Bancroft's

Independent Co-educational Day School 7–18

TEACHING & LEARNING

The Bancroft's Blend

How we get the best out of traditional and digital teaching and learning methods

01
Introduction

Technology has expanded rapidly, and it continues to do so. Digital devices and software are now part of everyday life, shaping how we communicate, work, find information and take part in society.

As a school, we recognise our responsibility not only to teach pupils how to use digital technologies effectively, safely and responsibly, but also to use these tools thoughtfully wherever they enhance learning and enrich the educational experience.

There can be a tendency to assume that anything digital in the classroom is inherently better. This is not a view we share at Bancroft's.

The need to evaluate the role and impact of digital technology in education is heightened further by the rapid emergence of large language models (AI). These tools make it increasingly easy for pupils to produce work without fully engaging in the underlying thinking, which can weaken the development of genuine understanding.

In this context, it is all the more important to create classrooms where the use of devices is carefully managed, reducing distraction and temptation where necessary. This allows teachers to keep clear sight of pupils' work and thinking, so that learning remains authentic, purposeful and grounded in real intellectual effort.

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Practice based on research and our experience

Since devices were introduced into our classrooms, we have found that technology works best when it responds to clearly identified needs and supports wider educational aims, rather than being introduced as a novelty or an end in itself.

Studies also indicate that pupils typically perform better when learning face to face, where direct interaction, dialogue and immediate feedback strengthen understanding and engagement. An overreliance on digital tools can, in some circumstances, reduce focus and depth of participation.

A LESSON FROM SWEDEN

Sweden pursued the widespread, early adoption of devices in classrooms across its education system, including in early childhood. It has since recalibrated its approach in response to growing evidence of declining literacy and comprehension.

Its experience reinforces the value of a more balanced approach in every educational setting, in which technology is used selectively to support, rather than define, effective teaching and learning.

The case for pen and paper

There is also compelling evidence for the cognitive benefits of traditional methods. Many studies have shown that writing by hand improves memory retention, deepens cognitive processing and strengthens understanding when compared with typing on tablets or laptops. Research at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in 2024, for example, suggested that those taking notes on a computer were typing without thinking.

Writing by hand

Improves memory, deepens processing and strengthens understanding.

Reading on paper

Often leads to stronger comprehension, especially with longer texts and under time pressure.

Revising on paper

Supports active recall and long-term memory.

Taken together, this research and our own experience at Bancroft's affirm that while digital technology has an important role to play, it must be used judiciously and in line with sound educational principles.

Technology is not a substitute for strong pedagogy. It is a tool: powerful when used deliberately and purposefully, but secondary to the quality of teaching, relationships, curriculum design and classroom practice.

03
Our guiding principles

To make sure digital technology supports the core principles of effective teaching and learning, six principles guide how it is used and considered at Bancroft's.

1 Teaching comes first

Expert subject knowledge and high-quality teaching are the foundation of learning. Technology is used purposefully to support clear educational aims and to enhance teaching and learning.

2 Methods that are proven to work

Learning and revision are most effective when rooted in evidence-based practice such as handwriting, written homework, essays and pen-and-paper revision, which improve understanding and strengthen long-term memory. Technology should complement these methods where appropriate.

3 Adding value

Technology is adopted because it supports and strengthens effective teaching. Its role is to add value and build on what already works in the classroom.

4 Flexible and inclusive

Pupils use and experience technology in different ways, so the way we adopt it stays flexible and inclusive, meeting every pupil's needs.

5 Simplicity

Technology should simplify. Tools should be coherent, manageable and compatible with existing systems.

6 Human-led

Technology can ease administrative work and free up time for teaching, but efficiency must never come at the expense of well-established practice such as marking, feedback and supporting pupils' learning, all of which remain human-led.

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What is the Bancroft's Blend?

At Bancroft's we are not anti-technology; we are pro-learning.

Our approach is deliberate and principled. We make sure that technology serves education, not the other way around.

At the centre of our practice we keep the most enduring elements of great teaching: intellectual challenge, the clarity of human explanation, the discipline of unmediated thinking, and the power of eye contact and live dialogue. Research, professional experience and informed instinct all point to the lasting value of these fundamentals.

THE BANCROFT'S BLEND

A considered balance in which timeless educational practice is strengthened, but never overshadowed, by the intelligent use of digital technology.

The Blend in the classroom

AT THE CENTRE OF EVERY LESSON

Human relationships

Clear explanation

Pen and paper

Unmediated thinking

The Blend places these fundamental elements of effective learning at the centre of every lesson. They are not automatic: they require consistent practice, skill and careful planning by teachers and pupils alike. Deep thinking, logical note-making, disciplined revision, structured problem-solving, essay writing, planning and extended reasoning all depend on them.

In a classroom guided by the Blend, pupils move away from instant gratification and gamified approaches, and engage instead with challenges that call for thought, reflection and deliberate effort.

Working on paper allows pupils to structure their ideas, map out problems and develop solutions without the limits of a small screen or a set of preset options. Essays, extended calculations and open-ended problems encourage sustained reasoning and planning, building independence and resilience.

DEVICES AT BANCROFT'S

Thirds to Fifth Form

Every pupil has an iPad.

Sixth Form

Students bring their own device.

Like any learning tool, devices are used thoughtfully, and only where they genuinely enhance the lesson.

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When digital tools are appropriate and beneficial

Digital tools are used selectively, where they genuinely enhance core teaching practice. These are the areas where we have found they add real educational value.

Digital skills

Technology is used to teach digital skills that remain important even in an AI world, such as programming. These skills help pupils to analyse data, solve problems logically and work confidently with the tools that underpin many professions and degree courses.

Research

Universities rely extensively on online academic databases, so devices at school support guided research using scholarly sources such as JSTOR.

Organising work

Digital technology can organise and store large volumes of material efficiently. Digital notebooks help pupils keep their work structured, tidy and easy to find, and give access to lesson resources without carrying several textbooks.

That said, we have found that extended reading on screen can be less effective for deep comprehension than reading on paper. Textbooks often let pupils navigate content more intuitively, follow information in sequence and see at a glance what is available.

Collaboration

Digital platforms help pupils work together, particularly on projects. Documents, presentations and mind maps can be created jointly, so ideas develop collectively. Shared spaces make contributions visible, support accountability and let teachers monitor progress and give timely guidance.

Feedback and assessment

Technology can speed up formative assessment, including real-time feedback through shared documents. Online quizzes also give instant responses that help to correct straightforward misconceptions quickly, though they are no substitute for sustained, thoughtful assessment and are used alongside it. Teachers can also annotate work digitally or record voice notes, offering clear, personalised guidance.

AI, USED WITH CARE

AI may have a role in offering pupils supplementary feedback outside lessons, for example during the holidays, provided the tool has been explicitly approved by their teacher.

All AI-generated guidance must be carefully reviewed for accuracy, relevance and educational quality. Pupils can also create self-marking flashcards to support active recall, and AI tools may help to generate practice materials or revision prompts.

Technology serves education, not the other way around.



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