

Editorial

With the Autumn term bringing dramatic headlines about the crisis in school places, the issue of how schools capital is spent is of growing concern to many. Coupled with an increased drive to open new types of school – UTCs, Studio Schools and Free Schools – and the fact we are now only 18 months away from an election, the re-launch of Learning Spaces could not be more timely.

For many of us working in and with schools, the issues around how to create fantastic learning environments have never gone away, despite the Government rhetoric playing down the importance of school buildings. Certainly there are benefits to streamlining the procurement process, making sure that as much of the limited budget as possible goes into the buildings. With many schools still struggling in decrepit buildings, there is certainly an urgency to make change happen. But at the same time, we should not be encouraging a race to the bottom. Poor quality buildings and education clients who are not properly involved in the process will only lead to schools that do not stand the test of time. Investment should be properly planned to deliver real long term benefits for pupils, staff, parents and the wider community.

In this issue we look at many of the challenges facing our sector. From making the case for continued investment in well planned, high quality infrastructure, to the perspectives of schools and architects who are delivering within the current context. We look at how new schools are being built quickly to meet local demand without compromising client aspirations, and how the outside spaces – which are often overlooked – can contribute enormously to a school's learning resources.

We look at the relationship between buildings and their communities, from how a new school can challenge existing perceptions to how parent power can make change happen.

Most of all, we wanted to hear what lessons had been learned and how these might help to influence thinking going forward. What has struck us most is that, even in the most challenging circumstances, our educationalists, designers and builders are continuing to be creative and pragmatic, delivering innovative solutions that support learning. It is also clear that we need to think big and small – some of the smaller projects have the biggest impact on empowering a school and making a huge difference to how it operates.

We hope you enjoy the new look magazine, and if you have a project that you would like to tell us about for a future issue we would love to hear from you. Please do get in touch to let us know what's working – we want to capture the enthusiasm, passion and creativity we see every day in our work with the talented people across our sector.

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