

Back to school, for fun

New technology is allowing academies to offer students practical skills and a welcoming environment in which to study. *Geny Calosi* visited St Matthew's Academy to find out more

I want to go back to school. No, it's not just because I miss the joy of carelessly romping around the playground. Or because I long for those times of discovery where the world was my oyster and everything was possible. Neither do I miss having homework to do.

The truth is: Schools today are cool. They have the latest kit to tempt students to study more and better. The hope is that this will also persuade them not to drop out.

A new school has opened its doors in Lewisham, St Matthew's Academy for Business and Enterprise. Catering for students aged 5-16, the academy provides practical as well as theoretical skills. The tools they learn will give these children better prospect for their future working life.

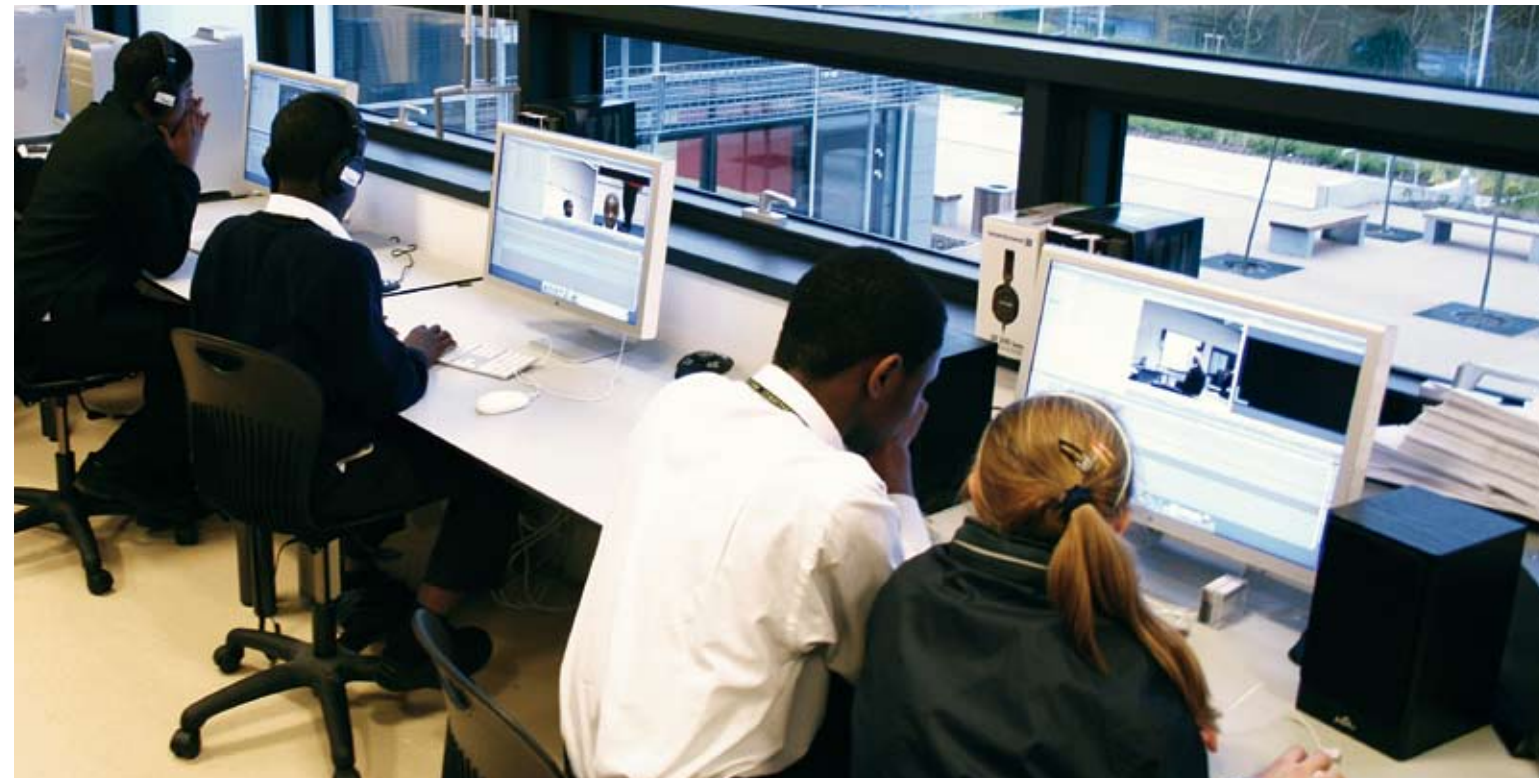
The new independent Catholic school and nursery was purpose-built on the sites of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School and St Joseph's Academy. It accommodates 1,260 students in a building that is truly Twentyfirst Century. Clear lines and wide, light open spaces make it inviting and exciting. From the reception area and throughout the school, there are digital signage screens with information. Classrooms have interactive white boards and projectors and a beautiful atrium provides a meeting space for students and parents.

The project, part of Building Schools for the Future, has been sponsored by De La Salle Trustees, the Diocese of Southwark, and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), together with the Lewisham Council and project managers, 3E's Enterprises.

A-V specialist Quadrant worked closely with the school to achieve its objectives of having a professional and future proof media department. Quadrant took care of designing and installing the school's production studios, post-production rooms and the IPTV system, using Exterity products.

Pat McDaid from Quadrant comments: 'The brief was to provide a state-of-the-art but flexible media department.'

'Student and teachers had to be able to use cameras and recording systems in different parts of the academy. We also installed IPTV over the IP network to transmit video and audio from the



KEY FACTS

Specialist academies are being design to provide children with practical tools for their future working lives. St. Matthew's Academy in Lewisham has media production and post-production studios with HD cameras, Apple Mac editing systems and a robust IP network.

The first Catholic Academy for Business and Enterprise, St Matthew's was developed by De La Salle Trustees, the Archdiocese of Southwark and Lewisham LEA.

The DfES is funding the running costs of the new academy as an independent school at a level comparable to that of other surrounding schools in the area and to that of specialist schools in the maintained sector.

The sponsors provided £2m of the initial capital cost, while the DfES provided the rest.

* www.quadrantsolutions.com

studio, atrium, music rooms, dance and drama for performances.'

The interactive white boards and all the IT network and PCs were supplied by Nottingham based XMA. Quadrant teamed up with Stage Electrics to install the lighting in the dance drama studio.

What will children learn

The new academy teaches the full National Curriculum, specialising in business and enterprise. Amongst the subjects included in this academy are media studies and media production, drama, modern foreign languages and sport.

Technology plays a very important role at this school. Pupils have access to the latest kit, including Apple Macs with Cinema HD Screens and Sony HD camcorders so that they can develop the skills and capabilities they need for the technological demands of the 21st century.

Whenever there is a discussion about education, buzz phrases such as 'every child matters', 'tailored teaching programs' or 'personalised learning programs' crop up. But what do they really mean?

In the case of St Matthew's Academy it means small groups, interactive whiteboards and projectors in every classroom and a range of professional equipment for specialised lessons. Learning here is not child's play. Students at this



information or get live TV over IP. Teachers are also encouraged to record their own programs to have them on a library as teaching material.

Every teacher has his or her own laptop computer, which can easily be plugged into the network via the numerous inputs in the walls. They can easily access all their files from where ever they are. The whole school is also a 'hot spot' and a wireless network is always on.

The equipment

The media and performing arts area are the most heavily kitted out in the academy.

The production room has Edit Room 7 systems on the G5 Apple Macs. Students can work on their projects on the Cinema HD screens. Apple Final Cut Pro software, Contour Jog shuttle controllers and Beyer headsets complete the workstations.

They also have an Editshare 3 Tb Education system which provides a shared storage solution fed by a Sony HDV deck and record to Sony HDV deck. The broadcasting room has plenty of room for head shots and full body takes. It even comes with a green screen.

'Some children from my class were very excited and they were telling everybody, 'We have a BBC studio in my school,' says Anabel Sans-Busby, media studies teacher.

The whole campus runs on an IP network which give classes more flexibility to transfer information and easier use of facilities.

In the pipe line is the plan to have a digital radio channel from the academy.

'Students already feel very comfortable with the technology,' explains Sans-Busby. 'Here they will learn to record and edit broadcast material the way it's done in the real world.'

Stacy Briskey, head of the arts department, has a vast knowledge of how the whole a-v system works and was very happy to have so much flexibility and professional equipment for her classes and performances.

The Dance Drama studio is very big and would fit an audience of about 70 people. But it can also be divided into two rooms. An art lighting rig and theatre curtains have been installed along the room. It can work as one big room or two separate ones.

A collection of fresnels and spotlights are all controlled via a Strand Frog lighting desk and a Zero 88 depending on which room is being utilised. A portable flight desk for audio is also included

should the rooms both be in operation at the same time. This includes an Allen & Heath Mix Wizard WZ3 12:2 mixer with Yamaha amplifiers and Tascam CC222SL CD recorder.

There are two a-v flight cases ready to be rolled around and used at the Dance Drama salon and the atrium. They contain Shure radio microphones (both handheld and tie clip) with remote antennae, Shure amplifiers and a microphone mixer. This system is operated with a Procon controller for control of the ceiling mounted projector and screen in the dance drama. A Sony DVD player is also included along with a headphone splitter. A portable flight desk for audio is also included should the rooms both be in operation at the same time this includes an Allen & Heath Mix Wizard WZ3 12:2 mixer with Yamaha amplifiers and Tascam CC222SL CD recorder.

'Each room can run separate events or I could have one box at the front and one at the back when I use the room in all it's capacity,' Briskey explains.

The studio also has an NEC projector and large electric screen. It is used to watch movies and to display works from the students.

'Pupils love the big screen and I use it a lot,' says Briskey, 'but sometimes it is funny, children are so used to SMART boards that they expect every projected image to respond interactively. The other week I was showing a film to a group of young students and a couple of them went up to the screen and touch it to see if it reacted!'

The school has 50 SMART Board SB680 and SB680i with NEC VT59 projectors.

Everyone at St Matthew Academy has their own smart personal card, which gives them access to rooms and clocks their registration. In the near future there are plans to make these cards a cashless vehicle for students to use at the school.

But the technology and connections to the school don't end between its walls. Parents are also involved and can log onto the school's network and check how their offspring are doing.

Parents' involvement and support is really important for these schools to achieve the desired 'personalised education' and assure the success of each and every child.

The way these children are learning to work and the way they are studying new subjects will raise the bar in the world of work. These young people will expect to find the same kind of facilities when they start working. Are we ready? ■

EQUIPMENT

TV STUDIO

Sony HDRFX7E Camcorders with Vinten tripods and dollies; BDL Autoscript; Sony ECM44 microphones with Shure SM58 vocal mics; Techpro talkback

CONTROL ROOM

4x Sony 14in LCD monitors for camera and autocue, 2x 20in Sony LCD monitors for Programme and TX; Panasonic WJMX70 vision mixer; Sony HDD, HDV and DVD recorders; Denon amplifier and Edrol speakers; Spirit audio mixer; Strand Lighting controller