



Crumpsall Lane Primary School, Manchester (Mark Watson)

Recognising the quality of Victorian and Edwardian schools

Because of BSF's focus on exemplar designs, there is a danger that local authorities will automatically assume that a new building is always better than retaining and adapting the old. This will mean an unjustified and unwelcome threat to our Victorian and Edwardian schools. Indeed, there is evidence that this is already happening in some areas.

We agree with BSF that good design improves the quality of life and the quality of learning in schools. But we want to be sure that the quality of architectural design in Victorian and Edwardian schools is also recognised and valued.

It is significant that many of our prestigious private schools have buildings designed by our best nineteenth century architects. In these schools the architecture is inseparable from the reputation of the school. The local primary school may seem humble in comparison, but good architecture always contributes positively to the educational experience.

The architecture of our old school buildings also contributes to local distinctiveness. Local school boards used local architects and

often developed families of buildings with a character particular to that location.

The school architecture of E R Robson in London, and Martin and Chamberlain in Birmingham is an important part of the identities of these cities. By contrast, new schools usually have no locally distinctive characteristics; they contribute to the decline in the differences between regions and places.

Clr Warburton said if people wanted to demolish the school, they should visit Oxford and Cambridge Universities, see how old their buildings are and see what education they give.

From the *Warrington Guardian* 22 August 2006, commenting on the Borough Council's proposal to resubmit plans to demolish Stockton Heath Primary School, Warrington, Cheshire

One of the main drivers for change behind the BSF program is to provide school children with inspiring educational environments. There must not be an automatic assumption that old school buildings represent an impediment to the raising of educational standards, or that

building a new school will always raise those standards. In every case an audit should be carried out to fully assess the extent to which the existing school buildings (either as they are, or with some reorganisation and refurbishment) can meet the future needs of the school.

What is Building Schools for the Future?

The DiES Building Schools for the Future (BSF) program for secondary schools aims to "rebuild or renew" every secondary school in England within the next 15 years. And the Government's primary capital investment program for investment in primary schools anticipates that local authorities will receive funding for investment in 50% of primary schools. There is an assumption within each BSF package that:

- 50% of the work will be new build
- 35% will be major refurbishment
- 15% will be minor refurbishment

We believe that the preferred order of outcomes for a locally significant Victorian or Edwardian school building must be:

- 1. That the building is used as a school, and in its existing built form.**
- 2. That the existing building is adapted sympathetically to accommodate an educational use.**
- 3. If neither of these are possible, that the building is converted to an appropriate and viable new use. This should only be necessary in a small number of cases. We believe that the great majority of our Victorian and Edwardian schools can, and should, continue to perform their original function.**

The strengths of historic schools

Victorian and Edwardian schools possess many assets, and have many advantages over newer buildings. These include:

Their generous size:

Board schools, for example, often have wide corridors and large halls which can be used flexibly, and can readily meet demands for extra space, and accommodate new ways of learning. By contrast, the minimum space standards which the DfES applies to new schools often become the maximum.

New learning environments do not have to be new-build: they can be adapted from existing buildings.

RIBA & CABE, 21st Century Schools: Learning Environments of the Future, 2004

Surely, the quality of the interior space and architectural form, structural strength, cast of light and relationship to surrounding land are what matter – not age. By those criteria many nineteenth century and earlier buildings are still educationally relevant.

Roderick Thomson, Deputy Headmaster, Moorfield School, in a letter to the Times Educational Supplement, 1970

Classroom space in new builds is extremely tight. They seem to have been drawn by accountants. As we are going for a refit of an existing building, we have extra space and I think children in urban areas need that.

Richard Slade, Head Teacher, Joseph Lancaster School, Southwark



Thomas's Clapham (Frederick Wolff)

The school occupies a site between Wandsworth and Clapham Commons. It is a Grade II listed building, which was built between 1904 and 1908 to house the Clapham County Girls' School...

The facilities at Clapham include large, bright classrooms, three fully equipped Science Laboratories, a Library, Gymnasium, two dining rooms and a magnificent galleried Main Hall. Three Music rooms, six practice studios, a Drama studio, a state of the art ICT suite, girls' and boys' changing rooms (including showers and disabled facilities) and a lift were all newly built in 2001. Within the grounds there is a separate Art, Pottery and Design Technology centre.

From the website for Thomas's London Day Schools

The main building is an imposing "triple-decker" structure of red brick and masonry, parts of which are now well over a hundred years old. Major repair and maintenance work, including replacement of windows and window frames, has taken place and the southern elevation is now sound and attractive. There is a programme of internal decoration taking place over the next five years.

From the website of Hargrave Park School, Islington

The school is a large three storey Victorian building, built in 1883, which towers imposingly above the small roads of residential houses. The school has a Hall and classrooms/dedicated subject rooms on each floor.

The school building exterior was completely renovated in 1999, and since 2000 there have been extensive improvements to the interior and school resources including-

- A new School Office
 - A new Literacy Resource Room
 - A new Resource Room for group work and one-to-one teaching
 - A new Performing Arts Hall
 - A new Story Sack Resource Room for Foundation Stage pupils
 - An ICT Suite with 14 computers, webcams and an Interactive Whiteboard
 - Interactive Whiteboards in every classroom
 - A very well resourced Music Room
 - A very well resourced Library with computerised loans system
 - New playground equipment
 - A dedicated Art & DT Room with Pottery Kiln
 - A new Nursery Playground
 - A new Resource Room for Teachers to use during non-contact time
 - A dedicated After School Club Building, which is also used by whole school for cooking
- From the website of Kenmont Primary School, London, NW10**

Schools of the future must be designed to avoid wasted investment through early and rapid obsolescence. They need to have a long functional life, demonstrating good value for money in terms of life cycle costs...

As buildings last a long time it is important they are of a sustainable design. Sustainability is both an environmental and social aim, and should be considered throughout the building process. The complete building can be a lesson in sustainability for the building's users – sustainability is now part of the National Curriculum – and the public.

Schools for the Future: Designs for Learning Communities

Where the asset is of proven historical and architectural significance, retains its integrity or is valued by the local community, English Heritage will favour an approach which promotes its repair, refurbishment and reuse as a school rather than direct replacement.

English Heritage, *The Future of Historic School Buildings*, 2005

Generally, [BSF] schools performed best on issues of functionality: classrooms had adequate space for current teaching methods, buildings were considered to be safe and there was adequate parking. Schools performed least well on build quality, with a reliance on mechanical ventilation and artificial lighting and poor quality fixtures and fittings.

CABE Briefing on a report published 3 July 2006: *Assessing Secondary School Design Quality*



Victorian pupils at Finchingfield C E Primary School, Essex (courtesy Paula Hagan)



Pupils celebrating the school's 150th birthday in October 2006 (courtesy Paula Hagan)

Their role as significant and valued symbols of their community:

We are very proud of our school and in recent years have tried to undertake refurbishments which are sympathetic to the nature of our building... Our parents and community appreciate that our school is a living school and its character is partly created by the historic building in which we work.
Bernadette Roobottom, Head Teacher, Shobnall Primary School, Staffordshire



Shobnall Primary school (Bernadette Roobottom)

The school is structurally sound and very much revered as part of our local cultural heritage. Despite a petition of more than 5,000 signatures opposing demolition the Borough Council/LEA seem intent on destroying the school to replace with a new school that is neither needed nor wanted.

Campaigner for Stockton Heath Primary School, Warrington, Cheshire

Government is encouraging schools to develop as focal points for a range of family and community services... Schools developing in this way can help to bring together different community groups, and in deprived communities can make a key contribution to neighbourhood renewal...

Schools in the future will be focal points for the whole community.
DfES Schools for the Future: Designs for Learning Communities, 2002

Today, schools continue to form a significant part of the local fabric... The shared experience they represent (in the case of historic school buildings across several generations) can be a powerful source of community identity and cohesion.

English Heritage, The Future of Historic School Buildings, 2005

School buildings have long occupied an important cultural and usually very visible place in cities, towns and villages. The gradual growth in provision of education in the 18th and 19th centuries meant that school buildings provided an additional focal point for large parts of society. The evolution of school boards and local authorities during the later 19th century ensured that schools became very much part of the local landscape.

Save Britain's Heritage, Beacons of Learning – Breathing New Life into Old Schools, 1995



Bonner Street School (E.R. Robson, 1876), due to be demolished this week (Kathryn Ferry)

I left the school in 1995. It's a shame that it is going because it's a landmark, and I've got memories from there.

Ria Gravener, 22, former pupil of Bonner Street School, Bethnal Green

The hall was also used, as it is in schools today, as a space for assembly, prize-giving and talks. As such it was seen as an important symbol of the school being a community, a place where everyone could come together and feel part of the same group.
CABE education website: Creative spaces – improving school design

This year Stanley Grove School became 100 years old. The school celebrated the event by holding an open day and a Fayre. The events were roaring successes with many ex-pupils coming back to visit us to look how things had changed. Visitors were able to look at photographs, report cards, log books and a presentation of Stanley Grove through the past one hundred years.

From the website of Stanley Grove Community Primary School, Manchester

Their sustainability:

With good and regular maintenance, the fabric of these old schools (which has already lasted over a hundred years in many cases) is robust and relatively easily adapted. Conserving an old school is also sustainable, in line with the Government's planning policy.

It is a good strong building, and will probably last longer than the new one. It is useful to learn about the Victorians, children like the building, and it seems it is only being knocked down to make a carpark and part of the playground.
Susannah Page, Year 6, Gilthill Primary School, Nottinghamshire, in a letter to the Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser

We're not going to have any more glass palaces. We're going to have functional buildings built of brick. Glass is hot in the summer, freezing in the winter. People can look through it and nasties throw bricks at it. And you don't have balconies on schools, anybody can tell you that.

Sir Cyril Taylor, head of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, interviewed in The Guardian, 7 February 2006

They tell me they are selling the bricks for £1.50 a time. Not a bad price for a brick. But the bricks as they are currently constituted, are worth much more. They have formed part of our heritage of the East End and all that is about to be destroyed.

George Galloway, MP, addressing the crowd at the funeral for Bonner Street School, 16 October 2006



Local people follow the hearse at the funeral for Bonner Street School (Kathryn Ferry)