



AGQTP NSW
CONTACTS

Frances Plummer
AGQTP NSW Manager
Phone: 02 9244 5686
Fax: 02 9244 5849
email: frances.plummer
@det.nsw.edu.au

Association of Independent
Schools New South Wales
Estelle Lewis
Director
Teacher Accreditation
email: elewis
@aisnsw.edu.au

Catholic Education
Commission
New South Wales
Paul Rodney
State Coordinator
VET and Teacher
Development
email: paul.rodney
@cecsw.catholic.edu.au

Please forward any
correspondence to:
Rod McLeod
AGQTP NSW Newsletter
Locked Bag 53
Darlinghurst
NSW 2010
email: rod.n.mcleod
@det.nsw.edu.au

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A catalyst for reflection and change

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St Canice's Catholic Primary School, nestled high in the Blue Mountains at Katoomba, is a small Catholic systemic school with an enrolment of around 140 students. Over the past few years, the school has been working towards integrating information and communication technologies into its teaching and learning programs. A recent move to interactive whiteboards, as part of a the Parramatta Diocesan *Australian Government Quality Teaching Programme* 'Focus on Learning', has accelerated work in this area, leading the teachers to rethink ways of teaching and learning.

Beyond the classroom walls

Images for visual arts lessons, movie clips and websites for investigations are just some of the resources that Year 4 teacher, Kay Magann, taps into. *'I couldn't go back to doing things as I did them before ... It's all about the broadness of the world out there which, with the interactive whiteboard, you can bring directly into your classroom.'* Teachers value the seamless quality of the technology, its ease of use and the timeliness of its capabilities. Instead of having to make special arrangements to use the school's bank of computers, the interactive whiteboard is on hand to be used whenever the need arises. In this way, the use of the interactive whiteboard becomes integrated into lessons rather than being an add-on. *'You've got the web resources right there, you can highlight, you can move things around. You don't have to hunt through books to find the right materials,'* commented Year 6 teacher and learning technology coordinator, Jemmy Brickwood.



Wayne Evans, Kay Magann, Paul Devlin and Jemmy Brickwood

Teachers' professional learning

The 'Focus on Learning' project provided support for outside expertise to help teachers become familiar with the capabilities of interactive whiteboards. It also provided release time for teachers to work in pairs on building technical skills, experimenting with the available software, and devising ways that whiteboards could be used in classroom activities. Teachers constantly talk about their discoveries and share their learning. The smallness of the school means that it's as easy as sitting around a table for everyone to be actively involved in this process.

Beyond the 'wow' factor

Once students got over the novelty of interactive whiteboards, they began to see them as a tool for learning, according to Wayne Evans, Year 2/1 teacher. They now use them to display work, to record ideas, to add and change things, and to problem solve. They constantly discuss what they are doing and why they are doing it. The size of the screen and its interactivity makes this process extremely efficient.

St Canice's principal, Paul Devlin, feels that the use of interactive whiteboards in classrooms reinforces the *Quality Teaching* framework, especially in relation to communication and co-operation. For Paul, interactive whiteboards suit the nature of today's learners. Students have grown up being exposed to a wide range of digital experiences. Interactive whiteboards engage and capture the imagination of students, even those with limited attention span, while at the same time offering opportunity to extend gifted students.