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partnerships for schools

This case study focuses on the work of Camden Council in embracing and including external learning environments in their Building Schools for the Future project.

The local authority has developed key documentation to guide and support while ensuring the Change Management process supports this focus.

Key project information

Local authority: London Borough of Camden
BSF Wave: 5
No. of schools in wave: 9

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Project description

Camden Council commissioned a brief to ensure that contractors' proposals for their BSF project reflect the importance of the external environment to transforming learning and teaching throughout the borough. The Building Grounds and Landscape Brief complements document Part B1 of Camden Council's Facilities and Services Output Specification (FSOS) and is designed to be read in conjunction with the FSOS briefing documents to ensure a cohesive approach which meets the needs of all aspects of the Camden BSF programme. *An extract from the FSOS is attached to this case study.*

Asking Camden's pupils what they need

Research carried out by Learning through Landscapes, the UK school grounds charity, into secondary schools has shown that better outdoor school environments can lead to positive changes in students' attitude and provide new resources for curriculum teaching and learning.

The Camden BSF team commissioned Learning through Landscapes to engage pupils in the development of the FSOS. The team, supported by a council planning officer, ran workshops in Camden's schools to get pupils thinking about what they really

wanted from external environments and how they could use them in the future.

This was part of Camden's long-standing focus on engaging young people in the design, use and management of their school grounds. Pupils were very positive about learning outside and suggested that "Maths facilities outside...will encourage less enthusiastic students to take part."

The whole estate and cross-departmental working

Camden's BSF team worked closely with the local authority's Planning Department to ensure that external school environments were considered in the context of their localities and strongly embedded in landscape designs as learning spaces. The production of relevant materials such as the FSOS captured key points from this process. Drafts of all documentation were shared and communication lines defined contributions to the process.

Camden Landscape Vision was produced following workshops with school staff, Client Design Advisers and council staff, and supported by Learning through Landscapes. The Vision has a specific focus on school landscapes in their local contexts, such as Place Shaping at Swiss Cottage. Vision to Reality workshops were held with the BSF bidders and schools which distilled the draft further.

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External learning spaces are a key consideration of the whole schools estate for the borough. To emphasise this, the planning requirements for the BSF schools include references to a requirement that contractors provide detailed landscape drawings and a written strategy demonstrating how the grounds meet the FSOS brief.

To ensure detailed costings for external areas are presented within the affordability envelope, rather than an allocated sum, the next step involves the development of Area Data Sheets for the external spaces to capture this work in a similar level of detail as expected for internal spaces.

Top Tips

- **BSF can be a tool to support the achievement of specific authority objectives (such as excellence in landscape design to support the educational transformation agenda) across services and departments of the whole organisation.**
- **It is very important that the area of work is embedded and integral to BSF.**
- **A champion for the specific area of work must be identified and provided with a brief and support, ideally someone who knows and understands the organisation, departments and service areas well.**
- **Constant lobbying and advocacy work are required throughout the process keeps the work live.**
- **It is critical to ensure thinking and visioning is supported across the local authority.**

Key contact

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Further information

Camden's BSF project:

<http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/education/education-initiatives-and-consultations/building-schools-for-the-future/>

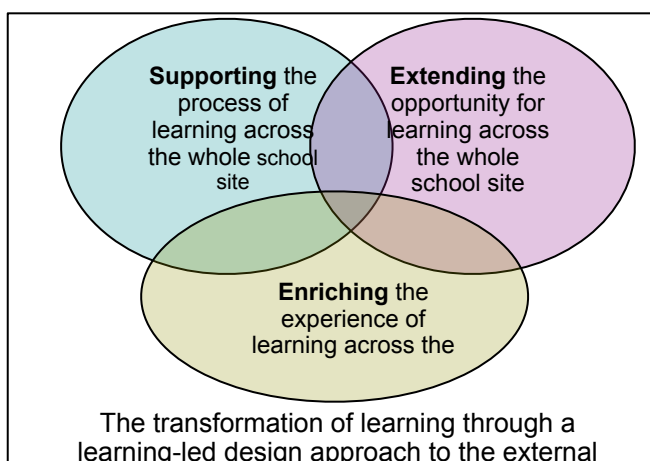
For further information about Learning through Landscapes visit: www.ltl.org.uk

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Extract from Camden's Facilities and Services Output Specification

Part B1/2: Authority Generic/School Specific Building Grounds & Landscape Brief

4. The Camden Vision for learning-led design of educational landscapes.



Our Vision is for an education landscape that supports, enriches and extends learning and teaching across the whole school site.

We see the external environment as an integral part of the equipped teaching spaces of a school and believe that through a learning – led design process the education landscape can make a significant contribution to the transformation of learning and teaching as part of the BSF process.

We therefore want to create a suite of external learning environments that:

- **Extend the opportunities for learning** by providing opportunities for learners to exploit the unique characteristics of the external environment, helping them to be successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve.

We believe that the external learning environment should complement and extend the learning and teaching that takes place within classrooms, sports halls, gyms, formal learning areas, etc. The design and resourcing of these spaces should take full advantage of the opportunities the outdoors

provides as both a setting, a stimulus and focus for a range and depth of differentiated and inclusive learning.

- **Support the process of learning** by providing opportunities for the delivery of specific pedagogic approaches and activities that maximise the potential for the development of all three learning domains in learners.

The focus for learning within the National Curriculum is organised around a model in three parts or overlapping domains:

1. Cognitive domain (intellectual capability, i.e., knowledge, or 'think')
2. Affective domain (feelings, emotions and behaviour, i.e., attitude, or 'feel')
3. Psychomotor domain (manual and physical skills, i.e. skills, or 'do')

Effective learning should address each of the domains, where relevant to the curriculum focus, the situation and the learner. We therefore want to create external learning environments that provide learners with opportunities to develop knowledge and intellect (Cognitive Domain); attitude and beliefs (Affective Domain); and the ability to put physical skills into effect (Psychomotor Domain).

- **Enrich the experience of learning** by shaping, equipping and resourcing the education landscape to encourage active engagement of learners and provide meaningful learning experiences.

We believe that our students potential for learning is maximised by a process of experiential or kinaesthetic learning which encourages and engages learners in 'immediate or concrete experiences' that then provide a basis for 'observations and reflections' on their performance and understanding. This approach encourages learners to develop new constructs that have new potential implications for future experiences or action which they can 'actively test' and evaluate before choosing to accept or reject them when presented with future new concrete experiences.

We therefore want to create comfortable and accommodating external learning environments

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that are suitably resourced, serviced and equipped so as to facilitate an active, hands-on approach to learning. Such spaces help young people to apply their skills and knowledge across a range of challenges, and build bridges between theory and reality.

Camden expects contractors to:

- **Understand our priorities for learning and teaching**- Design to deliver our school vision and aspirations for the transformation of learning and teaching across the site.
- **Understand the pedagogic requirements of effective learning and teaching** – Design to

facilitate new approaches and activities linked to curriculum requirements that realise the potential of the new external environments.

- **Understand the specific spatial requirements for an effective external learning and teaching environment**- provide us with a range of flexible external learning environments that facilitate personalised learning; inspire quality teaching and provide opportunities for students to make progress, achieve and succeed.

Many of the external learning environments will be multi functional, and schools will require the design teams to interpret their specifications to maximise the effective use of space available.