



## 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.**

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*Robert Wallace, Senior Teacher,  
James Allen's Girls School.*

There is a much-quoted riddle that goes 'How do you eat an elephant? Answer: one bite at a time.'

Although it is very much tongue in cheek, there is a lot of good sense in this old adage, and at least one school has found that it can be the best policy when it comes to deciding how to implement interactive whiteboard technology.

One of the most frequently recurring problems that has arisen from the huge amount of 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.

### Different ways to start

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 is far more sensible – and ultimately successful – than trying to eat an elephant in a single mouthful.

Robert has been teaching design and technology (D&T) for almost 19 years, and his own use of ICT in teaching grew out of its use in D&T, starting with computer aided design and manufacturing packages (CAD/CAM). Introducing ICT into the school through a practical subject like D&T seemed a sensible way to proceed, and has been very successful for the school.

James Allen's Girls' School – or JAGS, to use its popular name – is one of the oldest independent girls' schools in the UK. It takes pupils from five years old and up and is divided into pre-prep, prep and senior schools. Both the girls and the staff at JAGS

are encouraged to use computers from the very beginning. An important part of school policy is to encourage pupils and teachers to 'make good use of the significant and growing educational opportunities presented by access to the Internet and the use of email and other electronic communication.'

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 now, 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 there and then by just typing a few sentences into a search engine!'

## From Acorns to Windows

Back in the early days of ICT, the school had a range of Acorn Archimedes and Apple Mac computers, but now they use only Windows PCs – 125 of them in all, as well as 20 laptops for mobile computing. Most of their classrooms are equipped with PCs and there are also six dedicated ICT rooms, although these are situated within and 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 Board interactive whiteboards are preferred.

As Robert explains, 'They are easier to use than the others we have, and the software is very straightforward – especially the Notebook software.'

## Reliability is important

And there is another important factor, too. The school has had problems with some of the other manufacturers' boards, but so far the SMART Board interactive whiteboards have been 100% reliable.

'We have had no problems with the SMART Boards at all,' says Robert. '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 Board interactive whiteboards.'

The school's boards are sited within certain departments throughout the school, mostly in languages, D&T and classics, as these are the departments which specifically asked for them; but the boards are not exclusive to these curriculum areas and are available for others to make use of if they so wish. Many of the other departments within the school are happy for now to have just projectors without the interactivity that the SMART Board interactive whiteboards offer, but this may change in the future. 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 – or, worse, cluster them around a conventional PC monitor, squinting to make

'Now we have staff who are actually asking for the software because they have seen what it can do.'

**Robert Wallace, Senior Teacher,  
James Allen's Girls School.**