



Pond Meadow School, Surrey

From a dilapidated, cramped old primary school, surrounded by garages and overflowing rubbish bins and out of sight of the local community, a starker contrast between the old Pond Meadows school and the new one would be hard to find.

Wide, high and white corridors provide ample space for pupils on mobile beds, in walking frames or wheelchairs; indirect lighting means the wheelchair or bed-bound don't spend their school days staring up at harsh striplights; daylight and green landscapes flow in through quirky window arrangements offering visual respite for children of all ages; while the angles and heights of the undulating roofline accentuates the sense of journeying.

Architecture practice DSDHA spent some 18 months talking with Pond Meadow's staff for the design and development of the school, attempting to find a holistic solution to the special needs school's requirements that would also work for Christ's College Guildford secondary school, with which the Surrey County Council budget and site required a partnership in a £33m flagship educational campus. In the end, the two schools sit together but apart, united by the unusual rooflines, the slate grey brick and variegated window patterns, but fostering their own unique cultures.

Pond Meadows staff insisted that the building be single storey, so its 3,600 sq m footprint seems huge for a 90-pupil school. But with

around three teaching staff for every 65 sq m classroom of seven pupils – each of whom might need three pieces of mobility equipment – space is essential. To help demedicalise the environment, DSDHA designed in deep walls between classrooms, which allows for generous wall-storage into which all medical and schooling equipment can be slotted. Every classroom is a different shape, and all are fully equipped with hoists.

The elongated building, finished in spring 2009, accommodates three internal courtyards which mark the shift from upper and lower schools and allow natural light to penetrate the deepest corridors.

Universal grey carpeting or lino means there are few flooring thresholds to deal with and, for now, the walls are being kept clear – though artist Martin Richman has adorned the windows with a rainbow-hued series of coloured dichroic strips, reflecting colours on to classroom floors when the sun shines through.

Teachers are enjoying the freedom, mobility and flexibility of their new home, according to deputy head teacher Catherine Attridge: 'We love the dedicated classrooms and the wide corridors,' and she quotes with pride the comment from a 15-year-old pupil, Hayden, who, when asked by visitors what was his favourite bit of the new school, replied: 'I like people being able to see us.'

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ADDITIONAL CONSULTANTS:

Main contractor: Wates Construction ; **Landscape**

consultant: Townshend landscape Architects;

Collaborative artist: Martin Richman

