

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru	Design Commission for Wales
Design Review Report:	9 June 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	3 June 2004
Location:	Duffryn Infants School, Newport
Architects / Design Team:	Local Authority, Alun Beale
Client:	Duffryn School Sian Jones, Head Duffryn School Diane Daniel, Children's Partnership Sue Mizon, Early Years Consultant
Scheme Description:	Integrated children's centre Extension for nursery, IT training reception / cafe
Local Planning Authority:	Newport City Council
Planning Status:	Application approved April 2004
Panel Members:	Richard Parnaby, Ed Colgan, Nigel Hanson, Ben Sibert, Geraint John, Paul Vanner, Rob Firth, Cindy Harris
Observing:	Steve Trigg, Architectural Liaison Officer, SW Police Carole-Anne Davies, CEO, DCFW

Presentation

Duffryn Infants School currently caters for just over 200 children aged between 2.5 and 7 years. It is located in a very deprived area, with the highest levels of child poverty in Wales. The school has a reputation for excellence in education and in the quality of its relations with the community, and has been chosen as the site for the Integrated Children's Centre in Newport. (The Welsh Assembly Government has decided to provide at least one integrated children's centre for each Local Authority in Wales, as a pilot project.)

ICC's must provide certain essential services, and it is the coordination of these services which is important for the community. As well as early years education, these services are childcare, a community training facility, and 'open access' play. Other facilities such as a library, health centre, and advice centre would be desirable, but given the limited funding compromises have had to be made. Funding from the New Opportunities Fund of £535,000 has now been secured.

The teachers and educators involved in developing this scheme firmly believe that the only way out of this cycle of deprivation is to raise the self-esteem and aspirations of parents,

children and the community as a whole. They had visited similar projects and buildings in different countries and the Reggio Emilia model of education, using the environment as an educational tool, most closely corresponded with their vision. The proposed building is an essential part of this message and should be a tangible sign that the school values the people it serves. The quality of the building should be clearly stated, to reflect the high aspirations of the school and the community.

The designer was concerned to design a building which was aesthetically pleasing and fit for purpose - robust enough to withstand heavy use and even a certain amount of abuse. Two existing classrooms will be demolished, and a new extension will accommodate: nursery and childcare facilities; WCs; IT training/seminar rooms; a café and kitchen. The extension should match the existing building in its external finishes, but could differ in size and proportion. The construction will be conventional with cavity walls and trussed rafters. The designer proposed the use of profiled steel panels as the roof finish, rejecting slate or tiles on the grounds that they lack durability and would be vulnerable to vandalism.

Panel's Response

The panel was greatly impressed by the strength and clarity of the vision for this project expressed by the client team. They clearly demonstrated a determination to create an inspirational place to support the life of a severely disadvantaged but close community. However the panel was deeply disappointed by the quality of the design proposed. This should be a delightful building that lifts the spirits through the use of natural light, vibrant colour and a close relationship between the indoor and outdoor spaces. Unfortunately the pedestrian drawings showed a mundane design that may meet the basic functional requirements of the various funding bodies, but expressed no hint of the client's aspirations.

The panel explored a number of aspects of the proposal:

- The main entrance facing the delivery area and car park, is an unwelcoming approach to the building although it makes sense to locate the entrance to the new building close to the main entrance to the school
- The panel were surprised by the decision to demolish existing classrooms; and were not convinced by the designer's view that refurbishment and extension would not have met the goals of the project
- The acoustic partition(s) were thought to be generally unworkable and expensive. Division of the working spaces could be achieved in other ways and the money saved spent elsewhere.
- Currently there are no features meeting the requirements of sustainable development. Sustainability measures should be incorporated wherever possible: eg improving daylight levels within the building, through roof glazing rather than sunpipes; using the design of the building fabric to minimise heating requirements and fuel costs; and specifying locally sourced materials where possible.
- The Reggio Emilia model of education that had so inspired the client team uses the environment as an educational tool. It is therefore essential that there is a close interface between outside and inside the building, particularly to the north and west

where the play areas are, by more glazing and covered areas that would form an intermediate space.

- The designer emphasised the importance of robust construction in an area prone to vandalism. The panel recognised the problem but identified community involvement as the key factor in assuring the protection of the fabric of the building.

The panel enquired whether the client team had visited any buildings that captured the qualities they were seeking. Unfortunately, none of the buildings the team had seen inspired them as exemplars. Nevertheless, the panel encouraged them to continue looking, eg at 'Classrooms of the Future' [www.teachernet.gov.uk] or at other similar size buildings serving different functions.

Summary

The Panel expressed its strong support for the concept and aspiration behind this project, and very much appreciated the client team's inspirational presentation. However, there was a consensus that these aspirations were not at all well served by the quality of the current design, which required a radical rethinking. This is a building that should be filled with light and colour and the Panel felt strongly that a sustainable, delightful and inspirational building was possible within the budget.

The main task now is not necessarily to raise more money but to make use of what professional help is available to:

- organise a workshop in which school users and community members could participate, assisting greater ownership, and introducing a wider range of possibilities;
- offer practical help to the design team to maximise the quality and sustainable operation of the new building.

This should be done as soon as possible while there is still time to affect the outcome of this project, and DCFW would be happy to assist in this process.

End

