



## partnerships for schools

Elm Court School in Lambeth caters for up to 100 students with statements of Special Educational Needs. The school moved into its new facilities in a former disused Edwardian school building in March 2009. The school is a shining example of what can be achieved when a historic building is brought up-to-date in order to cater for the needs of its 21st century pupils.

Elm Court School was awarded Best Design for a Remodelled School at the Excellence in BSF Awards 2009.

### Key project information

**School:** Elm Court Special School  
**No. of pupils:** 100  
**Local authority:** London Borough of Lambeth  
**BSF Wave:** Wave 2  
**School motto:** "Caring, sharing, valuing and improving achievement"

## Blending the old with the new: Elm Court

### Project description

The school vision for a new purpose-built facility as part of Lambeth's Building Schools for the Future programme became reality in 2009 when it relocated to the former Strand Grammar School site, with its red brick Edwardian building, in Elm Park.

Formally occupying a site in West Norwood with more than 50 per cent temporary buildings, the school had developed over the years and needed to provide extra specialist and general learning environments areas. The buildings on the Strand Grammar School site had fallen into disrepair and the project offered the opportunity to breathe new life into this existing local landmark, retaining key features while delivering 21st century learning facilities.

### Who was involved?

- Lambeth Building Schools for the Future Team
- jmarchitects
- Apollo Education
- Navigant Consulting
- RM

### Reorganising traditional spaces

The Edwardian building was protected by a conservation area which meant that it had to be preserved from external alteration. The inside, however, gave jmarchitects the freedom to transform the original organisation of spaces into environments which complement the needs of the school, while complying to modern thermal and acoustic regulations.

Combining new with old and retaining some original features, such as the war memorial panels in the hall, meant that some teaching spaces could be larger than what would be provided for under a new build scheme.

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Asbestos removal, bats and Japanese knotweed were found on the site and all had to be factored into the construction programme by Apollo Education. Considerable time was spent liaising with the local authority's conservation officers on the choice of materials, particularly for the replacement windows and rood coverings, to ensure that the architectural integrity of the building was maintained.

Following a full survey of the existing roof and structure, the original double height hall immediately behind the entrance was the first area to be addressed. The floor level was raised to create a range of offices and therapy rooms underneath which, in turn, defined a new central ground floor corridor from the main entrance to the centre of the building. Raising the floor level made it possible to make a feature of the 4.5m floor-to-ceiling windows which had previously been out of reach in the hall. The second floor level above the hall was then raised and the resulting teaching area in the roof space now gives views out over central London for the first time.

To comply with fire regulations a new fire escape was necessary from the hall and library / ICT spaces above. A design was agreed in consultation with the conservation officers which maximised transparency to preserve the views of the Edwardian building beyond.



The central core to the building, previously the rear of the hall space with a classroom above, was opened up to create a new atrium space with a new student entrance and informal social and learning spaces. By removing sections from the internal walls and installing internal windows from the atrium to the surrounding circulation and new lift and stair cores the sightlines have been improved and the long dark Edwardian corridors are now flooded with light.



Maximising natural light within the building, the ETFE atrium roof had the same transparency as glass, but with only a one-hundredth of the weight. The atrium is also key to the building's natural ventilation strategy as hot air is pulled through the building from intakes in new classroom windows and escapes through high level vents adjacent to the ETFE roof. A canteen and dining area just off the atrium features new French doors, adapted from the original ground floor windows, which allow for al fresco dining in the summer months and add to the light and airy feel. Diagrams which show the transformation of the school building are on page 4.

### Making the most of a tight site

In addition to the Edwardian school building the site was occupied by a number of smaller derelict outbuildings which had been used by the council over the years for a range of uses, including as a nursery, gymnasium and a woodworking shop. The decision was made to redesign the site around a central open air amphitheatre cut into the slope of the site and an established oak tree, once again mixing the old with the new.

On one side of the amphitheatre, and joined to the Edwardian school building by a covered walk way, a new build teaching block contains: three dedicated technology rooms, a light and airy art room and a music room with viewing gallery. On the other side of the amphitheatre is a new purpose built sports hall with changing facilities. The area to the rear of the site accommodates a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).

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ICT was not an afterthought and is integrated throughout the school. All the classrooms now have the interactive whiteboard technology and pupils have access to the latest educational technology facilities.

Engagement with the local community was vital for construction partners Apollo Education as access to the site was limited as the Edwardian building runs nearly the whole width of the site from the front.

Apollo Education provided a dedicated Community Investment Manager to the project who acted as the key contact with the Senior Leadership Team and headteacher as well as the local community. They attended parents' evenings and seasonal events at the school both before and during construction. Apollo Education has also provided a 10-year sponsorship for an Apollo Achievement Award which celebrates pupil's achievements, ensuring a lasting relationship between the school and Apollo.

## Top Tips

- Keep transformation at the forefront - don't just refurbish a poorly functioning space
- Understand the curriculum and how the school operates to inform phasing and minimise decant or temporary accommodation
- Focus on managing the relationship with the school
- Combine ICT and FF&E with build design and construction

## Key Contacts

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## Further information

For more information about Elm Court, including a video of the project, go to:  
<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/EducationLearning/BSF/BSFSchools/BSFElmCourt.htm>

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