



The team at **DKA** draw on 21 years' experience to outline their approach to designing schools

Our understanding of education has changed dramatically from when children regurgitated repetitive memory recall exercises. Thankfully, society has also reconsidered what makes a good learning environment. The design of schools is governed by comprehensive legislation, and this is where the skill of an experienced architect can make a difference in navigating through the red tape, to deliver an appropriately engaging design. Today's new schools must be dynamic and interactive places for both students and staff. With over 21 years' experience of designing exemplar school facilities, DKA has refined a system for creating engaging learning environments.

1. Put the major stakeholders at the centre of the design process

Too many environments are designed without consideration for the end-user and the ultimate purpose of the building. How can a learning facility be designed without the students and teachers being involved from the early design stages? Asking students what kind of environment they want to learn in might initially throw up requests for rocket launch pads and spiderman climbing frames, but peel back the layers of imaginative requests and there is usually a nugget of a really powerful insight that we can take forward through the design process.

2. Have a vision for the master-plan of the site

Designing a school can be as complex or as simple as you wish. A key question that must be asked is "what do you want this building to achieve?" Identifying how the school sees itself in the future can be the key driver. The design journey may well be a single, but significant step, or a number of smaller steps in keeping with an ever changing vision. Either way a high level master-plan for the site is essential to ensure direction is not lost. Educational budgets are often under pressure and it is essential we make the most of every penny spent to ensure the ethos of the school is enriched. Taking a holistic view of the school's purpose both now and in the future will enable you and your design team to create a facility that works harmoniously and can evolve over time as teaching requirements and methods change. Considering both inside and outside spaces and the transitions between the two helps to create a unified environment that has a positive impact on the students' learning throughout their school day. Interior design is also a critical part of this and need not be a costly addition. Simple decisions like choosing a bright colour palette is believed to help promote mental alertness and activity. A well-designed environment that plays to all the senses can impact everything from student creativity and productivity through to motivation and well-being.

3. Consider the day-to-day running of the school

The practicality and cost of operating new spaces within schools can also be considered as your design evolves. We work closely with schools to ensure the latest design thinking and technology is built in to create schools that are easy and cost effective to run. Quite often simple design issues such as maximising natural ventilation and optimising the position of glazing can provide significant environmental and running cost benefits, whilst also having a positive impact on student and teacher well-being, motivation and energy levels.

We firmly believe that understanding these three essential steps provides the foundations for creating dynamic, interactive and evolving educational environments, appropriate to teaching requirements both now and in the future.

DKA is proud to be sponsoring The Telegraph Children's Bath Literature Festival when we will be asking local school children to send us the designs of their dream school. Visit our website www.dka.co.uk for more details. ■