

School provides best environment for learning and discovery



December 2016



An impressive development for Highgate School has been handed over in time for the start of the new academic year. The inspired scheme by architect firm, Architype, pays homage to the school's passion and long-term commitment to achieving excellence in education.

Gallery



Situated on Bishopswood Road in leafy Highgate, the historical site has long been the home of the junior school. The plan conceived for the school incorporates an inviting entrance and well-orientated layout, coupled with a continuous connection to the established landscape; creating a strong civic presence on the street side and direct visual links out to the cricket pitch on the west side.

The unfettered presence of the new school sits subtly in its established surroundings, despite the building's footprint and multi-storey design. With a minimal yet striking entrance, the school building extends into the site incorporating Ingleholme, a 19th century villa that has been sensitively refurbished as part of the development. As one of the last of its era in Highgate, Ingleholme has been linked to the new element through a series of glazed units, creating an attractive rhythm to the new public-facing elevations whilst allowing the ornate Portland stone and decorative brickwork of the original building to be on display.

Contemporary grandeur

The heart of the school is a generous, naturally-lit circulation space to which each element of the school is directly linked. Ceramic flooring, interrupted with colourful marble patterns to reflect the school's passion for natural sciences, command a sense of contemporary grandeur, complemented by 17 inspired sculptures and reliefs in and around the school, including a stone-carved chameleon on the stone staircase and a bronze cast pangolin hanging from one of the overhead glulam beams, offering a sense of intrigue and thought-provoking fun to the young pupils.

The space assumes a wide variety of uses, from secluded pods for focused study, to amphitheatre-style arrangements for informal performance and creative learning experiences. Lit by continuous overhead glazing and sections of floor-to-ceiling glazing, the feeling of light and airiness is akin to that of an atrium space, without the negative effects of overheating and glare thanks to the smart use of shading and an MVHR (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) strategy, which circulates fresh air at optimised temperatures throughout the school, supporting the building's passive design principles.

Arranged along a west-facing crescent, each standard classroom benefits from open views to the landscape, shaded by protruding vertical fins, constructed from some of the 55,000 handmade bricks that dominate the school facade, and topped by 580m² of wild flower meadow green roof. In addition to the classrooms are shared specialised areas, such as a fully-equipped art studio, science labs and design technology workshop. The performing arts department is located entirely in the retrofitted Ingleholme building, for which the primary access has been re-routed internally through the main school, creating an elegant and dynamic junction. The modern finishes of the new building artfully meet the restored Victorian brickwork of Ingleholme, which proudly remains a dominant and influencing lynchpin of the design.

Mark James, School Principal, said: “The new junior school is both an exciting challenge and wonderful opportunity. We now have a site, which provides the best possible environment for learning and discovery.”

Estates Director, Chris Birbeck, who played a key role in shaping the brief and managing the project from the client side, said: “Architype understood perfectly the ingredients required to create an optimal learning environment; the use of light, space and the incorporation of natural materials into a cleverly-considered collection of spaces that flow together naturally and which also commune seamlessly with the outside teaching and play areas.”

Sustainable future

Besides adding a layer to Highgate School’s deep-rooted history, the passive approach to the energy strategy will form the basis of a sustainable new future for the school, designed to a 100-year life-cycle. Benefitting from superb airtightness and a robust heating and cooling strategy, the school is providing up to 10% of its own energy, with the integration of photovoltaic solar panels.