

# identity

The character and ethos of a successful school is often signified by some of its key buildings. These may be new buildings, but are often older ones that embody the historical context of the original school on the

site. Many schools have buildings that they would be keen to keep as they are recognised by the staff, pupils and local community as representative of what is best about the school and its history.

If these buildings were originally designed to house a school, they may have appropriate accommodation that can be easily adapted to the needs of a modern school. Even if the spaces no longer meet current curricular needs they can often be remodelled to accommodate a different function. For example, small classrooms can provide a learning resource centre or sixth-form provision that can have the added benefit of historical character and architectural details.

City and Islington FE College used an existing Victorian school as part of its Centre for Lifelong Learning at Finsbury Park. The architect says:

'The decision to retain the Victorian building at the core of the scheme, while requiring more bravery, engagement and constant monitoring by client and consultant team in terms of cost and contingency planning, has emotional rewards – the long history of educational use on the site and its place in the collective consciousness of the local community has been reinterpreted rather than swept away wholesale. Many of the building's users, who have a long association with it, are very pleased about this.'



The historic significance of a site, as well as the buildings, can also mean that many schools may want to stay put, even when the site is confined. As ICT access increases, such constraints may be balanced by the opportunity to place schools at the heart of the community.

Bishop Wordsworth's School is located on a very cramped site in a conservation area in Salisbury. It has started a long-term improvement plan to replace temporary classrooms in poor condition and address suitability shortcomings. Relocation, even on a temporary basis, was not seen as an option by the school. The headmaster says:

'The school is located in what is arguably the most beautiful Cathedral precinct in the United Kingdom. The traditional Christian ethos of the school, together with the very strong ties with the Cathedral through the school's founder, means that a move to an alternative site would not be a viable or desirable option.'



# consistency

While there is always room for improvement, there will usually be elements of the buildings and the way that they can be used that staff and pupils already like.

Rather than starting with a clean slate, they can be reassured that what works best in the current school buildings will remain, while what is less suitable will be replaced or amended. When so much in education is changing, this can help to bring some stability.

Where the site is restricted in size or access (with playing fields elsewhere), replacing all of the buildings would mean that the entire school would need to be decanted to a temporary site while the work was done. Depending on the location of available temporary sites, this may cause more disruption to pupils than if remodelling work were phased around them while they stayed on site, especially where there are existing

issues of pupil disengagement or where pupils might be particularly sensitive to disruption.

Although the potential disturbance needs to be carefully managed, the benefits of building work nearby or adjacent to facilities that are in use can be understood by both pupils and staff. This also means they can communicate their concerns to the school's single point of contact with the contractors if necessary.



South Camden Community School (above) favoured phased remodelling over a total rebuild which would have involved major decanting. The head teacher says:

'Routine is vital to ensure that students feel secure and confident in their learning environment. When routine is disrupted learning suffers and behaviour management becomes more of an

issue. It is not only students who are adversely affected by the disruption of routine; it massively increases both workload and stress levels for staff and this also needs to be factored in.'

At Tiffin School in Kingston, the new learning resources centre (below) not only provides an inspirational library and mezzanine ICT facilities, but also links two existing buildings with contrasting styles (one dating from the 1930s and one built in

1986) which, together with a listed Georgian house, represented the traditional ethos of the school. IID Architects' design complements the existing buildings whilst also reflecting the spirit of the age and combining a sense of excitement

with the calm that independent learning requires. The new circulation areas and lift have provided access for the disabled to both floors of the adjoining buildings and have served to further enclose the courtyard.



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# conservation

Many buildings of various ages are worth preserving and if necessary remodelling, because of their historic or architectural character and detailing. Victorian and Edwardian buildings often have unique design qualities and features which would be very difficult or prohibitively expensive to include in buildings today.

Spaces that may once have been designed for a specific purpose will often have been used for other and perhaps less appropriate purposes since. Within a project that reorganises the whole school, however, such spaces can be ideal for modern learning activities: from small halls becoming libraries

to large classrooms with high ceilings being used for music rooms.

Adaptations and refurbishment of listed buildings can be difficult, but will often be worth the extra effort. Planning issues such as work in conservation areas and Tree Preservation Orders can be addressed more easily through projects which aim to substantially remodel existing buildings rather than replace them.

Sometimes, however, existing buildings may never easily provide teaching and learning facilities that are large or adaptable enough to

suit the modern curriculum. While the historical significance of, for instance, the original house on the school site may be recognised by the local planning authority and conservationists, the cost of repair and allowing full access may be too high for the school if the end result is still not suitable. Depending on the location and access of such a building, and its importance to the ethos of the school, careful decisions need to be made as to whether it is best used by the school, within the ideal masterplan, or whether it may be better used by others – perhaps for wider educational uses such as teacher training or for other community uses.



City and Islington College created a new atrium in an adapted 1880's Victorian London Board School. The architect says:

'The new and old mixture, while making the project complex to deliver efficiently on site, has other advantages. Working within the tight budget constraints, the dynamism created by juxtaposing the old building with the new gives a richness of spatial diversity which would be otherwise unaffordable. The detailing of the Victorian building – bas-relief carving formerly high above the playground and barely noticed – now has an enhanced status as students and staff pass close by on the bridges of the new building.'

Following an extensive conversion and extension programme, the Wolverhampton City Learning Centre at Wednesfield High School is housed in the school's disused swimming pool.

Although the distinctive late 1950s building formed an integral part of a larger building, Wolverhampton City

Council Property Services has allowed it to offer a self-contained facility on the school campus.

The original pool is now a citywide, shared ICT resource area, with a new opaque glazing system set back behind the existing structural columns to enhance the sculptural effect of the 'folded slab' roof.

