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partnerships for schools
building schools for the future

This case study looks at the challenges which come with a remodelling project, focusing on the experiences of Kelmscott School as part of Waltham Forest's BSF scheme.

Kelmscott School won the 'Best Design for a Remodelled School' category in the Excellence in BSF Awards 2008.

Key project information

School: Kelmscott School
Type of project: Remodelling
School opened: September 2008
Number of students: 900 aged 11 to 18
Local authority: Waltham Forest
BSF wave: Wave 1
Architects: architecture plb

Transforming existing learning environments: Kelmscott School's experience

Project description

The brief concentrated on transforming a 1970s middle school that had been extended over 25 years to cater for use as a 900 place secondary school. There were three main factors to consider in the design:

1. The main entrance was difficult to find, hidden away next to the kitchen bins and delivery bay. There was no sense of arrival.
2. The dining, assembly hall, library and circulation spaces were too small and not appropriate for the current population numbers and age.
3. The school wanted to become a performing arts specialist school and required new facilities to support this aspiration.

Key design aspects

The design responded to these challenges in a number of ways. A prominent new entrance has been positioned at the main road edge of the site. This makes the school highly visible and gives it a new identity within the surrounding community.

A new 'street' runs from the entrance through the whole school, providing a clear circulation route as well as a number of contrasting, informal dining areas.

Circulation within the existing one storey building was very narrow. The design takes advantage of the fact that every classroom has an external door by providing a new external covered walkway around the perimeter of the building, reducing the load on the internal corridors. The canopy over the walkway extends from the new build around the existing building, visually linking the two and has given the existing 1960s building a 'facelift'.

The emphasis for the new build areas was on creating flexible spaces, and using the affordable area to the maximum, for example by combining dining and circulation space in the street, to provide enough room for both activities, as well as a number of areas that can be used for breakout or small group teaching.

In the existing buildings the team concentrated on working with the school to identify the minimum number of alterations to achieve maximum impact. Minor adjustments to a number of existing general teaching spaces, making them slightly larger or taking

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out built-in stores which made the rooms L shaped, has had a huge impact in many rooms. Specialist teaching rooms have also been refurbished and remodelled to bring them up to current standards with ICT provision.

Performing arts spaces have been transformed with a new multipurpose hall, stage, drama rooms and a suite of music rooms. The hall is next to the main entrance and the street provides a foyer space during a performance for public or parents.

Consultation



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Pupils and staff were consulted during the design process. In response to their request to move away from the traditional school dining room to something more adult, the street provides a series of contrasting vibrant, bright, day lit spaces for dining or breakout activities.

Staff were particularly involved in decisions about where to spend the overall budget and in reviewing how the internal adaptations in the existing buildings could give them the best balance of more useable teaching spaces and better staff workspaces without losing all of the storage space. Departmental staff at all levels attended sessions which explored the options, ensuring that everyone understood the wider picture and helped in optimising the overall proposals.

Sustainability

Re-using and improving the existing buildings rather than demolishing them made this project particularly sustainable. A number of roof lights and sun pipes were introduced into the existing buildings to improve daylight. The heating systems in the existing buildings were replaced with more energy efficient systems and windows and high level roof light openings were overhauled to ensure good ventilation. A number of measures were used in the new build in targeting a Very Good BREEAM rating – including careful design of the south facing facades to prevent over heating from the sun and to take advantage of natural daylight.

Key contact

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Further information

The construction partners, Bouygues UK, have a website about the Kelmscott project:
www.walthamforest.project-info.co.uk/bouygues/waltham_forest/kelmscott_school/page/home_site

More information about Waltham Forest's BSF project is available at: www.walthamforest.gov.uk/index/education/capital-strategy-unit/building-schools-for-the-future.htm