

SSAT and Dulux Smarter Spaces Project – end of project report

School Name: Cuddington Croft Primary School
Name of person completing this report: Alice Cunningham
Brief description of type of room/space: Corridor in standalone block accommodating four KS2 classrooms.
<p><u>Overview</u></p> <p>Cuddington Croft is currently a ‘good’ school however we have worked very hard over the last few years to develop teaching and learning to an outstanding level. Our aspiration is to achieve and maintain this level of education. One strand of our School Development Plan is centred on innovation in teaching and learning, and therefore our hope for joining the Smarter Spaces project was that it would provide an opportunity to inspire and support this.</p> <p>Two particular challenges which we are faced with were key drivers in joining the project: finance and challenge. Our school is situated in an affluent area with our cohort made up of very few children eligible for the Pupil Premium. We receive little additional deprivation funding and have therefore had to find ways to constantly develop and enhance our provision with a diminishing budget. Another feature of our school is that many of our pupils are high achieving and perform well above average in national tests. Providing challenge for all pupils is another area where we are always seeking to be creative and innovative; enabling them to learn and develop through a rich and broad curriculum which goes beyond purely academic success. Our aim in joining the project was therefore to find a cost-effective way to develop and enrich a learning environment which would support our ethos: Inspire, enrich, succeed.</p> <p>During the design process, we found that time and budget constraints forced us to reconsider and redraft our ideas several times in order to reach an achievable resolution for the project; however, this process in itself has proven to be a learning process which has highlighted the need for resourcefulness and further reinforced that simplicity and functionality is key. The participants in the project also had to adapt as the design and realisation process spanned two academic years and therefore some of the groups of pupils who used the space changed. Other whole-school initiatives were also introduced during this time which additionally needed to be factored in to the design and use of the space. Despite this however, we aimed to engage a wide proportion of the pupil stakeholders in the design process through assemblies and school council meetings.</p> <p><u>Enhancing the teaching and learning environment</u></p> <p>Prior to the redecoration, the ‘Smarter Space’ was a stark contrast to the rest of the school. This was particularly evident as you moved from our new library and group rooms which were bright and inviting into the space which was a dark, unwelcoming entrance to a separate building. Being simply a corridor, it was well used with heavy footfall but was showing the effects of this, looking tired and unloved. It lacked any form of purpose other than having been used as overflow storage for teaching resources which were housed in large dominating cupboards, adding to the sense of darkness. There was no natural light, adding to the negative sense experienced when entering the area.</p> <p>Having carried out building work to infill spaces between another external building and the main school, the rest of the building now felt like a connected, whole space however the building with this corridor space still stands separately. Whilst there are possible plans for the future to create a bridging canopy</p>

across to this space, this has been put on hold due to budgetary constraints and so it was even more important to try and find another solution to raise the profile of this additional building which houses our year 4 and 5 classrooms and to change the impact of the entrance to this space for the teachers and pupils who spend their day in there.

Previous work carried out to make better use of other areas within the school has focused on creating breakout spaces which are aesthetically appealing as well as being flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of users. We have stripped away the conventional use of group rooms by replacing desks and chairs with bean bags and flexible 'pod' style seating to support a range of uses, manipulated by pupils to suit their needs. This has enabled us to begin developing innovative teaching and learning such as using an open studio space and giant whiteboard walls for collaborative maths teaching.

Through our ongoing programme of maintenance, we have also been mindful to update communal areas of the school using a colour scheme based on our school uniform echoing our school values and vision as a 'brand' which supports the school's developing identity. The Smarter space was designed with pupil input at the forefront but also remained sensitive to this 'branding'. This was essential in order to ensure that the identity of the main school was brought into this building, so that pupils based here felt like a part of the school community.

Inspiring engagement

Pupil engagement in the space began with the design process where representatives from the classes who used the space regularly were selected to form a cross section of learners. They were involved in the design process itself- both with myself as the lead teacher and in feeding back to other pupils in their own classes, assemblies and through the school council. Although the main work involved in the makeover to the space is complete, the design was created such that the space can be constantly evolving and adapting in a way which is responsive to the teaching and learning taking place in the classrooms within that building. Staff and pupils are, through this process, beginning to take more of an active and proactive role in the ongoing design of the space.

An initial group of pupils have since been selected as 'Learning Environment Leaders' and they have taken individual ownership of the whiteboard wall areas (or 'Learning Spaces'). Here, they are sharing their thoughts and ideas about their learning and are inviting other pupils to contribute. This is beginning to link their learning to other whole school initiatives which are being developed and particularly supports the concept of growth mindset where children are encouraged to think and learn differently. As these concepts develop, I am planning for the current Learning Environment Leaders to share their experiences with other pupils and help them to develop their own ideas to take over the ownership of the learning spaces. Pupil engagement has already proven high in this initiative, with children keen to be offered this opportunity.

Encourage positive attitude and behaviour

A whole school initiative is currently being developed to look at the way in which teaching and learning is differentiated in order to provide a wider range of challenge for all, and for pupils to be more actively engaged in leading their own learning. The focuses on the growth mindset of both pupils and teachers, actively encouraging participants to disregard previous conventions of ability groupings with set modes of learning, activities and adult support. Staff are developing practise which encourages pupils to seek challenge, to learn in different ways and alongside others and to embrace different ways of learning as a positive attribute.

A key component in facilitating this approach is for there to be more learning space available, this enables teacher flexibility to create different focus groups for learning- both independently and with adult support. The new Smarter Space will now be able to facilitate breakout groups of adults and pupils providing a safe environment with adaptable seating and whiteboard spaces for collaborative learning. The Smarter Space is now more than just a corridor and can be used as a flexible, safe breakout area where groups can take responsibility for leading their own learning.

Pupils at Cuddington Croft are generally well behaved and take responsibility for their shared environment. The Smarter Space functions as a celebration of this as pupils' mutual respect means that pieces of work can be shared and enjoyed by all and the Learning Spaces can be used in a collaborative way with no concerns that any disrespectful behaviour will take place. It is a great strength of our pupils that they behave in this way, and the space is a celebration and further promotion of this which places ownership and responsibility back in the hands of pupils who have the trust and respect for each other to make this successful.

Promote personal development and wellbeing

A key change in the design of the Smarter Space was to turn it from a dark and unwelcoming area into one which felt positive and welcoming. A key component of this was the use of colour and natural light. The pupil focus group initially engaged in design brainstorming and I led them in discussing colour, form and texture by looking at imagery and discussing properties of colours, textures and forms. The consensus of the group was that they were drawn towards natural concepts for the design; however, we agreed that in order for the space to appeal to all users and not be constricted to a specific concept it could not be heavily themed but would have to be simpler.

As the children were drawn towards a palette of more nature-inspired colours, the designer created a loose concept of sunshine colours (yellow, orange) as the highlights against a neutral backdrop of fresh white. The flexible seating/ work benches were adapted from the original concept of a park bench and scaled down to simple, hand built installations made from wood for a natural feel. The carpet was designed to represent a path and grass design but again in a subtle way which did not lend itself to a specific theme. Solar tubes were also installed to bring much needed natural light into the space and all of these design elements have had a significant difference on the 'feel' of entering the building. Where it was once depressing and dark, it is now fresh, bright and welcoming creating a positive mind set when entering the building.

This design style has already proven successful within other areas of the school and most notably in our library, the impact of which has been positively noted by the learning community and also by visitors to the school. It was therefore natural that this concept was used within the Smart Space, whilst leaving options for further development such as the addition of plants and other natural objects

Help improve building function

The aim of using natural design elements has been to create a space that appeals to staff and pupils of all ages and backgrounds and is not gender specific as it contains themes which are recognised by and accessible to all.

The storage which was previously used in the corridor area has been removed, widening the access and improving light function as the open shelving which has replaced these does not block light coming from the ceiling. Solar tubes have also been installed which improve the sense of wellbeing and reduce the need for the amount of time when additional electrical lighting is required.

Aside from the built-in shelving, there are no fixed work spaces or seating components incorporated into the design with the specific intention that the space would be adaptable and flexible; and moreover, adaptable by the children themselves containing no elements which would be too heavy or unsafe for them to use themselves. Seating comes in the form of durable cushions and stools which are lightweight, meaning that they can be moved around the space easily by children and for multiple use as seats or as a table surface for children working on the floor.

The built-in shelving was designed to provide integrated storage spaces for the cushions stools leaving the main corridor space clear as a walk way so that pupils can move safely around the building during changes between lessons. Similarly, the folding bench seats were custom designed to be cheaply and simply created and installed, and are easily collapsible so that the corridor space is once again optimised when they are not in use. Other flexible furniture currently used in other spaces within the school can be interchanged with furniture in the Smarter Space, providing maximum flexibility for different users.

The design is simple, leaving it adaptable and open to interpretation by the pupils to lead the development of the space as best suits them; with maintenance requirements being minimal to sustain the environment requiring little additional maintenance.

Before:



During:



After:

