



partnerships for schools

This case study looks at the vision behind Academy 360 and how this became a reality.

Thanks to its well-tailored vision, strong design and excellent stakeholder engagement programme, Academy 360 won the prize for 'Best BSF Academy' in the *PfS Excellence in BSF Awards 2009*.

Key project information

Local authority: Sunderland

Lead sponsor: Gentoo

Co-sponsor: Sunderland City Council

No. of pupils: 1,130, aged 4-16

Project cost: c£23m, plus ICT investment

Project timescales: new building complete in April 2010

BSF Wave: Wave 1

Construction partner: Balfour Beatty

Architect: Aedas

Academy 360: making the vision a reality

Project description

Academy 360 is an all-through school which opened in September 2009, as part of Sunderland's BSF project, with a specialism in Business and Innovation (including Performing Arts). It replaced the Quarry View Primary and Pennywell Secondary Schools in Sunderland.

Academy 360 was among three new build Academies to open as part of the city's BSF project last year. 360 was one of the first academies to be built through the PfS National Framework and one of the first in the national BSF programme to be co-sponsored.

Sunderland has developed the 'Sunderland Model' for its academies programme, the vision for which is to enable genuine partnership and collaboration between all schools, and each Academy is a partner within this collaborative network.

The Academy's lead sponsor is Gentoo (formerly Sunderland Housing Group), a not-for-profit organisation with a dedicated social investment team that works with partners, including local schools, to create opportunities in education, employment and enterprise.

With the building of the new Academy, Gentoo supported the 360 Chief Executive in leading on curriculum development and improving the life chances of learners by raising aspirations, creating appropriate vocational pathways and offering models of regeneration and achievement for the local community.

Vision for learning for all ages

Academy 360's vision is focused on three themes:

- Learning to Grow - for younger children
- Learning to Learn - for middle years
- Learning to Live – shown in the mix of specialist buildings and the home base areas in the three-storey Enterprise Centre

The vision is based upon clear beliefs about people and learning and continues to drive transformational curriculum change based upon individual pupil's motivation and interests.

In an area of high unemployment, Academy 360 aims to reconnect pupils and their communities to the world of business, enterprise and employment and ensure that the students develop a 'can-do' culture that will enable them to make a positive contribution to their community and the world of work.

Academy 360: making the vision a reality

Academy 360 design

The design of Academy 360's new building began with a 'journey'. Balfour Beatty and Aedas were asked by the sponsors to create an Academy that enabled all 4-16 year olds to journey through it as they grow into independent learners.

The design needed to be such that pupils of different ages could relate to their own spaces, but also enjoy working individually, in groups, in classes, in mixed age groups and as a whole school.

Academy 360 is located on a sloping site, however Aedas managed to overcome this and has delivered an iconic design with a campus feel.

The design concept creates a large number of flexible learning spaces including student home bases, specialist buildings for innovation, a theatre in the round, inner courtyards, indoor and outdoor sports, play, community and enterprise areas, five performance sites, integrated science spaces and a cyber café.

Above all, Academy 360 pupils find the school design to be exciting, different and welcoming.

Sustainability

- Academy 360 achieved a 'very good' BREEAM rating.
- The cooling system offers the ability to move energy around the building from areas requiring cooling to areas requiring heat.
- An electric lighting control system is linked to both presence detection and daylight sensors.
- A biomass boiler provides the energy for the heating systems. This provides 150 per cent of capacity, which ensures heat is always available.

Partnership working at all levels

At the heart of the educational vision and design stood strong partnership working and governance, and the commitment of the lead sponsor to produce a building which enabled the vision of all parties to be realised. This partnership working enabled Academy 360 and Gentoo to make the most efficient use of the PfS National Framework.

This was done by creating several working groups:

- an Academy 360 Design Team, chaired by the Gentoo Project Lead.
- a Delivery Team, including sponsor representatives, the local authority, the Client Design Adviser and PfS.
- a Project Board.
- an Education Leadership Board met regularly to share good practice and to provide a lead on the city's educational strategy.
- the lead sponsors for the city's three new academies also met regularly to share learning and support.

The issues and how these were tackled

Understanding a new system: The management system was new to all parties and processes were evolving all the time. The creation of a Delivery Team for Sunderland, to share knowledge and understanding was vital here, together with close relationship between PfS, the local authority and the lead sponsor.

Co-operation between lead sponsors was also key. Early in the project, it was normal for lead sponsors to feel at the end of a long line of communication and the co-operation that followed improved this. This also meant that good design ideas in one school/Academy could be passed to all others, helping to save time and cost throughout the design process.

Maximising input from a large number of stakeholders: This was a complex project. Two predecessor schools were involved, together with local community members, as well as Gentoo, PfS and Sunderland Council and a number of consultants (project management, legal, HR, ICT). Staff were understandably nervous about TUPE transfer and Academies in general.

Important steps were:

- An early residential meeting of the lead sponsor with predecessor school managers, school improvement partners and PfS to discuss educational vision.
- The Gentoo Communications and Marketing Manager's Plan included early consultation with school staff, parents and local community.
- Including one predecessor school head in all design meetings to act as a focus for staff and pupil input.

Academy 360: making the vision a reality

- Use of Gentoo technical staff to help translate ideas into space design prior to discussions with architects to save time.

Ensuring that the vision drives the design: The 360 vision is based upon three beliefs; learning to grow, learning to learn and learning to live. This vision requires new behaviour from learners and those who support them.

Constant questions must be:

- What does the learning behaviour look like?
- What is being done in the space?

Outcomes and Impact

Academy 360 has now begun the journey to transform what Ofsted called a 'significant level of under achievement'.

Progress so far includes:

- An iconic, state-of-the-art building, that together with Gentoo's new housing, transforms the physical landscape of the local area – delivered on time and within budget.

- The implementation of a new curriculum and approach that is changing attitudes to behaviour and learning and 'will, in the longer term, engage pupils and help them to achieve well' (Ofsted).
- The reversal of low aspirations for local people who can now see and experience change.
- The creation of a 'Community Voice' that has gone far beyond its governance role to become a major advocate for the local community.
- Far greater involvement by parents in the Academy and in their children's school life.

What could have been done better?

- Create protocols between stakeholders for procurement in writing sooner - as soon as is possible.
- Document more thoroughly design decisions particularly with regard to furniture. This needs to be done at Academy level as well as local authority level, as this avoids confusion later as to who decided what.
- Make the decision making process clearer to staff who are inputting in to the design and vision.

Next steps

- The inclusion of an early learning centre and community centre into the 'campus', and its integration with the shopping and health centres and the Pennywell Youth Project.
- Finalise the investment plan for the Academy 360 building.
- Develop staff to promote 21st century learning by fully using the building's potential.

Top Tips

- Establish good relationships and teamwork with all stakeholders.
- Be clear about the vision from the beginning.
- Move from the vision to learning behaviour to learning architecture (space, furniture, technology) to design.
- View as many buildings, not just schools, as possible.
- Employ the best Client Design Adviser.
- Constantly document the detail at all levels.

Key contact

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