

Press release

18 September 2003

An Icon for the Community

The Business Academy Bexley, designed by Foster + Partners and sponsored by Sir David and Lady Garrard and the Garrard Education Trust, was launched on Thursday 18 September by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Tony Blair accompanied by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke.

Hailed as an innovative building that stretches the boundaries of education, the Business Academy, part of the governments radical new approach to raise educational standards in areas where there is at present problems of under performance, is the first purpose built, part-privately funded independent state school in Europe.

The architectural approach comes from original instructions given to the architects by Sir David and expanded upon in a manner consistent with the philosophy of pioneering schools regeneration company 3Es. This philosophy demands open, transparent, and compact spaces to encourage integration, communication, and cross fertilisation between students of all age groups, students and teachers, students and visitors, and all the different educational disciplines in the curriculum as well as forging intimate links with the local community to provide a safe, exciting, and enjoyable environment for out of hours extra curricular activities.

As long ago as the late 1960s I was drawing visionary schools which would be open planned, filled with light, democratic and flexible - with no corridors no institutional barriers and with a philosophy of integration. Today, with the shared vision and determination of the City Academies Programme and the many other parties involved, we have together realised that school here in Bexley. This is a truly inspiring and above all safe environment for the children and the teachers as well as a vital new focus for the whole community. comments Lord Foster of Thames Bank.

Working within the framework of the Department for Education and Skills guidelines and incorporating Sir Davids original vision for education in the 21st century, Valerie Bragg, of 3Es, now the Chief Executive of the Academy and Foster and Partners developed an open-plan compact design based around three courtyard spaces devoted to business, art and technology.

The large business courtyard is the social hub of the school, housing a café at ground level and a theatre, television studio, editing suite and fully equipped gym above. It is also home to a trading pit or mini stock exchange, with large plasma screens, offering students their first taste of City trading.

The courtyard spaces visually and functionally link teaching spaces on different levels as well as teaching spaces of different educational disciplines. The teaching spaces are separated from each other only by partitions (which are intended to be moved to change the sizes of teaching areas or adapt

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them for other uses) but open to circulation space and courtyard space. There are no corridors and circulation occurs through the business court, art court, and technology court at ground level or along the courtyards at levels one and two.

The building is capable of reducing heat loss in the winter and, through its unique double-layered facade with external shading louvers that automatically track the sun's path, capable also of reducing heat gain during the summer to provide optimum conditions and minimise the building's energy use.

In order to link the building to its community an existing foot bridge, which was largely unused, was demolished and replaced with a 'toucan crossing'. The entrance is now visible from the crossing and its presence can be felt by local residents and commuters alike, making it an icon for the community.

Foster and Partners is designing four other Academies: the Capital City Academy in Willesden (2003); the Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham (2004); the West London Academy in Ealing (2005); and the London Academy in Edgware (2005).

All press enquiries in respect of The Business Academy Bexley please contact: Sam Price, PR and Communications on 0207 935 8133 or 07796 548000.

Foster + Partners

Norman Foster is one of the most important architects practising in the world today. His practice, Foster and Partners, is based in London but has project offices in a dozen different countries. Since its foundation in 1967, the practice has been responsible for a strikingly wide range of projects, from urban masterplans, airports, civic and cultural buildings, offices and workplaces to private houses and product design. It has won numerous awards for design excellence as well as over 50 international competitions. In recent years Foster has completed projects as diverse as the New German Parliament in the Reichstag in Berlin, Chek Lap Kok International Airport in Hong Kong and the Great Court at the British Museum in London. In 1999 Norman Foster was honoured with a life peerage, taking the title Lord Foster of Thames Bank.

Academies the background

The principle is a simple but effective one. Private enterprises in the form of Corporations or individuals become Sponsors of Academies and contribute several million pounds towards their creation. Each Academy is wholly independent and is owned and run by a private charitable Trust Company which is permitted to engage in trade so as to generate profits which are then ploughed back into the Academy enhancing the quality and nature of the infrastructure, equipment and the rewards to teachers and support staff alike. It is intended that the sponsor will be the Chairman of the Trust Company and of the Governors and will proceed to appoint all of the Governors which, in the case of Bexley the Chairman intends to draw from the world of industry, commerce, science/medicine and finance. Revenue funding will be provided by the DfES to the same level as that of local maintained schools. This is considered by the DfES to be sufficient, in any event with a newly built and newly equipped seat of learning, to adequately run the Academy with provision for a small annual reserve.

Government ministers have long-term plans for a further 50 Academies to be developed in partnership

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with business to regenerate inner urban education, including at least 25 in London.

The Business Academy Bexley

The Business Academy Bexley is a publicly funded independent Academy, which specialises in Business and Enterprise. It is owned and managed by the Charitable Trust Company Bexley Business Academy Ltd, under the Chairmanship of its sponsor, Sir David Garrard, who is committed to establishing and maintaining it as a special seat of learning. Independent of the Local Education Authority, The Business Academy Bexley is the Governments flagship Academy, pioneering the way for other publicly funded Independent schools in the future.

This will be the first cradle to university school in the UK. The school accommodates 1,350 11-18 years old students; but will, as a result of the Education Act 2002, go on to include a primary school and a nursery with crche, providing a continuity of education that is not available elsewhere in the state sector in the UK.

Sir David Garrard

Sir David Garrard has, for over 30 years combined his extensive commercial activities with a tireless involvement in both charity and public service work. His focus has been on disabled, under privileged and deprived children. Founder and Executive Chairman of the enormously successful FTSE 250 property investment and development group, Minerva plc, he is a Chairman of the Trustees of the International Centre for Child Studies; Patron of Handicapped Childrens Aid; Trustee of the Police Foundation; a Patron of the Philip Green Memorial Trust; a Director of the British Property Federation; is a Councillor and sits on the Steering Committee of the Business Division of the Princes Trust and is a Benefactor of the Nightingale Home for the Aged, in addition to supporting a myriad of other charities - the beneficiaries of which are principally children.

As the sponsor of the Business Academy he chose to embark upon a project which he regarded as the culmination of all the skills and experiences he has accumulated over the years namely to build, in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, the first part-privately funded newly built Business Academy in the world. Having, over three decades, been responsible for the construction of in excess of 100 major commercial development projects throughout the United Kingdom, his vast experience in the construction and development arena led to the first phase of the Business Academy being opened within literally 14 months of the decision to demolish and replace Thamesmead Community College with completion and the opening of the final phase just 12 months later, i.e. less than twenty months in total from commencement of construction.

Valerie Bragg

Valerie Bragg is the Joint Chief Executive of 3Es Enterprises and Governor and Chief Executive of The Business Academy Bexley. Valerie was formerly the Principal of the City Technology College Kingshurst, the first CTC, after having a previous outstanding headship. During this time she became a prominent international educationalist, championing, amongst other things, the cause of the disadvantaged child. Many of the innovations relating to learning and teaching which she introduced at Kingshurst, have now become accepted protocols used in our schools. For example, the concept of the

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extended day, the lunch-brunch, flat management structure, the value of vocational courses all had their origins at Kingshurst.

As Joint Chief Executive of 3Es, Valerie has played a key role in the regeneration programme promoting the 3Es ethos. Her unique talents have been particularly utilised in the educational design of the Business Academy allowing the ethos to be fully implemented. The ethos embraces the lack of hierarchical management structure, over didactic teaching, long cheerless corridors, the endless summoning of bells, an innovative curriculum, enrichment activities, the importance of the form tutor, links with Business and Industry and high aspirations and expectations of all.

Since the Academy opened in September 2002 she has acted as Chief Executive of the Academy representing the sponsor/Chairman of Governors. Her role is to deal with the business, public and administrative face of the Academy freeing up the Principal to focus on teaching and learning.

Both Bexley and Kingshurst serve very similar communities. In Birmingham we were able to show that by raising aspirations, self esteem and self confidence of the students, they were able to achieve goals, which previously they had considered beyond their reach. A young person coming from a deprived area is by no means a failure. In fact if their self-esteem and self-confidence are raised they are able to achieve as much, if not more, than young people who come from what is considered a more privileged background. We will build upon the achievements obtained in Birmingham to create a learning centre of excellence for the whole community of Thamesmead exciting times are ahead.

3Es Enterprises Ltd

3Es is the DfES appointed project manager under the direction of Stanley Goodchild. It is the wholly owned subsidiary of the City Technology College Kingshurst Trust. It is a commercial, not for profit company involving a team of internationally renowned consultants with direct experience in teaching and managing education processes. Basically the ethos makes the assumption that all schools wish to be successful and the process followed by 3Es removes any barrier stopping them achieving this objective. 3Es was the first private company to take over the management of the regeneration and creation of a state school and is now involved in the development of some nine schools which have failed to provide a positive education for their students. The Business Academy is already proving to be one of its successes. 3Es has established itself as the countrys market leader in this arena.

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