

APM Project Management Awards



# WINNER'S

## CASE STUDY



- Category **Social Project of the Year 2013**
- Winner **The Village School, A Special Educational Needs School**  
EC Harris LLP
- Sponsor **project**  
THE VOICE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

### Overview

Built in the late 1960's, the existing special educational needs school in the London Borough of Brent didn't meet today's standards for children with complex needs. The majority of the existing school buildings were single storey and didn't hold enough room for extra staff and equipment, also falling short of environmental standards.

The new state-of-the-art facility, known as 'The Village School', supports some of the Borough's most vulnerable children and young people living with disabilities. This includes those with Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Severe Learning Difficulties and other highly complex needs.

### Objectives

In order for the new school to make the most of the site and provide sufficient external play, it was proposed that the new building utilises the existing site by creating a two storey frontage. A 1,000m<sup>2</sup> new roof play deck would then be positioned on the rear of the building, over-looking the Short Break Centre (SBC). The SBC provides respite care for the children and parents, combining the provision currently housed elsewhere in the area.

During the demolition of the existing school buildings, it was agreed that the pupils would be moved to a temporary, new modular build facility with all associated foundations, drainage, incoming services and external works to be provided.



## Challenges

Examples of some of the problems the team were faced with included there not being enough toilets in the facility or enough space for wheelchairs. The team ensured that the classrooms in the new facility have access to larger bathrooms, and also built in wider corridors with two large lifts.

Furthermore, pupils highlighted that the external play areas at the school were limited, and that they wanted bigger spaces within classrooms.

The technical requirements of such a school could not be underestimated. The need for hygiene rooms, sensory rooms, soft play rooms, NHS inclusion and specialist play equipment meant that the team had to up-skill in various aspects of its work.

## Resources

Funding for the scheme was achieved through a combination of solutions including a contribution from the Target Capital Fund and capital receipts from the existing Short Break Centres, as well as other revenue savings.

Also, the team recognised that the consultation would need to be planned in such a way that it allowed the voice of even the most profoundly disabled pupil to be heard.

With many of the pupils having no conventional 'voice', they had to be listened to in ways that were appropriate to their specific needs. They were shown a DVD entitled 'The Journey to Our New School', and pupils who were able to express their views through speech, signing, eye-pointing met with the team.

For those unable to benefit from watching the DVD, the team observed the pupils' day so they could produce evidence of what they enjoyed and what was restricting further enjoyment.

## Co-ordination

Co-ordination was key to success with this project. EC Harris identified early on that to achieve the greatest benefits for their client, the delivery team and contractor would need to buy-in to the project vision. It was instilled into the team that they needed to understand their unique role and work as a cohesive unit. This was ensured by the stakeholder engagement and management plan – such as meeting the children, senior leadership workshops, innovative problem solving and design solutions and contingency management.

Following the first wave of consultations with other stakeholders, a stakeholder management plan was developed to identify those individuals and groups being consulted and capture their key thoughts – both positive and negative – around the new building.

The project team was aware that members of the school user-group had previous experience of construction with their own lessons to share with the team. Therefore, it was a priority of the team that the school stakeholder group was engaged throughout the project lifecycle and that lessons learned workshops – including consultations and health and safety observations – were implemented





## Successes

The new buildings have given some of the most vulnerable children and young people within the borough a positive approach to schooling and respite care.

The facility offers an inclusive community where opportunities are available for all, improvements for Ofsted and an integrated and co-located education and respite service making use of shared facilities.

It also brings benefits for the local community, too, with the addition of a multi-use games area, sports hall, swimming pool, drama and theatre performances and a café.

There was a unanimous agreement within the team that this was a special project and it was unlikely that they'd work on something of this stature again. The team became emotionally attached to the project beyond that which would normally be experienced, and a strong ethic formed ensuring that the project was delivered on time, within budget and to a high standard.

Cheryl Painting, project sponsor, London Borough of Brent, said: "You all know how much this new school will change the lives of the pupils who attend and the impact it will have in the wider Brent community – thank you."



**The APM Project Management Awards** have been celebrating project management excellence since 1993 and the broad range of categories is designed to make entry possible for projects and companies of all sizes and complexity.

The awards reflect the invaluable contribution project managers make in all sectors of society and the event provides an opportunity for industry professionals to meet with colleagues and entertain guests as well as celebrate at one of the year's most exciting events.

Highly regarded in the project management industry, the awards reflect the dedication and talent that helps to shape the project management community and the world around us. The finalists, winners and sponsors of the awards attract national publicity for their achievement and involvement. Winning an award provides invaluable recognition and kudos to the careers of winners.



For more details on the awards and how to enter or attend, visit [apm.org.uk/awards](http://apm.org.uk/awards) or email [awards@apm.org.uk](mailto:awards@apm.org.uk)

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