

Built to last

The capital's top schools are innovating to meet the challenges – and opportunities – of Brexit

Words MARK KEBBLE

Since the EU referendum there has been talk of a possible 'Brexodus' of international families from the capital. Yet figures from the Independent Schools Council this year show that demand for independent school places in London continues to rise. The number of independent schools in London has grown by more than a fifth (22 per cent) in the past five years, while their student population has grown by 12 per cent.

Nothing appears to be slowing the demand for places in London's top independent schools. And schools will stop at nothing to hone their academic offer, innovate and improve their facilities to attract wealthy families. 'Brexit hasn't had much of an impact on us and the families we work with at all,' says Diana Morant, Senior Consultant at Carfax Educational Consultants.

Increasingly, however, international families want more than simply top exam grades. Just like the other parts of their lives, they want their children's schools to have the right location, the right atmosphere and the right facilities too. 'A school's academic record is still a major priority for parents, but they are also interested in other things like after-school clubs. I have noticed London prep schools offering a more interesting range of unusual sports, arts and cultural activities,' says Morant.

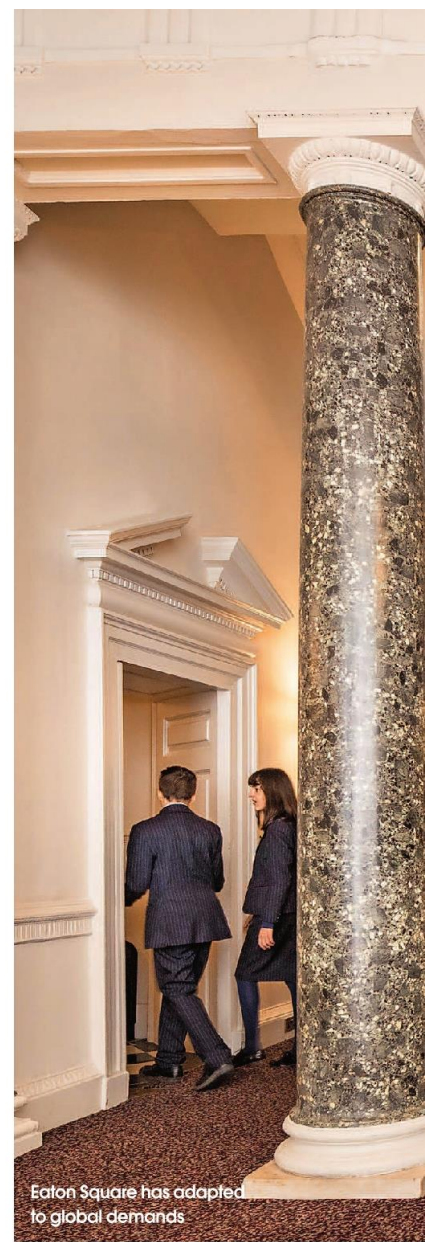
Eaton Square Upper School is a good example of the independent school sector adapting to global demands. The site, just by Green Park, suits families living in Belgravia rather than other north or west London outposts, while its design was described by *The Guardian* as being 'fit for an oligarch' when it opened last year. The Grade I-listed school has corridors lined with stained glass windows and it holds assemblies in a state-room hung with original 18th century green silk wallpaper.

Global trends are having an increasing influence too. Businesses today expect the people they take on to reflect global values – to be open, tolerant, creative and adaptable. Southbank International School is one of the schools in the capital that prides itself on its global approach. Part of international schools group, Cognita,

it has risen to the challenge of offering a global education in a physical as well as metaphorical sense. Not only is it the leading International Baccalaureate school in the capital, the school's brand new Westminster campus caters for families who want a central London location and an interior designed to reflect the realities of the 21st-century working world.

Developed to handle the school's growing demand for places, the campus is the result of a collaborative process between innovation consultants, interior designers, architects, students and teachers. Opened in time for an autumn term intake, Southbank Westminster looks and feels like a calm, cool and creative space with its study pods and semi-private breakout areas alongside spacious classrooms and large communal areas. Its high-spec technology means students can even join lessons with classmates in Singapore, Hong Kong, Sao Paolo, Barcelona and Santiago via video conferencing, promoting cultural understanding and allowing them to test themselves against global peers.

'It's about giving students the environment where they're happy to study on their own rather than sitting bored behind a desk,' says Craig Beech, director



Eaton Square has adapted to global demands

