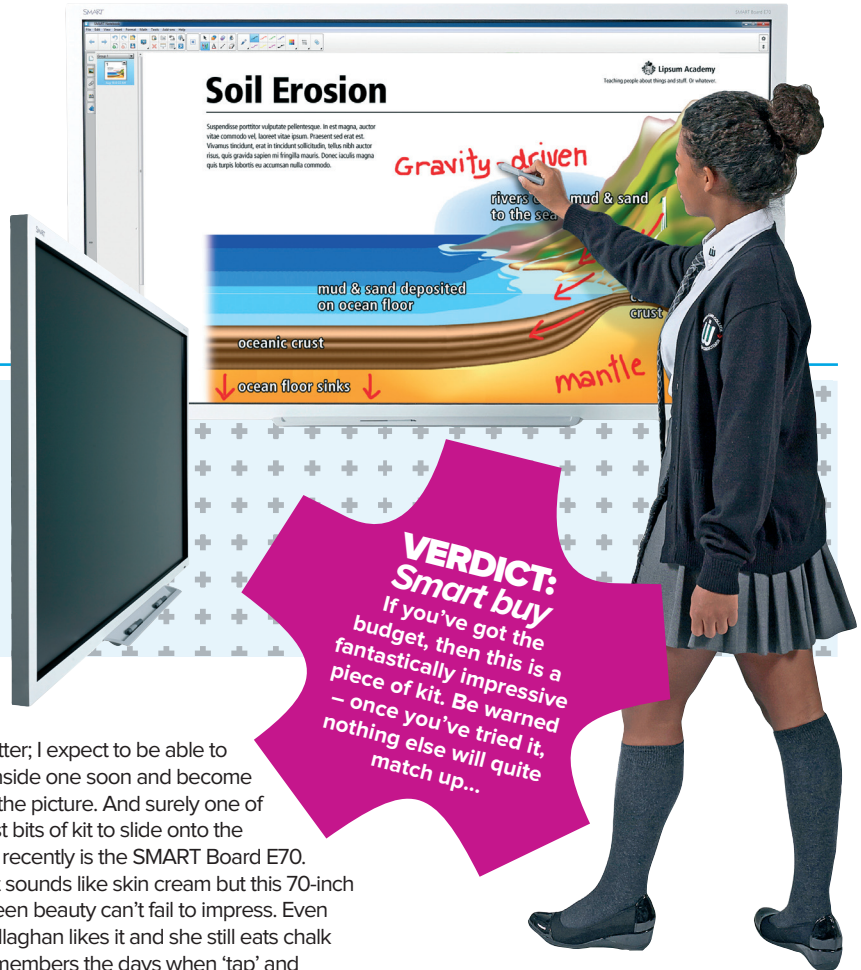


SMART Board E70

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REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



VERDICT:
Smart buy
If you've got the budget, then this is a fantastically impressive piece of kit. Be warned – once you've tried it, nothing else will quite match up...

I remember getting my first interactive flat panel. I was insane with excitement. It was brilliant. I'd get to school early to play with it and sulk in staff meetings because it took me away from my classroom denying me further playtime. No, really. However, when I moved schools I discovered that there were bigger and better toys out there and soon realised how tight-fisted my last school had been by buying the bare-bones basic model without airbags or go-fast software stripes.

SMART Boards have evolved dramatically over the years. They just get ridiculously better

and better; I expect to be able to climb inside one soon and become part of the picture. And surely one of the best bits of kit to slide onto the market recently is the SMART Board E70. Okay, it sounds like skin cream but this 70-inch flat screen beauty can't fail to impress. Even Mrs Callaghan likes it and she still eats chalk and remembers the days when 'tap' and 'swipe' meant something quite different in the classroom.

The SMART people tell us we can expect intuitive touch functionality. I'd expect that as standard; so what else? Well, what I notice immediately about this board is just how crisp and clean and clear the visuals are. The SMART people say it offers an unparalleled viewing and writing experience, and they aren't telling fibs. The commercial grade LED display is shadow-free; an absolute must for the classroom. The HD contrast will certainly help reduce tired and itchy eyes. It features a low-friction coated etched glass that enables your fingers to glide smoothly over the surface like Torvill and Dean on virgin ice, effortless and natural, so for this reason I'm giving it a straight 6.0 because it offers the perfect touch. No matter how awkward a student's position in the classroom, he/she will be able to see what's on the screen, and there's no glare. I checked.

There are more best bits. The E70 features something called freestyle multiuser interaction. Translated from marketing gobbledygook what this basically means is that you can have four students using the board together at the same time anywhere on the display, which can increase participation and so gives you a better chance of involving more pupils. This does of course depend on the size of the pupils. The software is the innovative SMART Notebook, which is powerhouse feature-rich hot stuff and the first choice of thousands of teachers for creating high-impact lessons. It's packed to the rafters with content, tools and support that I find hard to beat. This has real pedagogical punch. There are some new features in the latest version, too, which we are told makes it better and faster than ever. So along with updated

toolbar, audio recorder and reset page you now have drop cap support and the ability to toggle the zoom level.

Will the whiteboard last? It should do. The claim is 50,000 hours. That's plenty, because five years down the line you should be probably looking to upgrade and there will be probably something that offers time travel by then. Don't try fixing it to the wall yourself though, because it weighs a tonne, well 77kg actually. Mine was on wheels and left some nice imprints on my carpet that will probably take 50,000 hours to disappear. Although whiteboards are magical bits of kit the projectors aren't. The replacement lamps are expensive and consume power like a space rocket drinks fuel. You'll be glad to hear therefore that the E70 doesn't need a projector.

I think SMART Boards are probably the coolest invention ever made for teachers. Resources tend to fall into three brackets of analysis: 1) No siree 2) I'll sleep on it 3) Where's my credit card? I'm going for option 3 here, although my bank may freeze my account. It's worth a pretty penny and this is my only real grumble from the jungle because it's all about budget at the end of the day, and at the beginning of the day too. I think £4,299 is going to hit hard even if it's technically great value. Maybe there's room for negotiation in the interests of repeat business?

Reluctantly I will have to give this resource back. The thing is, I don't think I can. To do so would surely breach one of my basic human rights wouldn't it? They can chase me to Strasbourg where I'll be holed up showing the judges how useful the E70 would be in court and why I should be allowed to keep it. The problem is it's so damn heavy I think I won't get as far as the front door.

FESTIVE FUNDRAISING

Christmas Jumper Day is back... and it's bigger and better than ever! Will your school help make the world better with a sweater on Friday 13 December? Christmas Jumper Day is a brilliant opportunity for your pupils to have some end-of-term festive fun while raising money to help children in the world's poorest countries.

It's simple: just get everyone to wear a festive woolly, donate £1 and help save lives. Your pupils don't have to own a Christmas jumper to be part of it – they can decorate their own sweaters with tinsel, baubles and homemade snowflakes. When you sign up you'll get a free teacher's kit packed with stickers, posters and creative activities to add some sparkle to your day.

Visit www.christmasjumperday.org for more information and to sign up.

