

THE USE OF Interactive whiteboards – or Smart Boards – during lessons has helped greatly at a school for students with special needs.

But there is one problem. Hong Chi Morninghill School in Tsui Lam only has one whiteboard for 220 students.

Morninghill was one of two special schools to receive a whiteboard for free in 2004. It was part of a project launched by the Education and Manpower Bureau to study the use of the new technology in schools.

A Smart Board looks like a large, white computer screen. It has touch-sensitive sensors on the surface, allowing students and teachers to write, erase and perform mouse functions with a finger or pen.

Objects can be dragged between pages and from other applications. Laptops, too, can be controlled from the whiteboard, making teaching and learning much more interesting.

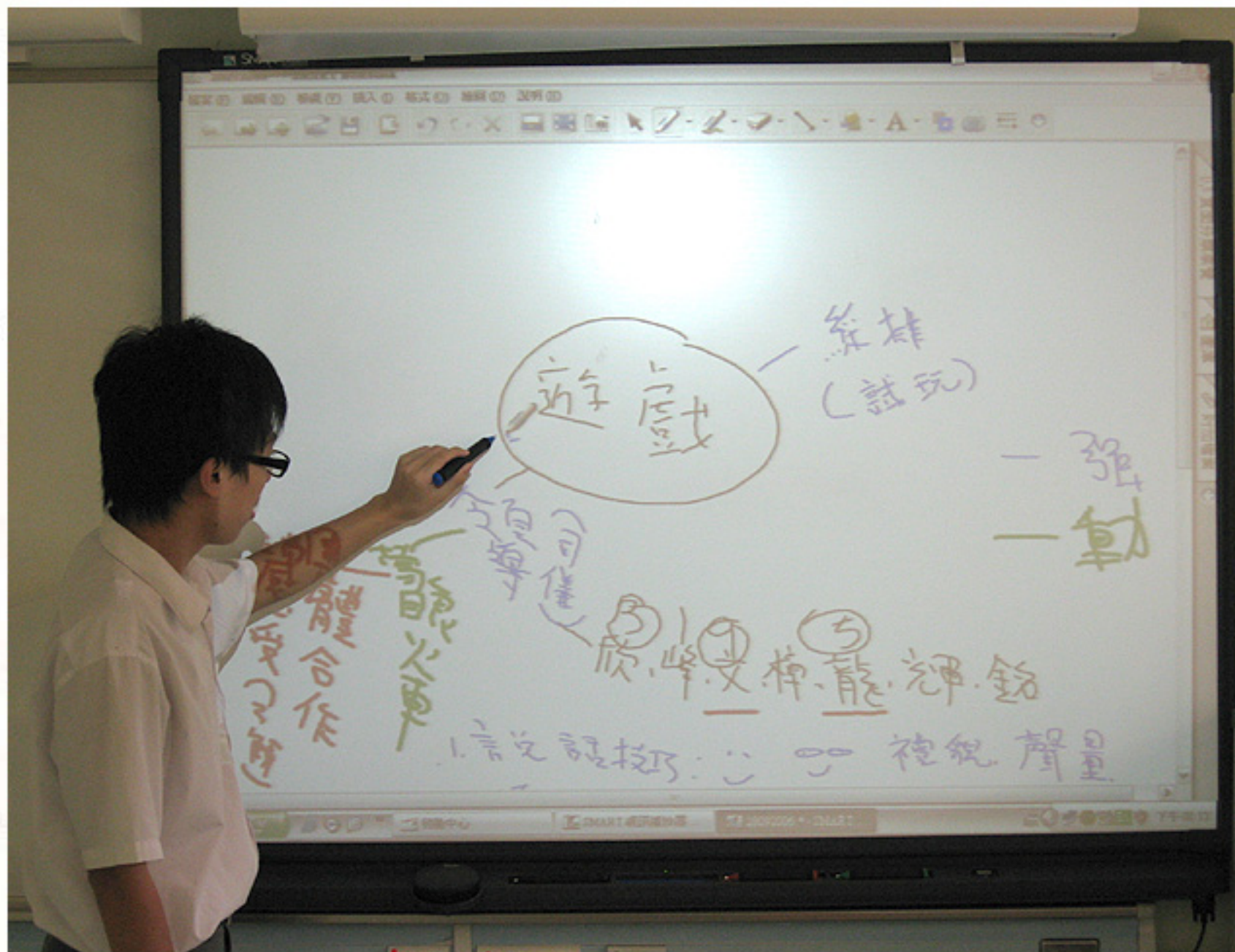
Four secondary and four primary schools also received whiteboards and the feedback has been positive. Teachers said the students are happier because the classes are less boring.

Morninghill principal, Evonne Ching Wan Yuet-yu, assigned the only whiteboard to Form Five and Six students who would benefit most from the innovative teaching method. Their IQ is equivalent to Primary Three or Four students in a conventional school.

"We have 220 students in 12 classes – six primary and six secondary. It is impossible to share the whiteboard among all the classes, so now only the 20 Form Five and Six students get to use it," Ms Wan said.

"We later realised that younger students could also benefit from using the board, but buying more [for other classes] was out of the question. One Smart Board can cost us between HK\$30,000 and HK\$40,000. We don't have that kind of money."

She said the whiteboard had many features that would help special-needs students.



Visual classroom



BY JUDY NGAO

"The whiteboard's keyboard is enlarged onto the touch-screen, which makes it much easier for our students to find the right keys to press. They have very bad hand-eye co-ordination," Ms Wan said.

Students also have short attention spans, and the interactive, fun and easy-to-use whiteboard has helped improve their concentration.

"Our students' biggest weaknesses are cognitive thinking, analysing and drawing conclusions. While a normal student's memory of the last class can easily be refreshed, our students need to be stimulated visually," Ms Wan said.

"The whiteboard has a feature that can save notes from previous classes. Presenting those files on the board can help revive students' memories and they can visually map out their thinking process," she said.

The hi-tech device also makes it possible for the entire class to take part in discussions. "It helps students to interact and communicate with each other during class and I've noticed

that they are more cheerful because of that," Ms Wan said.

But Morninghill is not optimistic about getting Smart Boards for other classes.

"Even if they cost HK\$10,000 each, we still wouldn't be able to afford them, because we just don't have the funds. Our school has a small number of students, and even if we asked parents to donate money, it still wouldn't be enough," the principal said.