

# High School of Dundee, Scotland

## Spreading the word



**“SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards have been the most important thing in my teaching over the last four or five years, and the opportunities have expanded exponentially because of the digital revolution...”**

**Val Vannet**, Deputy Head teacher, High School of Dundee

The co-educational High School of Dundee has a long and illustrious history, counting TV journalist Andrew Marr and, allegedly, William Wallace of ‘Braveheart’ fame among its notable alumni. The city’s only independent school, it has 1,020 pupils (including 330 in the Junior School) and a proud tradition of offering a high quality education to pupils from all walks of life. The school’s entire educational process is based on the understanding that children need to have their potential recognised and nurtured, and for several years it has successfully harnessed the power of SMART interactive technology to deliver even more effective teaching and learning.

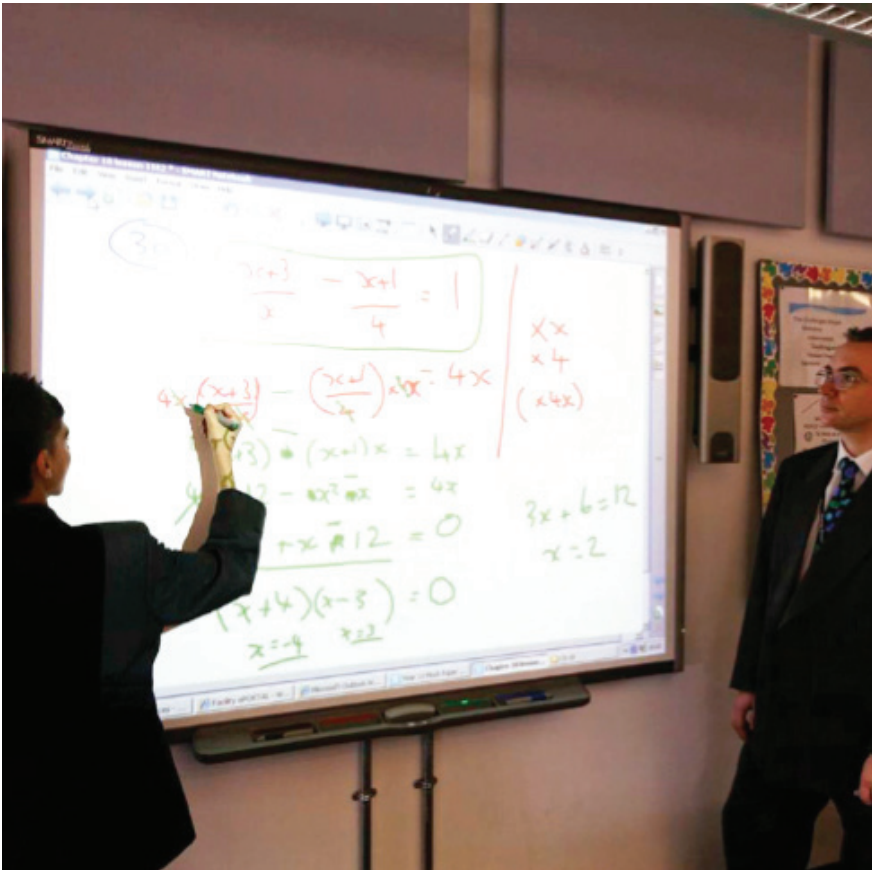
Deputy Head Val Vannet is now responsible for driving forward ICT in the context of teaching and learning at the school and has made it her mission to spread this best practice more widely across departments to ensure the school gets the best value from its technology investment. “When I arrived here to join the Geography department in 2000 after over 20 years in the state sector, The High School was already way ahead of state schools in its use of technology,” she says. “Because different parts of the school are housed on adjacent sites, e-mail was already established as a vital means of communication within and between departments. Thanks to the vision of one of the deputy heads at the time, many classrooms had projectors and every department had networked computers. The use of digital content was quite advanced in subjects like History, and I soon realised I had some catching up to do!”

Val’s personal journey with learning technology began in earnest when she bid for a SMART Board interactive whiteboard for her department around seven years ago. At the time, all Geography classrooms had projectors and Val embarked on a personal crusade to upgrade to interactive whiteboards across the department. “My logic was that there was little point just getting one SMART Board,” she explains. “As we were using Notebook™ software to produce resources, it made sense to encourage sharing.” Now the majority of departments – including the Junior School – have either SMART Boards or SMART Podium interactive pen displays connected to a projector and computer.

Today, she sees one of her roles being to spread best practice in the use of SMART interactive learning technology throughout the school. “Typically, many schools invest in and install technology but don’t have the time to invest in learning how to use it properly and fully,” she says, “and as a result, they often use interactive whiteboards as glorified projectors instead of reaping the full benefits of the interactivity and Notebook software.”

Val was trained in the effective use of SMART Board interactive whiteboards by Education Development Consultant Anne Forrest of Steljes, the exclusive representative for SMART Technologies in the UK, and now passes on her knowledge to colleagues through an ongoing training programme. “It’s sometimes difficult to imagine what’s possible with a SMART Board until you see it for yourself,” says Val, “so my role is to encourage people to have a go, explore the incredible possibilities of SMART Boards for themselves – and then pass on this knowledge and experience to others.”

There are many demands on a teacher’s time, of course, and Val aims to provide training during in-service days rather than relying on people giving up their spare time. In her view, this cascading of knowledge will be the key to reaping the full benefits of this exciting technology – not just within the High School of Dundee, but across the wider educational community. As part of its continuing professional development activities, for example, the Scottish Council for independent Schools (SCIS) organised a two-day



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session where Anne Forrest of Steljes spoke. “It was clear that the only way SMART Boards will be used properly is to open people’s eyes to their potential,” says Val. “This means devoting enough time to it, cascading knowledge and setting up professional networks so that practitioners across the country can exchange Notebook lessons and ideas.”

Val certainly needs no convincing of the power of SMART interactive technology in improving teaching and learning effectiveness: “SMART Board interactive whiteboards have probably been the most important advance in my teaching over the last four or five years. The opportunities they open up to embrace the digital revolution have expanded exponentially in that time,” she concludes. “This has

enhanced my enjoyment of teaching, and the enjoyment of the pupils. It’s such a liberating feeling, being able to manipulate the learning and watching veils literally fall from eyes. The potential is huge, but if the investment in training teachers isn’t made, you won’t get the most out of it.”

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