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AWARDS
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BUILDING TRUST



Award Category: Design Excellence sponsored by Sika

Project: Francis Combe Academy

Client: Hertfordshire County Council

Project Team: Architects Co Partnership, Mace Ltd, Kier Southern, WSP UK Ltd, Edco Design London, FF & E Space Planning, Alligan Construction



The Francis Combe Academy was designed to have a significant positive impact on the educational progress of its students, seeking to raise the aspirations and the achievement of all of its students and staff. The design had to accommodate the ten separate 'schools' forming the academy, in one retained structure, with a variety of new build environments, and an existing building. The schools are grouped into larger clusters placed around the external

open area at the heart of the academy. This central open area coincides with the existing dell.

The entrance into the academy has been designed to be inviting with views into the academy mall, it has also been designed to be safe and secure. The design consists of a three story glazed frontage aimed at drawing users to the building. The general administration controls the entrance lobby and other administration is centred on the mall, with views over the external heart, the courtyard and open Green Belt.

External materials have been selected to reflect the surrounding built environment. Brick, render and glass predominate and are applied to give variety within the scheme. The architecture is deliberately designed to provide a unique character to the academy and be visually distinct from, yet respectful to the adjacent historic building.

The external covered area runs alongside the rejuvenated Dell, providing an amphitheatre and open link to the green belt open land to the north. The covered link can shelter the whole school population during inclement weather and provides covered dining

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opportunities adjacent to the main dining hall.

The science learning area offers a unique collection of high calibre practical spaces for single science specialism, and a suite of flexible practical spaces for project work, demonstrations, collaborative team work, design and model making, and experimentation.

Another important design driver was the school's emphasis on utilising the external spaces for education. The landscaping solutions, including the provision of 'hard areas', offers areas for students to learn outdoors, to sit and to appreciate nature as well as use as external dining spaces. The biome garden offers experimental science learning.

Judges comments:

"This is a bright and spacious new Academy which provides an excellent learning environment for the students. A lively use of colour and a rich variety of materials gives the building a strong and distinctive personality. The building has a positive relationship to its setting, and the landscape strategy has created some flexible and attractive social spaces that are well used and much appreciated by the students."