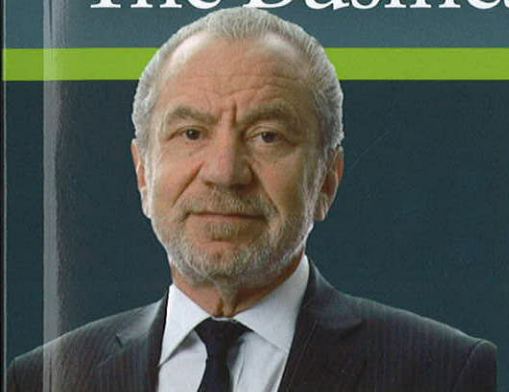


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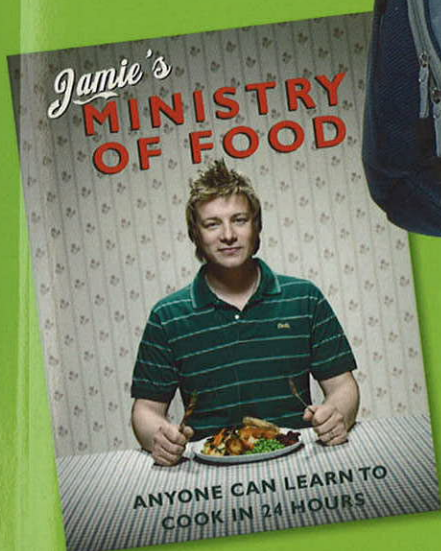
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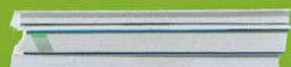


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A BUILDING TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE CURRICULUM

Sandal Magna Community Primary School in Wakefield is a newbuild flagship eco-school that has welcomed its first intake of pupils and staff. Here, we get the views of the project's architect Sarah Wigglesworth, and the school's principle Julia Simpson

SANDAL MAGNA Community Primary School in Wakefield – a newbuild school devoted to becoming a more planet friendly part of the community – welcomed its first intake of pupils and staff at the start of the school year. Here, the school's principle, alongside the architect from architectural practice Sarah Wigglesworth, look at the project, explaining why it was commissioned, any challenges, what the sustainability features are, and how pupil behaviour has changed for the better since being in the new building.

SARAH WIGGLESWORTH SAYS:

Sandal Magna Community Primary School in Wakefield is a flagship eco-school that is anticipated to be one of the most carbon efficient schools in the UK. In September it opened its doors for the first time to pupils, staff and the wider community. As a practice it's a major milestone for us – it's our first completed school building and the end of a long but very rewarding process.

In January 2006 Wakefield Council commissioned us, in partnership with NPS Group, to design a replacement for the Victorian Sandal Magna Primary School, which had reached the end of its life. The old school had become run-down, and the council decided to build a new school on the same site that would meet the modern day needs of the school and its wider community. The new school had to accommodate 210 pupils aged 5-11 alongside nursery provision, with room for future expansion. The school serves a diverse and often transient local population with few community facilities, and the opportunity was taken to provide a community room within the school building for use by parents and local people for adult education and other purposes.

Developing a sense of ownership among different user groups is central to our approach as an architecture practice and at Sandal Magna, a broad and inclusive consultation process produced a design brief that reflected everybody's needs and hopes for the new school. This was largely thanks to the inspirational leadership of Julia Simpson and her deputy Ann Smith, as well as real support and engagement throughout the process by Wakefield Council.

The consultation process produced a set of key issues which informed the school design. These included:

- importance of energy efficiency and sustainability
- providing a welcoming building for



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students, parents and teachers

- flexibility of spaces within the new building
- maintaining a sense of history and memory from the old school
- provision of a variety of play spaces together with community space

Julia and Ann were particularly keen to ensure that the school building not only addressed the school's educational needs but that it could also support the school's sustainable curriculum. The school had already embedded ecological

thinking into its daily routines and management practices through activities such as recycling, healthy eating programmes and a walking bus. The opportunity now presented itself to make the new school building an integral part of the school's sustainability programme.

Our design takes its cue from the surrounding Victorian red-brick terraces, and is laid out as three single-storey wings that reflect the street pattern. Red brick is used extensively throughout the school, and reclaimed bricks

from the old school have been used in retaining walls and landscaping. A row of ventilation stacks alongside the teaching blocks mirrors neighbouring rooflines while, at the centre of the site, the school is crowned by a striking new bell tower containing the old school bell. This not only evokes the tall chimneys of Wakefield's industrial history but also provides continuity with and memory of the old school.

The overall design of the school is highly contemporary. We used a range of cladding materials such as raw timber, weatherboarding and corrugated rainscreens to denote different uses within the school and to add interest and texture to the angular geometries of the building. Already pupils enjoy the tactility of the new school: using the building itself as a play tool, running their hands across the range of surfaces or gathering in little groups within alcoves or on window sills.

Inside the school, we made services and building elements such as ventilation, soundproofing, sprinklers and a rainwater harvesting system deliberately visible. This allows the building to be used as a teaching resource, allowing the school itself to become a demonstrative tool to form part of the curriculum for learning about buildings and sustainability. The school is proud to wear its sustainability credentials so clearly on its sleeve, and our transparent design has made teaching about sustainability easy and enjoyable for staff and pupils alike. It was important to us all that every part of the school had a connection with the landscape – so every room has views of the surrounding areas while each classroom has direct access to the outdoor spaces. These include a series of allotments and a nature garden where pupils can learn about food management and ecology.

Spaces within the school are flexible and can be adjusted according to different uses and teaching styles. There is a range of classroom sizes allowing different numbers of pupils to be taught in different settings. Teaching spaces can be expanded or contracted according to the needs of each class, and other spaces such as the school hall can be adapted for a wide range of uses such as PE or performance. The wide corridors alongside the classrooms also contain alcoves and other spaces for informal or one-to-one teaching.

I'm really proud of Sandal Magna. As a practice we have always striven to produce thoughtful, low-energy buildings that are simple to use, cherished by their occupants and economical to run and maintain. Visiting Sandal Magna now, it's great to see the building comfortably accommodating such a wide variety of different educational and community uses. We have produced something that is distinctive, that sits comfortably in its urban context, and a project that is unashamedly green. Thanks to Julia and her team, the new school is a building that meets the needs of its staff, pupils and the wider community. We hope it will educate,



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inspire and delight new generations of children, parents and neighbours for years to come.

JULIA SIMPSON SAYS:

It is hard to believe that we have only occupied our new building for one term. Our children, staff and parents feel very at home here and it is testimony to the hard working and dedicated staff that we have been able to operate a normal school day since 6 September when we opened to our children and families.

Yet for me personally, hardly a day goes by without a new revelation from this exciting building: it could be a previously unseen view of part of the building or the way that building is being used by the staff or children or even understanding how one of our sustainable technologies works. It has been a long and hard journey to where we are now but I do feel that all the anxiety and effort has produced a learning environment that has achieved and surpassed our wants and needs.

The journey began when our governing body and myself were asked by Wakefield Council whether we wanted to refurbish our dilapidated 1890 building or start again with a new building on the same site. We chose the latter and were delighted when Sarah Wigglesworth Architects were selected as our architects. It had been evident from a pre-selection meeting that Sarah Wigglesworth had very quickly grasped the context of our school and the needs of our children and their families. Also, importantly for us, she was committed to the green agenda and realised the importance of design in both

indoor and outdoor learning environments.

As headteacher I grabbed this marvellous opportunity to influence the design of a 21st century eco-school with both hands. I was extremely fortunate to be supported by our own eco-warrior in the form of Ann Smith, my deputy. Ann had already led the staff, children and parents in a sustainability initiative within school and we were working towards our first International Eco Schools Green Flag Award.

A series of consultations began with Sarah, her team and all stakeholders of the school. The children produced models, designs and wishlists of their own. The staff, governors and parents all had discussions with the architects and the local authority, and these informed the design brief. The chosen design was popular with everybody and, therefore, today we inhabit a totally contemporary building which is influenced by its Victorian surroundings in a way that maintains and values the traditions of the original building, which was itself a flagship design at the end of the 19th century.

The journey has been a long one but we have achieved all that we hoped for. Together with Sarah, Ann and Wakefield Council, I have been part of a close team that has kept the project on track while remaining true to our design principles.

We now look forward to the next part of our journey as we begin to evaluate the effectiveness of both our indoor and outdoor areas and our use of them. Exciting times lay ahead as we learn how to maximise the learning opportunities of our beautiful, sustainable and high-tech building.