

A school transformed

Ark Putney Academy
Wandsworth, London

hawkinsbrown.com

Hawkins
Brown



Project: Ark Putney Academy
Location: Wandsworth, London
Client: Wandsworth Borough Council and Ark
Services: Architecture and interior design
Scope: Regeneration
Value: £19m
Status: Completed

Building on former glories

Elliott School, Ark Putney Academy today, was one of London County Council's finest post-war comprehensive schools. Opened by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, the air must have been filled with the promise of social equality. Monumental and visionary, the design was recognised with Grade-II listing in 1993. Just over 15 years on, the school was found to be failing.

Falling pupil numbers were at odds with a successful past; any 'Elliottian' would be quick to point out their school's proud history. A façade in disrepair didn't help. Scaffolding with hoardings held up the dilapidated curtain walling due to lack of funds.

Optimism seemed to have been fully abandoned when the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative was axed and, with it, a £40 million restoration scheme.

Hope came in the shape of a project devised by Wandsworth Council and its strategic development partner Lendlease to self-fund the school's regeneration. The plan included releasing some funds by selling an underused part of the site and turning the school into an academy, championed by the Absolute Return for Kids (Ark) education charity. With the buildings saved from de-listing and demolition – and with less than half the BSF regeneration budget – we were tasked to transform the school while retaining as much of the original architecture as possible.

Giving the school a much-needed facelift

First impressions count. Fundamental to attracting new pupils, their parents and talented staff was a sympathetic restoration of the school's outward appearance: the curtain walling to the 124m-long main building and replacement sports hall.

Working closely with Historic England, the Twentieth Century Society, our clients (Ark and Wandsworth Borough Council), the project's specialist engineering consultant and the wider community, we developed a double-glazed window system, supported by a thermally broken, aluminum curtain wall.

It was also important to herald change with a fresh identity for the new academy. Inspired by the interior 1950s palette and tile patterns, we created a playful colour scheme for the façade, which also helped soften the architectural mass.

Besides aesthetics, the façade resolved year-round issues with heating, cooling and ventilation. The newly sealed buildings now meet modern energy standards, vastly improving thermal and solar performance, with the option to open windows in the warmer months. Annual heating bills have dropped by around 80%.

Attention to detail

The design solution for the replacement curtain walls enabled us to reference the original windows – notably the rigorous configuration and slim frames – and retain the sightlines.

\This is a school that now is in the position to reach its potential for the local community. It can finally be unleashed to provide brilliant comprehensive education

Justine Greening Local MP and Secretary of State for Education

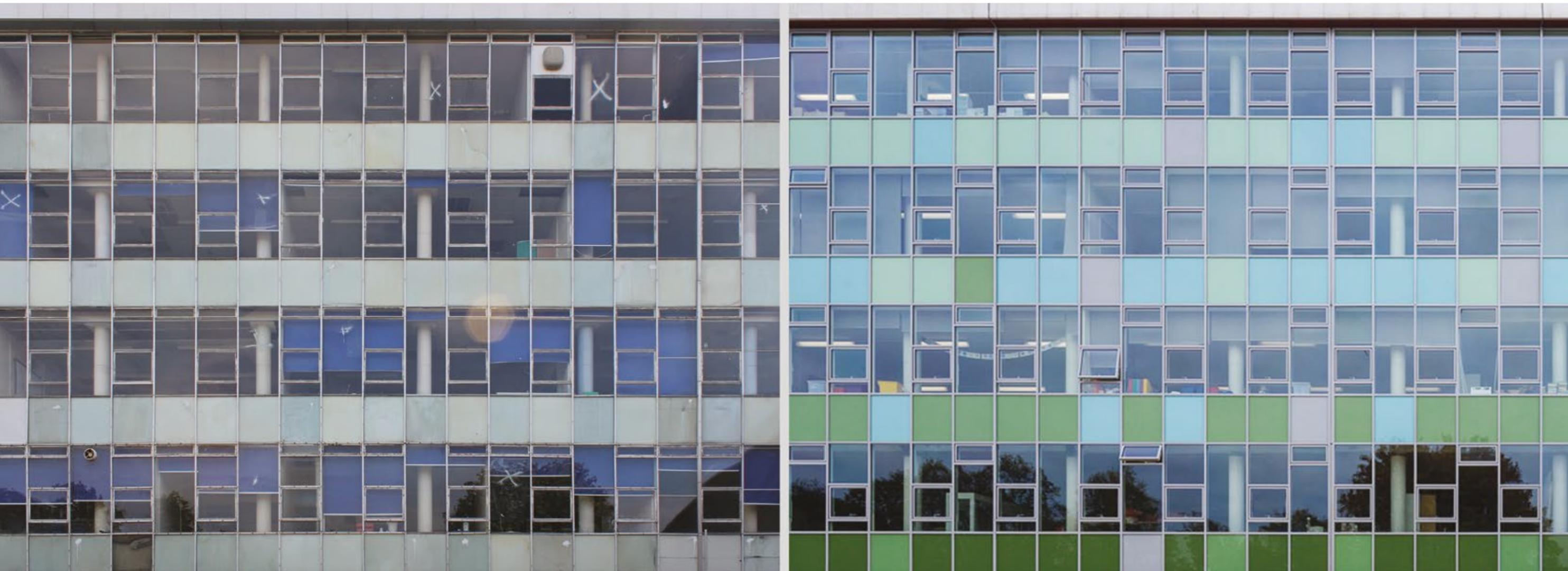
4,000

sq m
of exterior glazing replaced



Not forgetting the elephant

A new logo completes the facelift; a winning entry in a pupil design contest, based on the school's former elephant emblem.



Creating space for 21st century learning

Beyond the façade, the entire campus was in need of essential repairs and modernisation to meet the community's learning needs. It was a large site comprising three main parts: the main teaching block, the sports facility and a huge assembly hall. The challenge here was to achieve the remodelling with sensitivity to the heritage of the existing listed school buildings, within a tight budget.

We focused on the aspects that would make the biggest impact to pupils' immediate environment.

Rethinking the main teaching block

The academy's classrooms were increased in size to meet today's teaching standards, with an essential ground-floor dining area added. Lobbies and circulation spaces are filled with light and now flow well.

The academy is naturally ventilated throughout, with the exception of the IT labs and music department, which accommodates sound-proof recording studios and a large production suite.

1\ Retaining architectural features and details

Our interior design solution conserved and enhanced the buildings' high-quality finishes, including the three terrazzo main staircases with hardwood timber rails. To these stair cores, we added coloured acoustic wall panels, with a 1950s influenced palette.

2\ Re-landscaping the external spaces

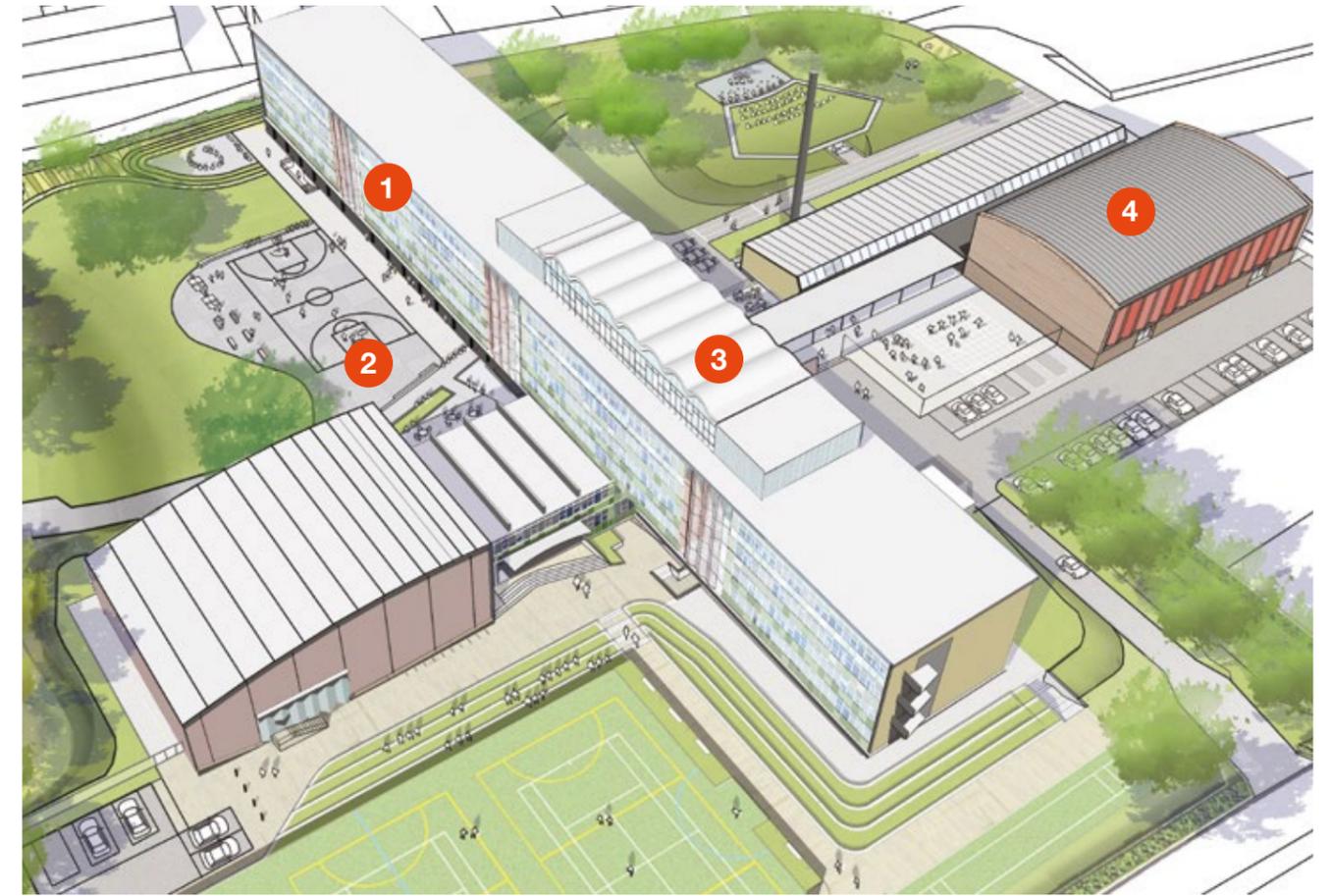
The areas around school buildings are important too; the defining place where children learn how to interact and socialise with others. Re-landscaping allowed us to maximise the usable playspace, as well as make accessibility improvements, reducing the level changes site-wide.

3\ Knocking right through

The academy's art department is another new asset, sitting in the elegant, freeform concrete wave roof on the top floor. Once a series of smaller rooms, this calm inspiring space with views over the capital is proving popular. An open space to open eyes and minds, providing an alternative type of learning environment.

4\ A community sports facility and dance studio

To meet modern building standards cost effectively, the former gymnasium and workshops were replaced with a steel-frame structure, retaining the site's original cruciform plan and building's composition. The hall is naturally ventilated through a zone of hit-and-miss brickwork. The birch-faced plywood lining provides a robust solution with a warm, natural finish.



\I hope that pupils leave Ark Putney Academy with fond memories of their time there, with a clear sense of self-worth and a feeling of limitless potential

John Jeffery Architect

TOP
5%

of performing schools for progress, since completion

