

Spotlight on ...

Noyna School Aprons



Ralph Birtwistle Managing Director, Noyna School Aprons

In this series of articles we hope to give the companies that work with design and technology education in whatever way the opportunity to give some of the interesting background as to who they are and how they support D&T in schools. This issue we are featuring Noyna School Aprons.

How does Noyna School Aprons work for design and technology in schools?

Noyna School Aprons provides high quality aprons and protective clothing for children and young adults of all ages and levels of education. With seventy-three years in the business, we pride ourselves in offering one of the widest ranges of aprons, tabards and overalls for secondary and middle schools, as well as playwear for pre-school play groups and nurseries and special needs.

Obviously, schools favour different styles, materials and colours, so we try to cater for most tastes with smart designs ranging from traditional butchers stripes, our highly popular flame retardant PVC aprons in vibrant colours, to classic chefs checks and harlequin designs, plus the smart new 'Food Technology' and 'I love cooking' aprons.

Over the years, we have worked hard to understand and meet the needs of food technology teachers and their students. We are often complemented on our friendly and efficient service, and our ability to turn round orders in double fast time. If there are any special requirements, we can usually meet those too.

How did Noyna School Aprons start up?

I'm often asked how 'Noyna' got its name. It's a simple explanation and rather romantic. My Father (John Birtwistle) founded the company in 1937, taking the name from Noyna farm, which was owned by my Great Uncle Jimmy Ralph. The story goes that when my mother and father were 'courting', as it used to be called in those days, they would go together to Uncle Jimmy's for Sunday tea after Bible Class. A few years later, they married and moved to Manchester, where they named their house Noyna, and then when they set up the business, they called that Noyna, too.

Originally, they set out to manufacture women's cotton 'pinnies' and overalls, so there were several changes of direction before the company got to where it is now, making protective aprons and playwear for schools.



How has Noyna School Aprons evolved over the years?

Over the years, Noyna has responded to changing circumstances. For instance, soon after the company was founded, World War II broke out and production automatically switched to the manufacture of overalls and headwear for the local munitions factory.

After the war, aprons and 'bib and brace' play overalls for children were the next big thing, it sounds rather old fashioned now, but in the days of 'make do and mend', children's clothes had to be protected as they were in short supply and relatively expensive to replace.

In the mid 1960s another opportunity came along. In those days, it was still traditional for girls to make their school cookery aprons in their 'needlework' lessons. Then one local girls' school, where my sister taught 'Domestic Science', decided it would be a good idea to buy in the school aprons instead.

Noyna was approached with the task of designing their new uniform apron. As word got around, the editor of the Association of Teachers of Domestic Science's (ATDS) magazine was told and, before we could draw breath, we were quoting sixteen weeks for delivery!

What is your best line and most popular service?

Over the years, the styles and fabrics of aprons have changed quite a lot, with teachers often coming to us with their ideas and suggestions.

One of the things they asked for, on a regular basis, was a waterproof apron. We experimented with a few ideas.

Then I saw a small item in a trade magazine about a Manchester company, which had won a contract to provide fabric for the Swedish army. Not only was the material waterproof, but it was flame retardant as well, ideal for children in a cookery room with numerous heat sources.

A big boost for the already popular PVC apron then came in the 1970s when, following a serious accident in a school, the fire prevention officer for Cambridgeshire, got together with education advisers and cookery teachers to discuss fire safety issues. All the fabrics being used for aprons were tested and the Noyna PVC flame retardant aprons came out top. As a result, the fire service bought our aprons for every single secondary school in the county, which was our biggest ever order.

Being hardwearing and easy to keep clean, especially by using Noyna's hygienic wipes, our 'flame retardant PVC apron' continues to be our best seller into secondary schools and a firm favourite in primary schools too.



Noyna Sch

What does your job entail or how do you interact with D&T teachers?

At Noyna, we pride ourselves in offering a very personal service. Every year we send out a new catalogue to schools, showing the very latest range, plus a number of cheerful letters throughout the year to remind teachers of our latest discounts and special offers.

When teachers ring in, the odds are they'll get straight through to me. Though teachers can also order by email, internet or fax, I always try to encourage 'phone calls, so that I can hear about any concerns first hand.

This kind of regular contact and feedback enables us to keep in touch with schools and the sort of aprons that design and technology teachers are looking for. In fact, many teachers have been customers of ours for years and will ring just to tell me when they're about to change jobs, with news of where they're going and the name of their successor. I've even ended up on the phone discussing a teacher's retirement plans and whether a house in France or Spain would be best.

One regular tease I have with teachers, when they ring me, is that my aprons exist to keep their children's dirty clothes away from the nice clean food. The fact that it also stops the students from getting butter and flour all over school uniform is purely incidental.

How do you feel D&T is changing in your area of the subject?

D&T and food technology have grown considerably as a subject. These days, there is a much a greater emphasis on understanding the food chain, the environmental impact of food choices, fair trade, and how to create a balanced and healthy diet.

More emphasis is also being placed on following 'best practice' in food hygiene and safety issues, which we as a company are very keen to support.

Teachers and students are undoubtedly much more aware of the dangers of cross-contamination and the importance of wearing the most appropriate protective clothing in the food technology classroom.

We are seriously committed to only supplying aprons that are safe and fit for purpose. Although we still receive requests from time to time for aprons that tie at the front, we won't make them, even though they are easier for the students, because they are potentially dangerous around heat sources.



ool

ns



Where do you see your area of the subject going to?

There seems to be a new enthusiasm for teaching youngsters to cook and eat healthily, from formal food technology through to various after school cookery clubs.

As styles of school aprons change and develop, Noyna is constantly looking for better fabrics and technical innovations, which will meet the needs of food technology classes in the future. For instance, we are currently looking into more comfortable 'breathable' waterproof fabrics, but retaining the flame retardant benefits of PVC, as well as 'fair trade' and eco-friendly materials and fabrics that are ethically sourced.

For more information about Noyna School Aprons, call Ralph Birtwistle on: 0161 748 2724.

Alternatively, you can fax: 0161 747 8775 or email: info@noyna.co.uk

Visit the Noyna website: www.noyna.co.uk