

Education gets Smarter at Westminster School

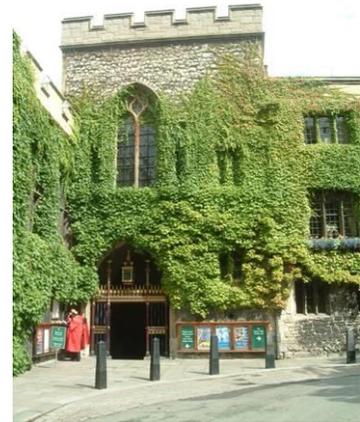
The Traditions of Westminster School embrace the audio-visual revolution and Smart-technology. Smartcomm install high-tech teaching facilities for 21st Century learning.

In the heart of the city, beneath the imposing towers of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, is one of the most prestigious schools in England. Westminster is an ancient school whose beginnings are traced back to the Benedictine monks of 1179. The school's official foundress was Elizabeth I, who gave the school its royal patronage in 1560. Her father, Henry VIII, personally assured the future of this fine school after the dissolution of the monasteries.

Discerning Learning

Entering into Dean's Yard through the ancient stone arches, you are greeted with a green courtyard flanked on four sides by the offices, classrooms and hallways of the main school. In November 2004, this beautiful and historical seat of learning underwent major renovations to update the teaching facilities for the 21st century.

Smartcomm were involved in an ambitious project to transform 2 two buildings into the schools new Music Centre (Manoukian Music Centre) and a teaching block containing 30 classrooms (Deans Yard).



Above: Deans Yard

Teach into the Future

The plans were to incorporate the very latest in audio visual technology for the Manoukian music centre and the 30 classrooms in Dean's Yard. The entire job took no more than three months from start to finish. As Smartcomm Managing Director, Steven Worrell points out,

"This was remarkably quick considering there were about 30 rooms to complete including the music suite"

Top Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley were appointed to the project, not least because of their extensive experience in historical restoration work. Many of the buildings date back several hundred years and incorporate period features such as ceilings and fireplaces. So, careful planning was required to ensure that the new plans took this into account.



Above: Main Orchestral Recital Hall in the Manoukian Music Centre

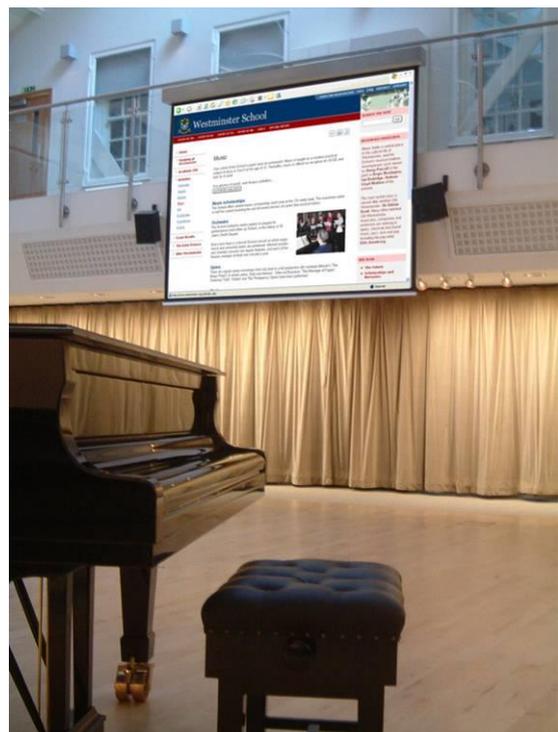
Musical meets Technical

The school's new music department, the Manoukian Music Centre is a multipurpose room used as a recital hall large enough to contain a full orchestra as well as teaching and practice rooms.

At the front of the hall there is a large electric screen and a Hitachi CP-X880 front projector, which are used for teaching and displaying the score for the orchestra. When not in use it is cunningly concealed into a custom-made case designed to blend into the existing balustrade which rings the upper levels of the room.

"The projector was chosen in particular because it could work well in this room size. The school had to get a special lens to fit the image on the screen at that distance" says Richard Hindley, Westminster's School's IT services Manager.

This impressive room has been especially acoustically designed to meet the need of the students practicing and to ensure top sound quality when the orchestra plays. There are six Sony STRDE497S speakers that provide surround sound. The excellent sound quality in the room is aided by the construction and design of the building itself with "flying saucers" similar to those at the Royal Albert Hall suspended from the ceiling, Super-silent aircon units and full-wrap-around curtains.



Above: View of the Projection screen, displaying website

A recording studio has been created next door to the main hall and the former rifle range in the basement (the building was originally an 1899 built Territorial Army Drill Hall) has been widened and deepened to provide sound insulated instrumental practice and teaching rooms. All rooms can be connected back to the windowless recording studio in which CCTV and mobile cameras are used to watch whats happening in the hall or rooms.

Classy-Rooms

Within Deans Yard, the school has completely transformed number 3, which originally housed the administration offices of the Houses of Parliament, but is now used for language teaching) The 29 classrooms spread over 3 floors have been individually kitted out with projectors, projections screens, wifi networks, computers and everything a teacher needs to make their classes more interesting and efficient. Some classrooms have projectors situated at the back of the room and some are suspended in the centre, it all depends on the individual requirements of the room. Both teachers and students get a lot of use of the new equipment and feel it has enhanced the teaching and learning experience.

“the picture quality on the classroom projector screen is just excellent” comments the school’s music teacher.



Above: Front foyer of the Manoukian Music Centre



Above: Period features in 3 Dean's Yard



Above: Stylish projector and custom motorised stainless steel container on balustrade



Above: Acoustic deflectors on ceiling

Preserving Heritage

During the renovation, careful design and planning was undertaken to ensure that the original features of the listed building were cared for. Some rooms still conserve their original ornate ceilings and enormous fireplaces alongside discreet speakers and pre-programmed Helvar lighting controls from Helva.

“One of the most difficult elements of the project was to come up with solutions that would fit each individual room...providing the technology required while keeping Heritage happy” says Hindley.

The building sprawls over several levels and often reveals ornate ceiling roses, fireplaces, mantles, and stained glass windows as you walk through the winding corridors.

All the renovations were fully completed in time for the start of term in September 2005. The teachers are pleased with the ease in which they can access sky, web and on-line teaching tools. It is hoped the students and teachers alike, will be able to take full advantage of the new technology well into the future.

PROJECT FACT-FILE

Total AV spend:	73.8K
Duration of Project:	3 months
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Architects:	Feilden Clegg Bradley 0207 323 5737 www.feildenclegg.com

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