



Cooking up a career in catering

ORPINGTON'S NEW CATERING-FOCUSED CAREER COLLEGE, DESIGNED TO PROVIDE VOCATIONALLY-FOCUSED PROGRAMMES FOR 14-19 YEAR OLDS, EXEMPLIFIES THE VALUE OF GREAT DESIGN IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

The significance of design and architecture in schools and colleges has come a long way since I was in short trousers. Without wanting to give away my age, when my Victorian-built school needed more space, they'd dump down a couple of Portakabins and we'd make do with that.

But now there is increasing recognition that factors such as the space, the light and even colour schemes can have an effect on student behaviour and attainment. And of course environments aimed at large numbers of children and teenagers need to be ultra durable, simple to maintain and fully accessible.

From a programming point of view, work needs to be scheduled around the academic calendar, with the most disruptive elements focused on frenzied bursts of activity during holidays. During term time, logistics and safety aspects are hugely complicated by the fact that construction is taking place within an operating school.

A less appreciated factor is that school and college sites have often evolved in a fairly ad hoc way, piecemeal over time. From an aesthetic point of view, they very rarely offer consistency or coherence in design.

Pretty much all these considerations have come into play for Bromley-based integrated architectural, property and construction consultancy Pellings through its various recent and on-going projects for Bromley College of Further and Higher Education.

The College is based across two campus sites at Bromley and neighbouring Orpington. Recent refurbishment and expansion projects at the Bromley campus include the Nido Volans Centre which provides specialist facilities for young people with complex learning difficulties and disabilities, a new sports hall and gymnasium, re-provision of an engineering faculty, a new business centre and learning resource centre.

A common feature of Pellings' work has been creating very high quality public spaces that

help to link the campus' various components. Additionally a large glazed rotunda forms a bold entrance and acts as a 'beacon' after dark, creating a strong visual link with the local community. The new buildings work in harmony with the external spaces to deliver a modern, high quality commercial environment, intended to reflect the innovative curriculum delivered by the college.

Currently Pellings is working at the Orpington campus, which is establishing a Career College. Bromley College is a pioneer of this new concept in education. Career Colleges are designed to increase the range and choice of opportunities open to 14-19 year olds. They will provide accelerated vocationally-focused programmes alongside core academic work. The premise is they will be equipped to the highest standards and staffed by expert teachers in academic and vocational subjects. Just as importantly, they will provide clear progression routes into higher education, apprenticeships, further education and above all, work.

Bromley College approached Pellings in late 2013 to design the new college, which is to focus on vocational training in hospitality and catering.

Work includes establishing production and training kitchens, learning spaces and classrooms and a student-led restaurant open to the public.

The project is being taken forward in two phases. The first provides a training restaurant, open to the public; a production kitchen; a training kitchen for up to 18 students; and ancillary spaces including staff and student changing facilities and student common room.

With a contract value of £1.2m the project started on site in June 2014 with sectional completion in October 2014 and final completion in January of this year.

The second phase of the development, now underway, is targeted for completion in 2016. This will provide a further training kitchen, a pastry kitchen, a café with barista-style bar, a small retail area and a pavement dining area facing Market Square – which the campus currently backs onto.

The new catering facility is in effect, a college within a college and is designed to operate separately both educationally and physically. With this focus, says Pellings' architect Andrew Tang, "we considered it important

that the restaurant be sited fronting onto Market Square allowing the Career College to distinguish itself from the main college and to present a completely separate public face."

Market Square is an under-utilised public space but the immediate area is undergoing a programme of redevelopment with a new residential development and cinema complex currently under construction. The Career College with its public restaurant, and ultimately a café and shop, contributes to this improvement of the public realm. It should help bring new life to the area and of course provide that all-important real-world front of house experience for the students.

The designs for both the production and training kitchens are the result of an extensive collaborative process involving Pellings, a hospitality and catering vocational training advisor and a specialist catering equipment supplier.

In developing the concept, says Tang, the team looked at other catering facilities and an important realization from this exercise was most educational training kitchens are not representative of what is found in industry. "In particular the concept of flow is vital in commercial kitchens," says Tang. "Not just in and around the kitchen itself, but between the production kitchen and the restaurant and the kitchen and the storage space – and this became a key design criteria."

The resulting layout of each kitchen was carefully developed based on its specific function with the emphasis on visibility, accessibility and the activity flow common to successful commercial kitchens.

The majority of the works involved refurbishment of the existing college buildings, mainly within what was originally a school hall. Pellings achieved efficient use of space by adding a mezzanine floor, with the upper level creating space for HVAC and power plant.

An added complication for the project stemmed from the fact that the first full student intake will start at the college in the September, but the college needed to be able to show prospective students around the facility from Autumn last year.

This meant certain elements, especially the training kitchen facilities, had to be in place early. This required some elements of "window dressing", for instance the need for a temporary air-handling unit on the roof of the adjacent building until the permanent kit could be installed within the mezzanine floor.

The only new build elements of the scheme are two extensions to the existing college building connected to the training restaurant. The extensions increase the area of the training restaurant while also providing much needed natural light. The smaller extension serves as a formal entrance to the restaurant and houses a Stannah platform lift to facilitate access.

The extensions are of steel framed construction, concrete ground bearing slabs, aluminium framed curtain walling with Trespa decorative facias, and flat roofs with a Bauder single ply membrane. Unlike the kitchen areas, the restaurant is a naturally ventilated space with new actuated louvre panels introduced into the existing building façade at low level and a penthouse ventilation unit installed in the roof of the new extension.

