



*DSDHA's John Perry Children's Centre is quietly radical. Photos: Hélène Binet.*



*Above: Sketch of the nursery's 10m canopy. Below right: Opening day (q: DSDHA).*



*Above: An internal courtyard introduces light deep into the plan and separates public and private functions; cork landscape wall; view through to outdoor play area. Below: View of parent waiting area.*

**Project team**  
Architect: DSDHA, structural engineer: Price & Myers, civil engineer: Hume Associates, qp: Stokkade, phase 2 contractor: Lakerhouse, client: London Borough of Barking & Dagenham.

**Selected subcontractors and suppliers**  
Polycarbonate: Rodica, aluminium windows and doors: Technal, steel windows in polycarbonate facade: V&S, metal roofing: Pergapha, roller shutters entrance doors: Catic, carpentry: Monocraft, Siergie, cork cladding to 'landscape wall': Forbo-Paris.

The borough has a very specific pedagogical model, in which it aims to teach all children in larger-than-average classrooms. The community, once dominated by Ford, is moving from manufacturing to service-orientated employment. This has led the local authority to recognise education as a critical factor in the future success of the borough. For nursery design, this has meant budgets and areas are slightly higher than the DES standard. The design ambition has always been determinedly high, with a clearly stated expectation to set new standards.

In both phases standard practices were questioned so that different hierarchies could be achieved – for example with the radical removal of internal

full-height divisions between different age groups. In the Children's Centre, all the children play in the same space, with low screens separating the large open space into zones. This creates a sense of connection and community, of a collective experience.

A similar lexicon of materials was employed for consistency across both phases. The form of the nursery provides the fourth wall to an existing courtyard, whose other three sides are formed by a 1951 primary school. In the larger Children's Centre, the form was designed to maximise the internal floor area, whilst minimising the external envelope.

The large play space is entirely naturally lit and ventilated, and has underfloor heating. Serviced

areas are enclosed by a continuous cork-clad 'landscape wall' that runs the length of the building. This lyrical element contrasts with the precision of the external envelope.

The inward-looking building is a subtle presence in its suburban context. But each elevation has been designed to perform. To the south, an expanse of glazing and polycarbonate is pierced by two portal frames that contain the many openings required to access the external play areas and stores, while shading the interiors. It overlooks a landscape garden. Once mature, the gardens will be enclosed by high hedges and greenery to veil the views of fencing and the playing field beyond.



**Plan 1 Phase One, 14 staff rooms, 3 quiet space, 4 interview room, 5 medical room, 6 office, 7 reception, 8 laundry, 9 kitchen, 10 courtyard, 11 babies' rooms, 12 two-to-three year olds, 13 three-to-four year olds, 14 meeting room.**

