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Customer Story

The Grammar School at Leeds (GSAL)

The Grammar School at Leeds (GSAL), one of the leading independent schools in the north of England, was created through a merger of Leeds Grammar School and Leeds Girls' High School in 2008. Following the merger, children aged 7 and above were based on a site on the outskirts of Leeds, with its nursery and pre-prep located near the city centre.

Reimagining the Classroom at GSAL

In 2019, Gabrielle Solti was appointed as Vice Principal and Head of Primary at The Grammar School at Leeds, with the ambitious goal of bringing together the Pre-Prep (located on a separate site) and the Prep School to form a single, cohesive primary phase. Achieving this required reimagining how space was used, how learning was delivered, and how the environment could support pupils from Early Years through to Year 6. All of this took place during the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which added extra layers of complexity in logistics, health safety, and educational continuity.

Introduction of the Agile Classroom

Gabrielle brought prior experience with flexible furniture from a previous school, fully understanding its benefits for collaboration and adaptable learning.

"I very much believe in environments where children can collaborate and work closely together—it's very important for their learning. Having furniture that moves and removes the traditional fixed front of the classroom supports and enhances that experience," she explains.

When GSAL began envisioning its new primary learning environment, the leadership team saw the opportunity to create something innovative—an agile school that would reflect the expertise from both former schools. A key part of that vision was designing classrooms that encouraged communication. As one of GSAL's core values is to be brave and have a powerful voice, fostering environments that support students in learning to communicate, listen, and share ideas was essential.

The school aimed to align its physical environment with its educational philosophy—promoting creativity, flexibility, and collaboration. The introduction of the agile classroom coincided with bringing the school together, presenting the ideal moment to embed new teaching practices. Extensive time during INSET days was devoted to exploring new teaching and learning approaches and how agile spaces could support them.

Staff engaged in multiple INSET sessions,

team meetings, and interactive workshops. A representative from VS Furniture visited to discuss the design rationale, and staff were encouraged to explore different layouts hands-on.

Emma Cox, Deputy Head Academic, shared: "We have a very collaborative approach—both with the children and among staff. We shared best practice, experimented with layouts, and featured examples in our half-termly newsletter to highlight their benefits."

To maximise space in smaller classrooms, the school implemented VS storage solutions and piloted teacher standing desks, which have been well-received and are planned for wider rollout.

Impact

The benefits of movement in learning were well-known to staff, but the real-world impact of agile furniture exceeded expectations—particularly for pupils with individual needs.

Initially, the HOKKI stools were intended for younger children, but they quickly proved effective right up to Year 6.

Emma noted, "In the past, when furniture was static, some children would fidget. The VS chairs allow controlled movement, helping children release energy and concentrate better."

Gabrielle added, "Children at GSAL are very engaged and collaborate naturally. It's now our normal way of working, and it's always something visitors comment on."

"There is no fixed 'front' of the classroom anymore. Teachers can stop mid-lesson and have pupils turn toward them easily. The layout enables collaboration, quick reconfiguration, and accommodates both traditional and modern teaching methods."

The pupils at GSAL echoed this enthusiasm. Easton, a Year 6 student, reflected that at his old school, he used to sit in one position, but with the VS chairs, he can now move freely in all directions. Izzie, a Year 5 student, added that the movement helps her concentrate better during lessons. Nuh, another Year 6 student, explained how the chairs move with him—whether he's leaning forward or back, the flexibility makes sitting more comfortable and less tiring.

Future

The agile classroom model is now fully aligned with GSAL's teaching philosophy and has become a cornerstone of their pedagogical approach.

Gabrielle stated: "It isn't just about having furniture that moves; it's about embedding flexibility into our whole educational ethos."

After five years of use, the school is also impressed by the durability and continued impact of the VS furniture.

Emma noted, "The furniture has lasted really well, and VS customer support has been fantastic. There isn't the wear and tear you would expect to see—it is really durable."

"For me, the furniture is a game-changer. It unlocks new possibilities, even in smaller classrooms. It's a long-term investment that truly supports how we teach and how children learn," Gabrielle concluded.

Pupils also appreciate the flexibility. Amelie, a Year 5 student, said she likes how the tables can be moved into squares so students can collaborate with their talk partners. Noah, in Year 6, added that the furniture really helps make the space more comfortable and supportive.

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Gabrielle Solti, Head of Primary
The Grammar School at Leeds (GSAL)

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