

Bradford BSF : Involving the schools and the students

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Pre ITN

In March 2004, long before the formal procurement process began in Bradford, Buttershaw, Tong and Salt schools collaborated with School Works in a DfES-sponsored demonstration project to harness the student perspective. The first stage was an “inspirational tour” of distinctive and interesting buildings in nearby Leeds. The second stage consisted of a two-day design festival during which 150 students, staff and members of the wider school community looked at a range of design issues from how to give students a sense of ownership of their schools to how to make them environmentally friendly, how to address issues of space, light and colour to how to design out bullying, and how to create stimulating learning spaces both indoors and outdoors.

According to Allan Jarvis, Deputy Headteacher at Buttershaw, “The report from the student workshops was hugely influential in shaping the output specification we then put together. The descriptions of acoustic performance were taken directly from the students’ suggestions. Our storage strategy was greatly influenced by students’ criticisms of clutter in classrooms. The students own phraseology found its way into our outline circulation strategy and into specifications for indoor and outdoor social spaces. Output specification suggestions about how passive supervision could be maximised in our new school were taken almost verbatim from the students. In trying to define how corridors should be designed, students talked about “rounded corners” to improve sightlines and suggested that corridors might taper from a wide entry point to ease congestion. It was feedback from students that prompted us to include a request for ergonomically sophisticated seating in classrooms. It is no exaggeration to say that the writing of the output specification was greatly aided by the clarity of the students’ thinking and the range of their ideas.”

ITN Stage

The ITN stage offered the schools the opportunity of a close and creative relationship with Bradford’s three short-listed bidders. The bidders developed an extensive programme of consultation with the student body.

Bid teams organised visits to other recently built schools to stimulate thinking and focus feedback and Allan Jarvis feels that this was very useful in helping the students to shape criticisms not just of their current learning environments but also of some possible improvements and alternatives.

Preferred Bidder Stage

Beckfoot School is one of the schools in the second phase of Bradford’s BSF programme. The Headteacher, David Horn and project leader Charlie Tebbutt decided that they wanted to harness the students’ views just as had been done for the three phase one schools by School Works and the design festival. Their starting point was the selection of two students for the leading roles. Max and Alice had just entered year 12 and they collected and collated the written and oral responses from student discussions and used them to develop a report which summarised the full range of outcomes. There was a considerable consensus and a clear set of messages for the

team that would be developing the project at Beckfoot School. The report pointed out that “students often mention the need for the school to feel more ‘homely’ and there was a large consensus in favour of making it more comfortable.” Charlie Tebbutt drew heavily on it in writing his output specification, supported by a paper whose title – “Make it Homely” emphasises just how influential the students’ thinking has been.

The report is now being used by Bradford’s Preferred Bidder, Integrated Bradford, who are also working with a group of representative students as they formulate the new design with the school.