



# SMART story

Woolmer Hill School

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### Increasing pupil engagement in learning

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Matthew Toombs, Assistant Head teacher and Head of ICT, Woolmer Hill School

As you’d expect at a specialist Technology College, interactive learning technology plays an important role in the daily life of Woolmer Hill School in Haslemere, Surrey. A mixed comprehensive with around 640 pupils aged 11 to 16, the school has made a significant investment in a state-of-the-art technology suite and three dedicated computer suites. These central ICT facilities are supported by a SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard in every classroom, and the increasing use of SMART Response throughout the school to help engage pupils and assess their individual performance, and that of the whole class.

Formerly known as the Senteo™ interactive response system, SMART Response is designed to support the key principles of Assessment for Learning. By providing instant reports on how each pupil in the class is doing, teachers can quickly and easily adjust the direction of their lessons to ensure that they are as effective as possible for each individual student.

“The thing I like most about SMART Response is that it’s so easy to use – you simply log in, pass round the handsets and you can be up and running in seconds,” says Assistant Headteacher and Head of ICT Matthew Toombs. “And, of course, it runs through the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and works perfectly with Notebook™ 10 Software so our teachers don’t need any specialist technical knowledge to start using it.”

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## Quick facts

**Location:** Haslemere, Surrey

**Student population:** 640

**Number of classrooms:** 45

**Technology:** 45 SMART Board interactive whiteboards, SMART Response interactive response system

**Training:** Steljes and then in-house

### Impact on learning:

- Positive feedback from teachers and pupils on SMART Response improving engagement
- Reduces amount of marking teachers have to do
- Keeps pupils informed on their progress

As Head of ICT, one of Matthew's responsibilities is to assess the various learning technologies available on the market, having been impressed with a demonstration of SMART Response at an education exhibition in the summer of 2008, he arranged with Steljes (the exclusive representative for SMART Technologies in the UK) to have a complementary set to try for a month.

A decision to purchase a 32 handset kit soon followed. Since then, use of SMART Response has grown steadily across a number of departments and Matthew's goal is to broaden its use still further – particularly in the science department, where he is confident it will have a number of applications. To showcase its capabilities, he ensures that the system is used as often as possible around the school, from engaging pupils with quizzes at assembly to gathering opinions and making decisions at staff meetings. "Like anything new and different, the first hurdle we have to get over is the suspicion that it will mean more work," he says, "but once teachers have had a go with SMART Response they realise how quick and intuitive it is to use they really fly with it."

One of the key strengths of SMART Response is its flexibility, and teachers at Woolmer Hill have already found a variety of different uses for the system – and are developing new ones all the time. In the geography and humanities departments, for example, it's used primarily to gather pupils' opinions on key issues – which can be done either anonymously or with their names attached. The maths department uses it to both conduct end of unit tests and as a tool to gather survey information to export into Excel spreadsheets, while the PE department uses it to test GCSE students' knowledge of physical biology. The uses of SMART Response are almost endless, as teachers can transfer their own resources onto Notebook or download new material from the Web to make their lessons more interactive, inclusive and engaging.

As the use of the system becomes more embedded throughout the school, Matthew expects SMART Response to be used increasingly as a formal assessment tool – particularly as it means less marking for teachers! "We now have SMART Response 2.0 software, which makes it even easier to compare and analyse results and keep every pupil informed of their progress," he explains. "SMART Response is a great tool which fits well with our other ICT initiatives such as the development of a Virtual Learning Environment for the school. Eventually I'd like to see a SMART Response kit in every department."

Although it's too early to assess the long-term educational impact of SMART Response at Woolmer Hill, the reaction from both staff and pupils who've used the system has been extremely positive. "Engagement is really what SMART Response is about," concludes Matthew. "The kids love using it, and there's a real buzz of excitement when they see the blue bag being carried into the classroom! They like the interactivity and instant feedback compared to written tests – and being naturally competitive they like to show off in front of their classmates!"

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