

The Class of 2050

Discover what schools could be like in the future

By Craig Mcqueen

Think of a school classroom and it's still the old images of chalk, blackboards and rows of desks which spring to mind.

But as modern-day teachers and pupils know, the reality is far different.

Having a computer in the class is no longer the preserve of computing teachers as all subjects get to grips with modern technology.

So much so, that pupils are now as likely to be surfing the internet using the school's broadband connection as they are reciting their times tables.

Teachers use tablet PCs and projectors to call up images at the front of the classroom at the touch of a button, with the old sound of chalk on a blackboard being replaced by the hum of desktop computers.

For pupils, having your dinner money stolen is a thing of the past thanks to the use of canteen smart cards which can even make sure kids are eating a healthy diet.

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And in the interests of security, parents can now receive text messages when their children don't show up for registration.

But if this is the modern face of many of Scotland's schools today, what will our schools look like in the decades to come?

We asked BT futurologist Professor Graham Whitehead to take a look into his crystal ball and predict what technology the schools of tomorrow will be using.

It's his job to look at how modern technological advances can be applied to enhance our lives.

Here's his take on what might change in discipline and correction. There's no more lines for bad behaviour - the ultimate punishment is disconnection.

"This morning the children are working on foreign language skills, their language assigned by a tutor.

Looking at the Future Slightly Differently

"They wear wireless headphones and enter their own acoustic bubble, hearing the original sounds of the language in one ear and an auto translation in the other.

"The desktop becomes an active area where information is displayed.

"Paper icons appear and can still be moved, edited and deleted, but now it's done by hand gestures and screen touch. A vertical screen at the front of the desk displays a virtual classroom of 2050 will be like for the children of tomorrow:

"Technology will allow kids to do so much more. They gain entry to the school when their implanted ID chip has been read. Their presence is registered, and a message sent to their parents announcing their arrival.

"They place their single e-book on their e-desk and homework is uploaded into their personal working space. A computer-generated teaching assistant checks the work, flagging good examples to the human teacher and poor efforts language tutor who starts the lesson using stored records and works at the level and speed of each child.

"Lunch has taken on a new meaning. The meals look the same, but provide the exact nutritional and calorie content needed by each child based on their record of activities and other food intake reported by the implanted chip.

"Back in the classroom, a new science project kicks off with a partner school in Helsinki.

"The classroom wall, which had been displaying a view of an exterior landscape, suddenly changes and another group of children appears.

"The pupils show each other plants and trees from their countries and experiment with different growing patterns in diverse climates.

"It's a science class, a cultural experience and a language lesson rolled into one.

"Exams are still essential, but there's no laborious crafting of written words on sheets of paper.

"Tests can be taken almost anywhere, even at home.

"The interactive working area enrolls the student by chip ID and iris recognition. Voice responses verify that the student is the one who should be sitting the exam.

"Many question why there is still a need to go to school at all. Distance learning done from home is used, if appropriate, when a child has an infectious disease.

"But schooling is more than just learning. Despite all the new technology in 2050, school remains a social occasion, even if sometimes that interaction is through a wall-sized display module." {Reprinted from: Daily Record 15 March 2006}