

Case study



James Allen's Girls School

One bite at a time

Some schools have found the introduction of new technologies to be an uphill struggle, with equipment often lying unused because teachers are unsure what they are supposed to be doing with it.

One top performing school has found that the answer is to bring technology in slowly and steadily. Then the culture of usage spreads gradually through the school community.

One of the most frequently recurring problems that has arisen from the money which has been pumped into information and communication technology (ICT) in schools in the last decade is that many schools have felt an obligation to acquire as much technological hardware as they can get with the money, whether they really think they need it or not. The inevitable result is that much of this equipment sits around gathering dust because the teachers do not know what they are supposed to be doing with it.

However, there are alternative ways of introducing new technology into schools. Robert Wallace is Senior Teacher at James Allen's Girls' School, a private school in Dulwich, London, and believes that the way his school has introduced interactive whiteboards to teaching represents a sensible approach to sidestepping this problem.

Robert has been teaching design and technology (D&T) for almost 19 years and integrating ICT into the school through a practical subject like his seemed a sensible way to proceed. James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS) is one of the oldest independent girls' schools in the UK. Both the girls and the staff at JAGS are encouraged to use computers from the very beginning.

Challenge

To introduce technology to a school that will actually make a tangible difference and not be considered just another gadget by staff and students.

SMART solution

SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards that are easy to install, simple to use and bring dynamism to lessons, as well as total inclusion for every pupil.

Result

A new, proactive approach to education where teachers learn from each other and the benefits are clearly visible among the students.

The great benefit of ICT to teachers, in Robert Wallace's opinion, is its immediacy; it can place information at the tips of your fingers in seconds. "When a child comes up to you with a difficult question, you no longer have to say to them: 'Well, I'll look it up in time for next week's lesson and we'll talk about it then.' You can look it up immediately by just typing a few sentences into a search engine."

Most of the school classrooms are equipped with PCs and there are also six dedicated ICT rooms, although these belong to curriculum departments within the school. In addition, 26 teaching rooms are networked and have data projectors.

Six years ago the school acquired its first interactive whiteboard and it now has 13 of its teaching rooms in the senior school equipped with SMART Board interactive whiteboards, as well as six in the prep school. There are a number of other manufacturers' boards in the school, mostly in pre-prep, but these are mainly where departments have required them for use with specific proprietary software packages, especially at key stage 1. Generally however, SMART Boards are preferred.

As Robert explains: "They are easier to use than the others we have and the software is very straightforward, especially Notebook. We have had no problems with the SMART Boards at all and this is very important from a teaching point of view. For example, imagine if a board goes down in a maths class and the teacher has prepared a lesson specifically to use on the board. It might not be possible to teach what was planned at all if the board is unavailable. This has happened with some of the other boards, but thankfully never with the SMART Boards."

The school uses a simple rule of thumb in deciding who has the use of the boards: "When we timetable rooms, we put those staff in the rooms equipped with the interactive boards who are most keen to use the technology," explains Robert. In his own classes Robert has found the boards extremely useful. "I teach D&T and use the board for viewing software and looking at various aspects of the subject with the whole class."

It is, of course, in whole-class demonstrations that the boards really come into their own. Previously it was common to bring children into a huddle around the teacher's desk, craning their necks to get a good view of a demonstration, but now they can watch from the comfort of their own seats, anywhere in the room. Nobody struggles to see anything in even the most complex presentation.

Although the school has found the boards to be valuable teaching and learning tools, they do not regard them as an end in itself, and they encourage the teachers using them to discuss their use with their colleagues and pass on the benefit of their growing experience.

The school has found it best to make use of the expertise and experience within each department in training its own staff. "We find this much more effective than bringing in an ICT specialist to do the training," Robert explains. "Seeing someone from their own department show them how it can be used in teaching their own subject area is something they can relate to. It shows them what they can potentially do."

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Robert Wallace, Teacher of Design Technology, James Allen Girls School.

About SMART

SMART Technologies Inc. is both the industry pioneer and global education market segment leader in easy-to-use interactive whiteboards and other group collaboration tools. The award-winning SMART Board interactive whiteboard is the most widely installed interactive whiteboard in the world.

Many school jurisdictions have standardised on the product, which is used to provide interactive learning opportunities and enhance student achievement in more than 450,000 classrooms spanning every U.S. state, every Canadian province, every Local Authority in the UK and in more than 100 countries worldwide. SMART products also include interactive pen displays, interactive digital signage, wireless slates and software. Using SMART products, groups can access and share the information they need to meet, teach, train and present. SMART's education customers include New York City Board of Education (U.S.), Oxford University (UK), Kobe City Board of Education (Japan), Barnier Public School (Australia), University of Ottawa (Canada), United World College (Singapore), Stephen-Hawking-Schule Neckargemuend (Germany), Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (U.S.) and Harvard University (U.S.).

SMART is a private company founded in 1987. Employing more than 900 people, SMART is headquartered in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, with assembly facilities in Ottawa, and offices in Bonn, Tokyo, China, New York City and Washington, DC. SMART has been issued and maintains a broad portfolio of patents with numerous U.S., Canadian and other patents pending. In 1992 SMART formed a strategic alliance with Intel® Corporation that resulted in joint product development and marketing efforts, and Intel's equity ownership in the company. SMART products are sold through dealers across North America and distributors worldwide. For more information, visit www.smarttech.com.

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