



## Where School Architecture Should Go From Here

On Wednesday 8th June several members of IID attended a debate on the future of school building as part of the London Festival of Architecture, held at the recently completed Hackney New School designed by Henley Halebrown Rorrison.

Speakers were:

- Toby Young, a pioneer of the free school movement
- Ty Goddard, a long-standing advocate of intelligent investment in education architecture
- Lesley Falconer, Head of Hackney New School
- Simon Henley, Architect & founder of HHbR.
- The panel was chaired by curator and architectural historian Jeremy Melvin

The purpose of the debate was essentially to investigate whether architectural qualities can impact on learning, and we attended to help inform our practice's approach to design.

Toby Young's opinion was that design was useful for functionality purposes, i.e. well designed circulation routes, toilets, locker rooms, adequate light, and sufficient ventilation would all help improve students' learning experiences and aid good behaviour. However his thoughts were that the materiality and visual impact of space from an 'architectural merit' perspective were less important, so much so that any building could be used as a school and they did not need to be purpose built.

Lesley Falconer reinforced this point, suggesting that the lasting memory students who return to visit have is of the people, not their surroundings. This said, she believed strongly that her students were benefitting from feeling valued as part of society by being given a new school building. She also favoured the location of the Hackney New School as part of the urban environment, with good links on the canal and in a mixed use area. The site was found by individuals who were setting up the school, who spent many hours visiting potential sites before finally finding this one. It was procured through a Design and Build contract with contractor Willmott Dixon.

Ty Goddard contradicted Toby, suggesting that memorable spaces helped improve learning attainment; that beyond just the functional aspects of a building, a strong architectural design added to the learning environment. He provided evidence through several studies that the environment a class is taught in could affect learning outcomes. However, Toby strongly disagreed with the idea that a building could impact on your 'subconscious' through a 'supernatural' effect which was his understanding what architects strive to achieve.

Our take on this debate was that we agreed that school designs do not necessarily have to create a big architectural impact in order for great learning to be achieved. However every person deserves to feel valued in life, and one way of doing so is to provide young people with school buildings they can feel proud of, that give them the best possible outlook on life and help them meet their potential. These thoughts were echoed by Simon Henley, who suggested that school buildings are meaningful centres within a community that people can identify with and become fond of. We believe this includes using materials which are durable and long lasting; our government should be trying to avoid creating 'temporary' buildings using cheap materials, forming buildings which look dishevelled within a short period of time, and instead focus on creating longer lasting, well built buildings which will require a higher initial spend.

We were left thinking about a quote by Arthur Conan Doyle in Sherlock Holmes, when he likened redbrick Victorian board schools to lighthouses. "Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future," Holmes says. We would like to ensure that our new schools meet similarly elevated aspirations.

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