

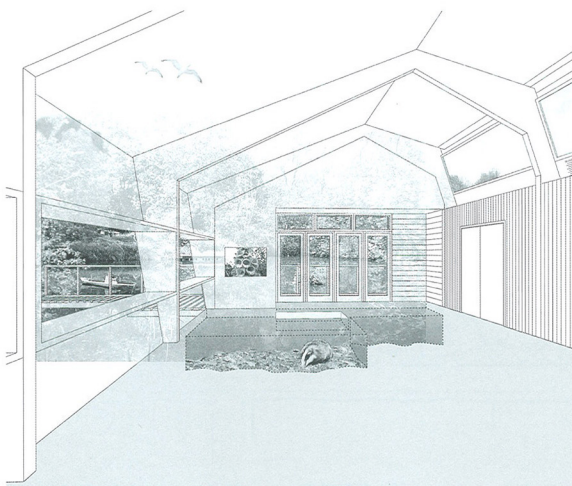
A DESIGN MANUAL

Schools and Kindergartens

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BIRKHÄUSER



Perspective with pond



View across the pond | Children play in the snow in front of the new classroom | Interior views of the classroom



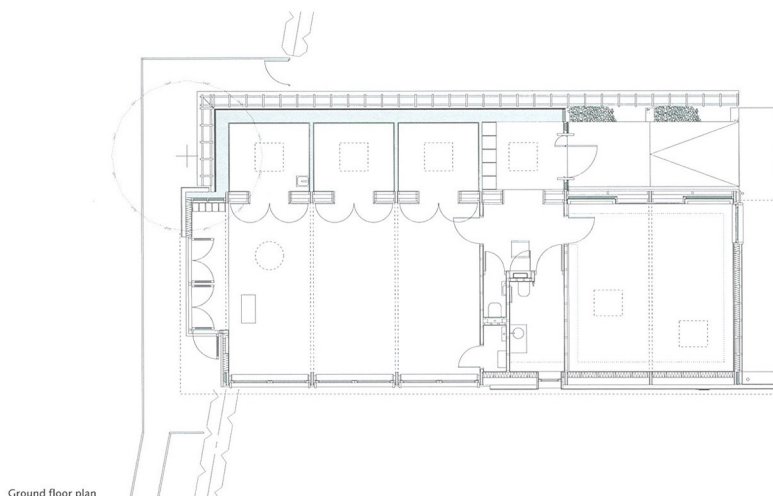
Mossbrook Primary School

Norton, Sheffield, UK

Architect	Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, London
Pupils	Aged 5-11 years
Building area	200 m ²
Average classroom	146 m ²
Parking spaces	20
Build cost	350,000 GBP
Completion	2003
Year group system	Groups as small as 12 and as large as 76

Government funded project exploring innovative prototypes of classroom design

Located on green belt land to the south of the city, the designers recognised this gift of a site, a wooded copse overlooking a pond bounded by an existing sensory garden. They decided to submerge the new building within this natural environment as much as possible. Slightly detached from the main school campus, the new classroom develops its own distinctive architectural language and finds new ways to exploit the rich natural environment. The building is full of intelligent and thought-provoking details which are oriented towards the perceptions of children rather than adults. For example within the entrance lobby, the workings of a toilet cistern at the back of the adjacent WC cubicle is revealed behind its Perspex casing. There are vision panels in the walls and the floor which permit close observation of physical and nat-



Ground floor plan



ural phenomena under supervised conditions. An underground burrow has even been cast into the ground floor slab, so that foxes or badgers can nest in full view of the children in their classroom above.

The building is clad with a collage of advanced industrial construction materials usually found on smart factory buildings. Corrugated steel, polycarbonate sheeting and oak (which for some odd reason is painted rather than used in its natural state), form a robust exterior envelope. This has practical benefits from a security perspective; however, it is perhaps an ironic nod back to the industrial heritage of Sheffield, a heritage which has mostly disappeared over the past 25 years. As headteacher Maggie Brough explained, the materials and the way they

are used are intended to act as an educational resource in their own right showing the way architecture works. Portal frames made of ply- and softwood support acoustically treated ceilings which provide a generous volume inside the classroom. Child-height windows frame views of the surrounding landscape. As Maggie Brough observed, 'the new building nestles into the landscape rather than standing apart from it...we are all very comfortable about that...' With its restful views of nature and spacious quiet interior, this building has a tranquil, almost spiritual quality; at the end of their lessons, many children do not wish to leave. There is a sobering comparison here between the architectural mediocrity of the existing school buildings and the new classroom. One of the most innovative aspects is the use of virtual and elec-

tronic media to further transform the way in which children see. Collaborating with artist Susan Collins, web cams located in the conservation area and triggered by body heat record animal movement and direct images into the classroom through plasma screens located in the floors and walls. A boat on the pond is fitted with an underwater camera and children are able to remotely control its movement to observe underwater pond life. One of the resource rooms has been made into a Camera Obscura reflecting real-life time images of the exterior directly onto the table top within one of three small group rooms.