



partnerships for schools

building schools for the future

This case study looks at the role played by teachers, governors and students in the creation - and operation - of BSF's first 'school-within-a-school' learning environment.

Brislington Enterprise College was winner of the 'Best school team' category in the *Excellence in BSF Awards 2008*.

Key project information

School: Brislington Enterprise College

School type: Mixed comprehensive

No. of pupils: 1,755 (1,485 11-16; 250 post 16; 20 vulnerable and physically impaired; 20 ASD centre)

Local authority: Bristol

Project cost: £34m

Working as a team: involving the whole school in BSF transformation

Project description

Teaching staff, governors and students were at the heart of Brislington Enterprise College's (BEC) four-year journey of transformation that has seen it move into a new school building based on a radical new model of school design/organisation.

BEC's 'schools within a school' design allows it to apply a model of what is known as 'human-scale education' – a model which is increasingly used in the USA. Instead of a single large unit, it provides a series of smaller learning communities, each with its own clearly defined identity and its own director and staff.

The entire school team at BEC has been involved with, and committed to, implementing change from long before the bidding process. This continued through to completion of the main work, and now that the school is operational, with ongoing plans to develop new ways of teaching and learning.

This case study will look at how the efforts of the school team has touched on every aspect of the new school.

Shaping the vision: the role of BEC staff

The headteacher, John Matthews, was instrumental in ensuring that the management team and teaching staff were kept informed, involved and organised in order to best understand and engage with the myriad issues associated with a change such as this.

An Assistant Headteacher was designated project manager to liaise with architects, the construction team and other stakeholders on day-to-day issues of design and build.

Some staff were engaged in exploring design options for the new school, while others examined possible methods of education to put into practice in the finished building.

Teachers visited schools in Boston and Philadelphia, as well as in the UK, to study different education models and learning environments.

All adults at BEC attended a one-day conference to shape the final model of human-scale education to be applied at the school.

Working as a team: involving the whole school in BSF transformation

During 2007/08, BEC ran 1.5-hour Continuing Professional Development sessions after school every Tuesday to fully develop with teachers how the new curriculum would work.

The impact of educational transformation on design

BEC developed an exciting vision for its future consisting of a series of separate small schools under one roof. Each separate school would accommodate around 300 students, with shared central facilities for arts, music, PE, resources and dining.

With no previous experience in school design, BEC's leadership team had to do their homework in order that they:

- Were aware of the breadth of school design options;
- Could see new schools in action and learn what works, and what doesn't;
- Could speak with other school leaders, staff and students;
- Could think about changes to the curriculum, how teachers teach and how/where/when students learn which would impact on the design decisions;
- Could become better informed about architectural choices and concepts and be able to articulate likes/dislikes to the design team.

Visits to schools in this country and the USA helped inform the design. For example, teachers from BEC saw one school in Pennsylvania where large teaching areas had to be divided up with screens within 18 months of the building opening.

Even after the school team's vision was shared with architects, they continued to track developments which would impact on the design of the school, such as the 14-19 agenda.

Supporting personalised learning

The creation of a series of **small learning communities** has facilitated the introduction of 'learning families' of around 10 students, who meet every day for 10 minutes with their adult learning guide.

BEC's design allows **flexibility** in learning: pairs of standard classrooms can be opened up to create one large teaching space, then divided again to support work in smaller groups or more individual learning.

The flexibility of the design will help the school meet future needs: the layout can be reconfigured by taking down some internal walls to create different areas for learning.

ICT is an integral part of the new school: students can access the **Managed Learning Environment (MLE)** at home or school 24/7, enabling students to learn at their own pace.

Change management to support staff

BEC used 'champions' among the teaching staff to help promote the chosen new model for redeveloping the school and human-scale education.

Day-long staff conferences were held off-site to evolve and promote the new model.

A middle tier of teachers received additional training to prepare for the introduction of the new model.

While still in the old school building, BEC invested heavily in improving ICT beyond the basic level. Teachers had their own laptops and electronic whiteboards from 2004, and a wireless system was installed.

It was crucial for the success of the project that existing teachers, and the 65 others who have joined, shared the vision of the leadership team and governors. An Ofsted report in September 2006 found that, halfway through their BSF journey, a "critical mass of staff are now following the strong and clear direction given by senior leaders" as expressed in the vision.

ICT changing the operation of the school

ICT has been designed into the new building, rather than being an add-on. The MLE gives students, staff and parents 24/7 internet access to information and resources, whether at home, school or anywhere else with internet access.

The MLE brings together all the information teachers need into one place. They no longer need to log into multiple programmes to find out what a student is working on, their past performance, or their attendance record. Students can access their timetables, resources to prepare for lessons and homework, find out information about school events etc.

The whole building is wireless, enabling teachers and students – who will all have their own laptops by 2010 – to work anywhere. In addition, BEC has done away with whiteboards and installed projectors linked to teachers' laptops.

Access to the school, and meal purchases, is via an electronic identity/swipe card carried by all students

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and staff. This reduces administration through electronic registration, plus having a cashless school further reduces administration costs and avoids discrimination against those with free school meals.

Early indicators of change

In the year prior to moving into the new building, students, staff and the local community were motivated, positive and looking forward to the benefits of the new school, where academic results are already improving.

In summer 2008, GCSE results were the highest ever recorded. Attendance for the year was the highest

BEC had ever seen, while exclusions were at their lowest. BEC has seen a significant increase in the number of teachers and non-teaching staff applying for vacancies. Staff turnover is at a much lower rate than in previous years. September 2008 also saw the largest intake of students for four years, and BEC also recruited well for its newly relaunched Post-16 Centre.

Once in the new building, staff reported that it seemed calmer and more purposeful than before, and parental interest in open evenings has never been higher.

Top Tips

- A successful project is one which is truly collaborative – that means all staff, governors, students and members of the community are kept informed and have an opportunity to take part in conversations about spaces for learning, curriculum changes etc
- Involve all stakeholders at all stages: students contributed to the design of the toilets, social areas and dining spaces alongside architects and designers; students also commissioned a 'Public Arts' project artist; staff were involved in the design of specialist areas
- Governors have been involved at a strategic and operational level throughout the project to challenge and support in equal measure
- The Senior Leadership Team has been in post throughout the project – this has ensured that a consistent vision was applied throughout the process

Key contact

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Further information

More information about BEC is available on the school website: www.because.org.uk

For the latest news about BSF in Bristol and the activities of Bristol's Local Education Partnership (LEP) see: www.bristollep.co.uk/