

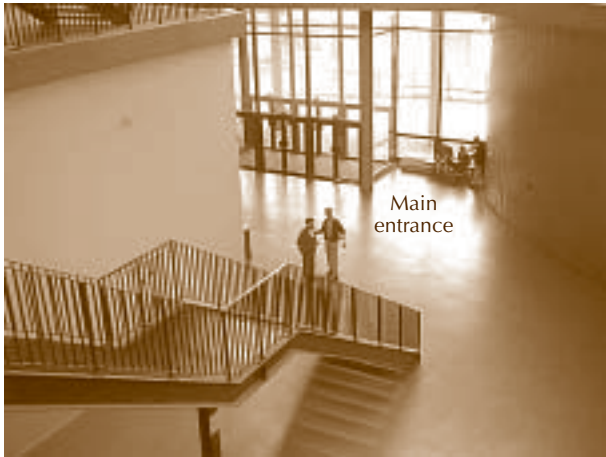


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# School Works in the United Kingdom: A New Approach to Local School Design

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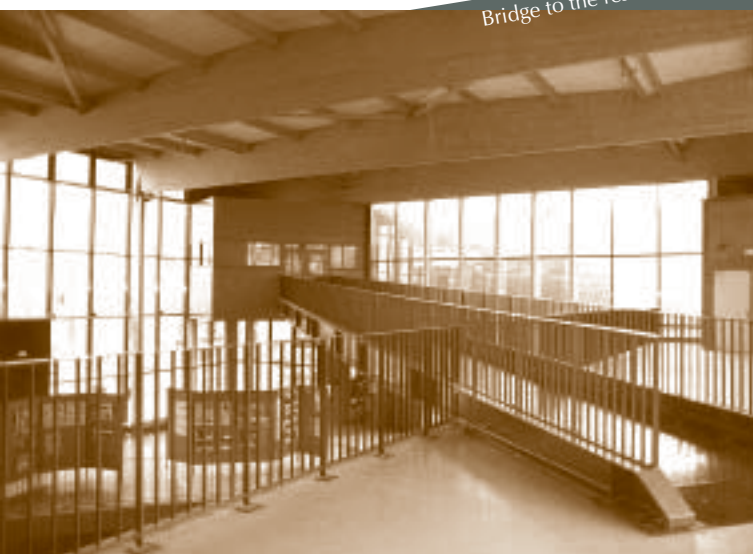
## **SCHOOL WORKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: A NEW APPROACH TO LOCAL SCHOOL DESIGN**

11 design and assembly workshops, over 100 computers, a multimedia room, a conference room, a documentation and information centre and a 150 m<sup>2</sup> technical resource centre organised into specific areas, a cafeteria and a residence for pupils and apprentices with 114 standard rooms and ten rooms for disabled pupils (the residence is managed by a private association).

The annual enrolment consists of some 1 300 pupils in initial education and 1 100 trainees in continuing education. There are over 250 staff members responsible for management, maintenance, teaching, counselling and security. Its operating budget is approximately EUR 2.3 million.

The “Max’P” Association, which acts as a link between former and current pupils, is housed on the premises. Over 10 000 former pupils belong to this association, some 5 000 of whom work in the construction sector. The association publishes a newsletter of job vacancies and jobs wanted.

Bridge to the resource centre



School Works, a not-for-profit company in the United Kingdom, has developed a secondary school design process which enables communities to create unique school buildings that cater for their own particular needs. At the heart of this process is the basic principle that it is the people who work and learn in a school building every day who really understand its ethos, its needs, its strengths and its weaknesses, and that truly involving the school community will generate an innate sense of ownership and respect for the buildings. School Works has put its participatory process into practice at an inner-city school in London.

Traditionally in the United Kingdom, local education authorities have acted as clients on school building projects. Head teachers and heads of department are usually consulted on *pre-conceived* design ideas, and pupils are only occasionally given a chance to see designs before they are built. This lack of engagement with school communities means that schools are designed according to the priorities of individuals who may never use the buildings once they are constructed.

In addition, many schools currently under construction show little evidence of fresh thinking about the way learning environments are designed and used, and little emphasis on the need for quality design, despite government commitment to improving the fabric of school buildings.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is School Works?**

School Works is an independent organisation that is funded by the Department for Education and Skills to explore new approaches to learning developments in education and make recommendations for new ways of designing and building school environments. The company believes that the design of school buildings has both a direct and an indirect impact on learning. School Works argues that as the function of schools is rapidly changing, it is vitally important that design keeps up. It is

1. The current British Government has pledged to build or refurbish more than 600 schools over the next three years and has set aside the huge sum of GBP 8.5 billion (EUR 13.8 billion) to improve education building stock.



Aerial view of Kingsdale Secondary School scheme

not enough to simply create functional spaces for teaching and learning. We all cherish our homes, we aspire to beautiful places of work; why should our schools be any different?

School Works also believes that quality architecture is an essential ingredient in creating an inspiring environment for learning and encourages schools to work directly with creative architects. Whilst one might expect this to push up the price of building works, in fact, good design and attention to detail need not cost more. School Works argues that its not what is spent, but how it is spent that counts.

### Participatory process at Kingsdale

Together with an interdisciplinary team including architects de Rijke Marsh Morgan, an education researcher, an artist, performance artists, an engineer, a construction manager and a facilitator, School Works engaged with the community of Kingsdale Secondary School in south London to develop a new school vision, new building designs and complementary recommendations for educational, management and cultural change.

Through engaging pupils, staff and the local community in creative workshops, the School Works participatory process uncovered the real needs of the individuals and groups that use the building. Teachers were encouraged to consider the way that their classrooms could aid or impair teaching. Pupils were asked how the school buildings influenced their behaviour. The local community discussed their perception of the school and put in requests to share school facilities.

Further to this a number of key findings emerged. Firstly, clear links were found between design and learning,

and these linkages were often in the detail. For example, the process highlighted the fact that without personal storage spaces, students were not bringing the required equipment to school, in order to avoid carrying it with them all day. This had an obvious impact on their ability to participate fully in lessons, and the process recommended the provision of lockers.

Secondly, there was a clear link between design, behaviour and education – for example the long, narrow corridors in the school were encouraging unruly behaviour through their design. Students were arriving at lessons late and agitated after their trips down these overcrowded spaces which were impossible to patrol. As a solution, the School Works process recommended removing the walls that define the corridors and opening out the central courtyard to create a spacious circulation area, providing passive surveillance to promote good behaviour and therefore better concentration in lessons.

Other recommendations ranged from introducing swipe-card security access to educational resources, to providing soft toilet paper. Whilst not all of the ideas put forward are revolutionary, they were inspired by the priorities of those that use the building.

The influence of the School Works process also went deeper than the fabric of the building. By generating a dialogue with the young people who attend the school, the project aimed to create designs that would be easy to maintain, not just because they were made of high-durability materials, but because the students knew that the school environment was their own and were therefore more inclined to take care of it. As well as generating respect for the building, the School Works process developed a new sense of belonging in the school and developed the relationship between the school and its local community. The students were inspired by the process and delighted to have been asked to participate in it. As a year 10 student said: “What we are doing is too beautiful.”

Construction at the school commenced this year, and the outcomes of the project will be monitored over a five-year period.

### School Works publications

School Works has produced a step-by-step guide to involving school communities in the creation of unique new school designs: the *School Works Tool Kit*. It is packed with inspiring images and creative workshop ideas that will be as useful for schools that are rethinking

Kingsdale  
Secondary School  
interior courtyard

© de Rijke Marsh Morgan, 2002



their storage systems as for those that are embarking on extensive refurbishment or new build projects.

School Works has also produced a book, sponsored by Ecophon, outlining policy recommendations arising from the project so far: *Learning Buildings*.

Further information on the project and copies of both books are available from School Works Ltd, tel.: 44 20 7401 5333, [www.school-works.org](http://www.school-works.org)

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Kingsdale Secondary School teaching space

## VENEZUELA'S BOLIVARIAN SCHOOLS PROJECT

According to Article 102 of the new Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, "Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free and compulsory. The state shall assume responsibility for education as a function of maximum importance which it cannot decline to perform, at all levels and in all forms."

The Bolivarian Schools Project is intended to respond to problems such as dropping out, educational exclusion, repetition, malnutrition, and loss of local, regional and national identity, and to the search for citizens interested in economic and social transformation. The Bolivarian Schools Project sets four guiding principles for Venezuelan schools:

- promote social transformation and strengthen national identity and democratic participation;
- provide integral educational for social justice;
- contribute to the campaign against educational exclusion;
- participate in community activities.

To put these principles into practice, the government has defined the following means:

- a full school day;
- integrated school meal and health services;
- refurbishment of existing school buildings and construction of new ones;
- appropriate and adequate funding;
- curricular reorganisation within a system of life-long education;
- development of school management techniques;
- integration into the community;
- development of research, evaluation and supervision.

### The evolution of school building in Venezuela

The four principles above are guiding the current phase in the evolution of school building in Venezuela, which has reflected official education policy over the course of time.