

# Designing with Children

## Kingsdale School

The Kingsdale School refurbishment project was implemented as part of The Architecture Foundation initiative School Works and was completed in 2004. Kingsdale School is a large mixed comprehensive school in Southwark, South London. Constructed in the 1950s, the school was in need of refurbishment for 21st century learning and teaching needs. dRMM architects were assigned the school design following their successful entry in the School Works competition in 2000. Professional collaborations included working with Gordon Cowley and Atelier van Lieshout. The design made use of the existing building to superimpose a new roof over the internal courtyard, which accommodated new dining facilities, assembly and performance space, improved circulation, and social and house-based activities.

### Motivation

School Works was a national initiative addressing the impact of school buildings on school standards, student and staff self-esteem, morale and pride of the school community, thus helping to shape a 21st century curriculum. It considered both the 'hard' infrastructure as well as the 'soft' infrastructure which surrounds school buildings, such as educational achievement, school culture and ethos, local community engagement and lifelong learning opportunities. Supporting the revisioning, refurbishment and re-building of school environments, School Works applied a participatory approach, bringing together architects, educationalists and the school users. In the case of Kingsdale School, school staff, students and the surrounding community comprised the key stakeholder team.

### Children's involvement

School Works worked alongside an interdisciplinary team that included: dRMM Architects, an educational psychologist, educational policy researcher, engineer, construction manager and performing artist. Staff team members who participated in the project included teachers from

#### What

Re-modelling of Kingsdale School main building

#### Where

Southwark, London, United Kingdom

#### Age

11-16

#### Group Size

Whole school, approximately 900-1000 pupils

#### Project Stage

Brief, In Use

#### Children's Roles

Clients, Creative Inspirers, Expert Consultants, Placemakers

#### Timescale

2000 - completed in May 2004

#### Partners

dRMM (Architects)

The Architecture Foundation initiative 'School Works' (Initiator)

London Borough of Southwark (Client)

Students and staff, Kingsdale School (Participants)

a range of departments, such as maths, art and sciences. The senior management team was also represented throughout.

A three-stage approach was followed:

– **stage 1 (2 days):** following a one-day staff workshop, in which they explored the school culture and environment as well as ideas about the future school, student representatives were engaged in a similar workshop over two days, discussing their feelings about and experiences of their school and exploring potential changes;

– **stage 2 (5 weeks):** in the second phase of the project all stakeholders took part in workshops. For example, students explored issues of belonging and difference or storage inadequacies; staff looked at organisational issues; while local residents discussed communication with the school; and

– **stage 3 (2-3 weeks):** The participants finally met to agree solutions and recommendations.

A range of methods were used during these stages to support exploration, research and expression of ideas and experiences. Warm-up exercises, such as word association, postcards, team building and guided relaxation, were used as means to generate discussion and encourage participants to respond to the requirements of the tasks. Ranking exercises enabled participants to raise problems, prioritise, pick preferences and identify solutions. Student representatives also ran surveys to explore their peers' experiences of their school. Other engagement methods included social mapping (i.e. areas of socialising, studying and playing), drawing timelines of when and how space was used, mood charts and route-mapping. Art and performance, collages, creative writing and poetry were also used as means of expression. Focus groups took place throughout, with students keeping audio, written or video records of the work implemented.

During their engagement with the project, the participants spent a couple of days outside the school in order to explore the goals and values of the project and plan ahead and discussions helped to generate design and education or management solutions. The issues addressed included, for example: a single welcoming entry point; inadequate teaching spaces and technological resources; breaking down assumptions about the school community; internal communication difficulties; security and personal space for the students. Design and building problems were addressed alongside the educational goals and needs of the school, thus linking the 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure.

## Outputs and outcomes

Following the process described above, the architects developed the design brief and feedback to the stakeholders through sketches and outline designs illustrating the proposals. A set of indicators was then developed by a team of staff members and students, named the Maverick Explorers, to help evaluate the impact that the project had on the school and students' learning. The team collected information throughout the project and communicated the results of their research evaluation to the rest of the school.

The transformation of the main school building included a music performance and cinema auditorium, a 1,200 student assembly area and dining facilities, while aerial walkways, bridge and stairs made new circulation connections.

At the start of the project the school was under OFSTED's 'special measures' programme and thus ineligible for capital funding. Following the success of the project, however, the school received funding (£7.5 million) from the then Government's Department for Education and Skills to implement dRMM architects' design proposals. Much of the project's success was due to the diversity of partnerships forged. According to Steve Morrison, Kingsdale School's Head Teacher: *'the multitude of stakeholders and the cross-fertilisation of different professionals [...] have combined to create some of the most special features of the project'*. Various design awards for dRMM came to complement the successful project – for example, M4I Demonstration Award (2004, for the consultation process); The Wood Awards (2004, for the Auditorium); Royal Fine Art Commission 'Building of the Year' (2005).

## Resources

dRMM'Kingsdale School Transformation' <http://drmm.co.uk/projects/view.php?p=kingsdale-school-transformation> (accessed 9 December 2013).

Schoolworks – The ground breaking schools design initiative 'Kingsdale School Case History' [http://www.school-works.org/dSite\\_kingsdale.html](http://www.school-works.org/dSite_kingsdale.html) (accessed 9 December 2013).

Seymour, J. et al. (2001) *School Works Tool Kit*. London: School Works.



Courtesy: Alex de Rijke, dRMM



Courtesy: Michael Mack, dRMM



Courtesy: Alex de Rijke, dRMM





Kingsdale School, dRMM Architects  
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