

# Value of Good Design in Schools: 10 Steps to Consider



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## A good school is driven by its educational vision and ethos. The role of school buildings, whether new or partially refurbished can facilitate this vision.

In school design there are many common parts whether that is teaching spaces, staff spaces or generalised large spaces. However one size does not fit all. The school building needs to function whilst eliminating challenges such as cramped spaces, lack of natural light and bad acoustics. School buildings should relate to their surrounding community, each offering unique opportunities whilst overcoming their individual challenges.



Designed by architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris (AHMM) for Clients Wandsworth Council LEA/Lend Lease

## 1 Need to maintain continual government investment.

The government have stated that they are investing £10 billion to maintain or improve school buildings between 2016 to 2021. (The School Conditions Improvement Fund, Department of Education created 825,000 places since 2010, with the priority now focussing on secondary school places.) Continual investment in the school estate is required which provides for a good level of maintenance and ensures that all schools are fit for purpose. There is no reason to still have crumbling and overcrowded facilities.

## 2 Challenge the Brief...

There are many things to consider: We are fairly traditional in the way we think of how a school should be and the facilities that they should offer. Having great facilities that are open for a short time in the day and then shut for 14 weeks over the

year doesn't necessarily make good sense. With a lack of external areas for both sports and play, schools are faced with challenges. However perhaps by having a more joined up approach, including the sharing of facilities with other schools, the community and universities would result in an overall better-quality offering? With this comes a longer term plan for management and maintenance.

- Should existing schools be open for longer hours?
- Can we introduce more 'Titan' Schools with 1600 places +?
- Shall we consider the 'Joined up approach' combining the sharing of facilities?
- What about Multi-functional schools?
- Embracing technology with new ways of working?

**3 Use the Evidence:** Good school buildings have a significant and positive impact on pupils and teachers alike. The 'Better Spaces for Learning' research carried out by the RIBA helps to define and quantify the value of good school design.

**Pupils:** Let's focus on behaviour, engagement, wellbeing and attainment achieving a potential 16% uplift.

**Teachers:** A drive on productivity, health and wellbeing offers a potential 15% uplift.

By using this and your own school design research you can help improve the next generation of learning facilities.

**4 Good design can make schools cheaper to run.** Up to £150 million is currently being spent annually on unnecessary services and maintenance which potentially could have been avoided. If the principles of longer term management and running of the school buildings are considered at the design brief stage, a small initial investment will have a greater long-term impact. For example, simple considerations during the design stage can all play an important part in the wider picture. For example, orientation of spaces in the building to avoid overheating, or mitigating glare from sunlight, or even specifying materials that may be more expensive initially (however they last 20 years rather than 2 years). In a drive towards making one size fit all, new school buildings often ended up with over complicated services being fitted. If the right design solutions had been adopted at an earlier stage, the complex and expensive mechanical and/or electrical equipment that was used could have been avoided.

**5 Collaboration** - Times of austerity can be times of greatest creativity, people pull together producing some of their best innovations. Let's reject the current fragmented approach and join together to overcome social issues.

**6 School engagement** - Bringing together the educational vision and the design vision. Galvanise the energy of the youth, give a voice back to the next generation and provide a sense of ownership.

**7 Educational Vision and Design Brief** - Whether considering a large, new school or a small expansion to an existing school, the most critical part in school design (and it should be the very first priority) is having the educational vision set down. When considering the design brief there are many questions that need to be addressed at the outset. These considerations include school function, pupil numbers, pupil travel logistics, small elements of design, and areas of the wider masterplan. The design brief can then translate this vision into spaces and be used as a working document throughout the design stage, construction stage and beyond.

**8 Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE)** - Let's learn lessons from what did and didn't work. After a school goes through the process of design and construction the feedback is an essential part which often gets overlooked. Referred to as 'Post Occupancy Evaluation' (POE) the gathered evidence should be used to assist and help improve the next generation of learning facilities. Be transparent, encourage discussion, admit mistakes, however don't let this stifle creativity or individuality.

**9 'Minimum Standards must stop being treated as maximum standards'** - it curtails opportunities to innovate or respond to local context! The 'one size fits all' policy and the creation of minimum standards has led to PSPB baselines and modular and component driven solutions. Whilst there is nothing wrong with driving efficiency it should not be at the expense of quality. The children and staff deserve more than this.

**10 Last but not least, where has the joy gone in school design?**  
#Reignite the joy!

Caroline Buckingham will be speaking at Education Estates on 16 October.