



Building a Brand New School at Zero Cost

Three Rivers Academy in Surrey needed a major upgrade, but they had no direct funding from local or central government. **Mark Saint** from Building Schools for Nothing shares their process of planning and delivering a state-of-the-art school that is rejuvenating the community.

Three Rivers Academy in Hersham, Surrey, opened the doors of their new state-of-the-art school building to staff and students in February 2018.

The high-quality, spacious accommodation, including the amazing sport, drama, dance and music facilities, was designed to inspire 21st-century learning and allow students to perform at the highest level.

The school, previously named Rydens Enterprise School & Sixth Form College, did not have a great local reputation and parents were reluctant to send their children to the school. Bullying, absenteeism and other anti-social behaviour had become part of the culture and pupil numbers and results were declining. The school was failing.

The original school buildings were an ad-hoc mix of ages and condition, with blocks randomly located across the site with poor adjacencies, meaning that pupils would spend part of the academic day walking between buildings. There was no separation between vehicles and pedestrians and one playground had even been converted into a car park.

Building Schools for Nothing (BSfN) became involved to plan and deliver a complex strategy to provide replacement school buildings without any direct funding from local or central government.

BSfN is part of the MEA Group which is a construction consultancy of Project Managers, Quantity Surveyors and Building Surveyors who have actively worked with schools and colleges delivering land disposal solutions to fund redevelopment of education facilities for over 20 years. In 2009, MEA delivered the largest, and at the time, unique in England, self-funded redevelopment of a school in Marlborough, Wiltshire. This project comprised a £23m land sale and the construction of a 12,500 m² replacement secondary school.

Following this successful project, and in response to the withdrawal of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) scheme, Building Schools for Nothing was established. They now work with schools, academy trusts and multi-academy trusts advising on and delivering self-funded redevelopment projects and since its formation has been involved with school redevelopment projects worth in excess of £100m.

The strategy for Three Rivers Academy centred around the disposal of 12 acres of surplus land following the securing of planning consent for residential development, as well as planning consent for a new school on the 30 acres of retained land.

The vision for the project was to create a new community which would transform the reputation of the school into one where students would feel proud of and safe. Architect Scott Brownrigg designed a scheme which centred around creating a new residential neighbourhood and raising the profile of the school within local community. It needed to transform pre-conceived perceptions and provide outstanding facilities that the community as a whole could benefit from. The goal was not only to increase pupil numbers and results, but also to create an environment without corridors where children felt safe and inspired. All of this needed to happen without any government funding.

The project has provided a new 1,878 place 11–18 secondary school adjacent the redundant existing school buildings. This new 15,000 m² state of the art school building now provides pupils with access to high-quality, spacious accommodation, including the amazing sport, drama, dance and music facilities.

The large classrooms lead from a central mall and are colour coded to faculty areas, they have high ceilings and panoramic views across either the playing fields or the front of the school. Many are dual aspect with large viewing panes to the central mall. The Learning Resource Centre provides a welcoming space for the main school and a separate mezzanine floor for sixth form students to study. Meals are provided in a contemporary style café area with seating stretching down the mall.

In addition, the school facilities also include a 6-court sports hall, assembly hall, performance spaces including a studio theatre and drama workshops, together with a full-size 3G artificial pitch and a MUGA providing netball and tennis.

The £40m project was self-funded from the sale of surplus land to Bewley Homes, who are developing the disposal site with 296 dwellings. The development complies with the local policy for affordable housing, providing 43% of homes which have that designation.





The new school building has been shortlisted for several building awards. It is the only UK school to have made the shortlist for the final of the World Architecture Festival Awards in the Completed Schools category.

BSfN has managed the entire process from the school's original 'I wonder if' thoughts to students moving into the building. This has included forming and managing the complex strategy involving many activities such as planning consents, ESFA s73 approvals, disposal strategy, legal agreements, design team and contractor procurement and the build process of the new school.

'We are thrilled with our new state-of-the-art school. Our vision was to create a world-class learning environment for our students, and the project team has achieved this with a building that is designed for students' present and future needs, and that is very much not a standard specification building. This has resulted in a professional, safe accessible and inclusive environment for our staff, students and the wider community.' Anne-Louise Payne, Head of School

'Massive thanks and credit to BSfN who work night and day on our behalf and seem to have an infinite capacity to soak up pressure and respond with energy and creativity to whatever obstacle is thrown in their path. They gave us the expertise, the masterplan, and the confidence to go for it. Their skill, energy and stubborn refusal to be daunted by any challenge has delivered a new school for future generations of Elmbridge children.' Ian Mackenzie, Bursar (Retired)



Mark Saint is director of Building Schools for Nothing. For more information on the programme, visit www.buildingschoolsfornothing.com