

# Case Study

## School statistics

Number of children: **970**  
4 form entry per year  
(120 each year group)  
plus 450 in 6th form  
Number of teachers: **85**



# Exceeding Expectations... at Camden School for Girls

## Thinking outside the box... Painless Installation

In February 2005 Camden School for Girls calculated that the number of Internet connected PCs for students was only just at the nationally required ratio of 1:5.

"The school had invested very heavily the previous summer in new infrastructure," explained Clifford French, Head of ICT, "and it simply was not reasonable to expect that we could go on buying more and more standard Windows XP boxes with high purchase costs and maintenance requirements from our small team of network professionals. We had to find a different solution to bringing ICT to more curriculum areas".

Leverstock carried out the installation in just one week, which included upgrading the existing Windows 2000 servers to Windows 2003 and the integration of the thin client server into the existing infrastructure.

This work went painlessly and much of the week was spent working with the school's network manager to provide her with training on installation of additional software and configuration of printers.

## Exceeding Expectations...

"My previous experience of thin client was that these devices provided a somewhat slow and limited computing experience," admitted Clifford. "Leverstock introduced us to a nearby school at which they had installed a similar system and my technical colleagues checked it out; they were most impressed, particularly with the ability to run multimedia software. We therefore decided to go ahead with a limited scheme to provide 'proof of concept'. We arranged for Leverstock to install a server and single terminal to enable us to assess exactly which programs could be delivered through a thin client solution and which might still require conventional Windows XP machines".

## Immediate Expansion

So successful was the initial installation that the school immediately expanded its system. "We now have a server farm with two servers running 60 thin clients distributed around our campus," said Clifford. "The thin client workstations require zero administration. We keep one thin client terminal in the ICT office and we know that if we can run an application there, students and staff will be able to run it on any thin client anywhere in the school. The advantage of having two servers is that if one server has to be taken off line or restarted for software installation, users automatically connect to the other server with no loss of functionality.

## Wow factor

Students of all ages were impressed. The black monitors were as impressive as those used elsewhere in school and with the thin client terminal mounted on the underside of the desking, there was more room for students' papers and books.

Some students asked how to log on because the first screen they see is not the same as the Windows XP log on. "I just stood back," said Clifford, "and they logged on with no explanation. I was amazed at how fast they ran Word and accessed the Internet, compared with the variety of XP workstations around the school. Once the student has logged on, the experience is almost the same as using Windows XP".

"A rugged solution with low initial cost and zero maintenance – what more could any school want?" asked Clifford French.



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## Zero Administration...

The initial purchase of two highly specified servers and 60 thin clients compares favourably with the cost of 60 conventional PCs but the real savings are in maintenance. Even the best Windows XP installations suffer from “dead on arrivals” and failing hard drives. These failures frustrate teachers and students and place heavy burdens on support staff. A thin client solution avoids all of these issues. An added benefit is that there is “nothing to walk”: schools that have suffered from theft of PCs or components will be pleased to note that there is literally nothing, other than the mouse and keyboard, to steal.

## What Works – and What Doesn’t...

We originally anticipated that the thin client network would provide a cheap and maintenance free solution for students who needed to run Office and an Internet browser. We were amazed by how fast it fulfilled this basic requirement.

Much of our installation week was spent asking “Can we run this?” and trying it out. We found that we could run Adobe Reader, various Internet Explorer plug-ins, all of the Birchfield interactive CDs that we have for technology and the SMILE Maths Suite. Before our highly obliging and

knowledgeable consultant from Leverstock left us, we had made a diary note to try Multimedia Science School in the autumn term. We were very pleased with ourselves when we installed this and found that it would run well.

## Where to Find...

The thin client terminals were originally installed in the English and Business Studies Departments. So successful were they that the school expanded provision to include a small sixth form study area and also the common room. “Sixth form common rooms are not generally known as computer friendly areas,” commented the Head of Sixth Form, “but the students are really pleased with the provision and there have been no problems”.

## Looking to the future

The system is still quite new to the school but it is already enhancing the students’ education and the teaching environment. Prospective parents are impressed that the school now has more than one computer to every four students – and that so many are new or almost new.

Plans for the immediate future are to allow students to access the thin client network from outside school. They can already access their files through the school’s

extranet but the distinct advantage of the thin client network is that they will be able to run programs that are on the terminal servers, just as though they are in school. It is hoped that the next financial year will see the expansion of the thin client network into the science labs. “A rugged solution with low initial cost and zero maintenance – what more could any school want?” asked Clifford French.



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