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This case study focuses on the design brief for the first Pupil Referral/Behavioural Unit opened as part of BSF in the London Borough of Lambeth.

It looks at the design brief and stakeholder engagement, through to the final concept for the buildings and outdoor spaces.

Key project information

School: Park Campus
School type: Pupil Referral Unit
Local authority: London Borough of Lambeth
Architects: EllisWilliams Architects
Project cost: c£7.5m
Design start: 2006
Opened: 2008 (construction duration - 65 weeks)

The design of BSF's first Pupil Referral Unit: The Park Campus, Lambeth

Project description

The Park Campus, the first PRU to open as part of the national BSF programme, houses three different student groups, each with their own specific set of needs. The principal group is the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) of 80 secondary-level students. The second group is the Behavioural Improvement Program (BIP) consisting of 30 students who are on the campus for a short-term basis. The third is the Behavioural Education Support Team (BEST) that serves as a drop in centre for senior students, parents and the wider community.

A PRU is a school, established and maintained by the local authority, that provides education for children who require alternative educational provision. In addition to pupils who have been excluded, PRUs may provide education for school-aged mothers and pregnant schoolgirls, school-phobics, and pupils awaiting placement in a maintained school. Many children attending PRUs have been permanently excluded and some are at risk of exclusion.

The focus of referral units is on getting pupils back into a mainstream school. Generally class sizes will be no more than eight students per class base. ICT facilities have been utilised to prioritise the teaching of most

subjects within one classroom. Pupils will only be able to move class bases for subjects that require for a specialist equipment like science or technology.

The BIP is aimed at improving poor behaviour and attendance in schools where these issues form significant barriers to student learning and educational progress. The BEST is made up of a multi-agency team who work with young people, their families and schools to promote emotional well-being that leads to improved behaviour and attendance at school.

The design brief

Architects worked closely with the headteacher, Richard Leonard, and the Lambeth Children and Young People's Service to develop the brief for the Park Campus from first principles.

Through a series of workshops it became apparent that the needs of the various student populations were very different. These three populations - Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Behavioural Improvement Program (BIP), and the Behavioural Education Support Team (BEST) which, together with the community accessible sports facilities, became the four building blocks of the design. Each of these four functions requires a degree of separation and needs control of its access.

The design of BSF's first Pupil Referral Unit

In addition to the design brief, there were several site constraints that significantly affected the design. The first of these is a large municipal sewer that runs through the eastern portion of the site - this precluded placing buildings in this area. The second constraint was that for political reasons the north west corner of the site (where the parking is currently located) could not contain any buildings. These constraints resulted in a very tight site area.

The design concept



The PRU, BIP, BEST and the community accessible sports facilities are grouped around a central courtyard. This central courtyard becomes the heart and focus of the school, and contains an outdoor amphitheatre. The main dining area faces onto the central courtyard and has large sliding glass doors that allow the two spaces to be used as one during moderate weather. The dining area is used as a daily group assembly and briefing area for approximately 40 students at a time.

External dining is provided beneath the canopy outside the main dining area, immediately adjacent to the courtyard.

Supervision and control of students are important issues. It was essential that clear sight-lines be provided both internally and externally to aid in passive supervision. Externally there are no remote areas where students can loiter unobserved.

The sports hall and changing facilities are kept to the front of the site, both for acoustic reasons and for community accessibility. A typical sports hall would normally be a windowless box, but it was felt that a multi-use area that serves as a sports hall, assembly area, and performance hall would be of more benefit to the school. High-level daylight is provided along the long edges of the hall/sports court.

With the exception of the sports/assembly hall all buildings are two storeys in height. This gave an acceptable compromise between available site area and the direct connection and supervision requirements of the school.

Colours are used to accent and underscore the design ideas. Background colours of the building are the dark blue brick base, white, and grey. Three colours form the palette for the accents. Yellow denotes public areas, blue for learning areas, and purple for staff and administration areas.

The community-use sports facilities include a floodlight Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) (23.5m x 36.0m) with synthetic pitch which is designed to Football Association standards. It accommodates football, Futsal, and three tennis courts. There is also a hard court, fenced playing area: 11.5m x 20m with basketball courts.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement was particularly important for Park Campus as the brief and the design was developed from first principles. The principal stakeholders involved were the:

- London Borough of Lambeth Planning Department
- Park Campus headteacher
- Park Campus Senior Management Team
- Park Campus entire faculty
- Park Campus selected students
- Local residents
- Ward councillors
- Community leaders

- Partnerships for Schools
- CABE
- Sport England
- Football Association
- Metropolitan Police

The design team held regular meetings with the Children and Young People's Service, headteacher, and Senior Management team as the brief and design were developed. Several separate workshops were held for the entire faculty and for selected students from the school.

The design of BSF's first Pupil Referral Unit

Some of the early design studies were for a more centralised and combined school, but during the course of the various meetings and workshops the plan layout and separation evolved to what is now built. The most notable workshop in this regard was one with the entire faculty where several different approaches and site options were reviewed and discussed, and a near universal and strong reaction developed in favour of the approach that was subsequently adopted.

From these discussions came the idea of an external space being the heart of the school. As this idea was developed, again on the basis of discussion, the idea of creating an amphitheatre was developed. Parallel to this discussion was the use of the dining area.

This is situated immediately adjacent to the external courtyard and has an intimate and close connection to the external space. The dining area is the internal heart of the school. Large sliding glass doors are provided so that the internal and external space can be combined in temperate weather. Additionally, exterior seating is provided for covered outdoor dining.

In developing the brief, it was important for the school to have a space where up to 40 students could be gathered in order to discuss the day's activities and goals. The dining area was early on collectively identified as this area, and this further underscores this space being the internal heart of the school.

The sports hall is a flexible space that allows for sports, assembly, and drama. This multi-use was decided upon in consultation with the principal stakeholders, as the original intention was that the space be only a sports hall. Given the relatively small size of the school, the construction budget did not allow construction of separate assembly and sports halls, and the multi-use solution was deemed to be the most cost-effective solution.

Structural overview

The buildings are a series of steel frames supported on pile foundations. Precast concrete planks form the floors and ceilings. The canopy is formed from curved CHS tubes factory assembled in modules and bolted together on site. Wind posts for the window walls are composite sections designed to minimise sight lines.

Landscape design

The design of the external environment is integral with the design of the school as a whole. EllisWilliams

Architects retained Plincke Landscape as a sub-consultant to develop the external design in tandem with the school design.



A courtyard garden is provided to the west of the new buildings. The garden is a quiet, enclosed area planted with trees, grass and shrubs that can be used informally by students and staff or as an outdoor classroom for teaching. On the south side of courtyard there is raised seating area that can be used as a performance space or for drama classes. A water feature is located in the courtyard and the sound of moving water adds a calming element to the environment.

A series of outdoor classrooms are located on the north side of the new PRU building connected to the internal teaching spaces. Hedges to provide enclosure and privacy will divide the classrooms.

Sustainability

Sustainability was an important consideration, and the project has a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating. The orientation of the building maximise the opportunities of the site. Teaching and learning areas are kept away from a busy and noisy street. This allows most of the spaces in the campus to be naturally ventilated while still complying with strict acoustic requirements. Precast concrete planks form the floor and roof construction, and approximately 75% of the surface area was left exposed to enable a 'thermal flywheel' to be created. Ventilation is controlled through a series of louvres that are computer controlled by the Building Management System. This allows fine-tuning of the environment, and also allows the buildings to be nighttime cooled without the usual security issues surrounding this option.

Despite the constrained site, the classrooms receive very good day lighting, with many classrooms receiving daylight from two aspects.

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Surface rainwater is collected in underground holding tanks, and the option is provided for this to be used for irrigation in the future.

Rubble from the demolition of existing buildings on site was used to infill a series of basement vaults.

Procurement

The project was procured on a Design and Build basis. Navigant Consulting on behalf of the London Borough

of Lambeth retained EllisWilliams Architects (EWA) and the rest of the design team. The scheme was tendered on RIBA Stage D information, and the design team was novated to the successful contractor, Apollo Education. Detailed design was finalised by the design team working on behalf of the contractor.

The project benefited from very good relations between the design team, the Park Campus school, the Lambeth team, Navigant, Apollo Education, and

Key contact

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Further information

BSF news, information about schools in the borough, as well as information for the market about the next phase of BSF in Lambeth is available at: www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/EducationLearning/BSF/

Information about EllisWilliams Architects can be found at: www.ewa.co.uk/