



**partnerships for schools**  
building schools for the future

This case study looks at the work of the REAL Centre - a new feature at education Information Communication Technology (ICT) provider RM's Oxfordshire head office.

REAL stands for Rethinking Education and Learning and the aim of the space is to provide teachers, designers and pupils with the chance to see how the integrated design of furniture and equipment (F&E) with technology can deliver flexibility and extend the range of activities on offer to support personalised learning.

## The REAL Centre: Integrating furniture and technology for 21st century learning spaces

### What is the REAL Centre?

Each January at BETT, the education ICT show, RM has a learning space where they showcase innovative technology solutions alongside furniture ranges that support and extend its use to enhance learning experiences.

Building on this, the company has installed a permanent version at its head office in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. This has enabled them to demonstrate to people who are involved in refurbishing, designing or using new learning environments what can be achieved if the integration of F&E and ICT happens much earlier in the design stage.

The REAL Centre opened in May 2009 and in the first six months of operation over 170 different organisations, including local authorities, primary schools, architects, secondary schools, construction companies and technology providers such as Fujitsu and Intel have visited.

In order to ensure that visitors get the most out of the experience, RM limits numbers to a maximum of two or three groups simultaneously and provides guided tours to talk them through the different areas. The tours usually last around three hours and provide visitors with the opportunity to try the different products out and ask questions of the guide.

Graham Pragnell, Head of Education ICT at London Borough of Newham Council visited the REAL Centre shortly after it opened and said: "I must say I was extremely impressed with this new venture. Very careful consideration had been given to all of the equipment and resources within the centre and there had been no 'padding' in order to fill it.

"But what most impressed me was the 'guided tour' by Myf Powell, Education Integration Manager at RM. Myf's broad education background and understanding shone through and helped bring out the true educational relevance of everything I saw. I found it stimulating and thought-provoking."

### The Zones

The REAL Centre features four key learning zones:

- **Da Vinci Studio** – a practical, exploratory and creative project space that showcases how art, science and technology can be used across the curriculum.
- **Communication and Sensory** – this area is designed to develop communication skills with students of differing abilities and includes sensory work.
- **Creative and Media** – demonstrates how more traditional learning spaces can incorporate creative activities to motivate and engage pupils.

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- **Open Learning** – a flexible learning area that provides an environment for project based activities that encourages independent study and supports group learning.

RM guides groups through the four zones demonstrating the multiple activities that the spaces support and recommends that any potential visitors consider bringing pupils with them so they can not only see them using the spaces and products within them but can get a true understanding from them of how these ideas work in reality.



## The outcomes

A visit to the REAL Centre can provide an informative experience that demonstrates how early integration of F&E and ICT in the design process can really help BSF, and other schools refurbishment programmes, deliver the improved educational outcomes that they aim to.

Graham Pragnell’s visit is bringing multiple benefits to school design in Newham: “After my visit I immediately arranged for my own curriculum support team to have a combined visit with their PFI colleagues. This visit was another extremely successful occasion and the two teams came back absolutely glowing, singing the praises of both the centre and the guide’s educational expertise. They all felt they had a highly professional debate about the resources and their use and all felt they had been stimulated and motivated.



“Since those early visits, lots of Newham local authority officers and school staff have attended and all came back with something to enthuse about. The centre’s provision is timely for us here in Newham: it fits well with our BSF programme but now also will help primary headteachers and key decision makers as four of our schools move forward in the Primary Capital Programme.”

As well as helping inform school design in the BSF and PCP programmes, there has been interest in REAL from Abu Dhabi, Kentucky and Egypt.



## Further information

If you would like further information or to visit the REAL Centre, you can arrange this through the website: <http://www.rm.com>