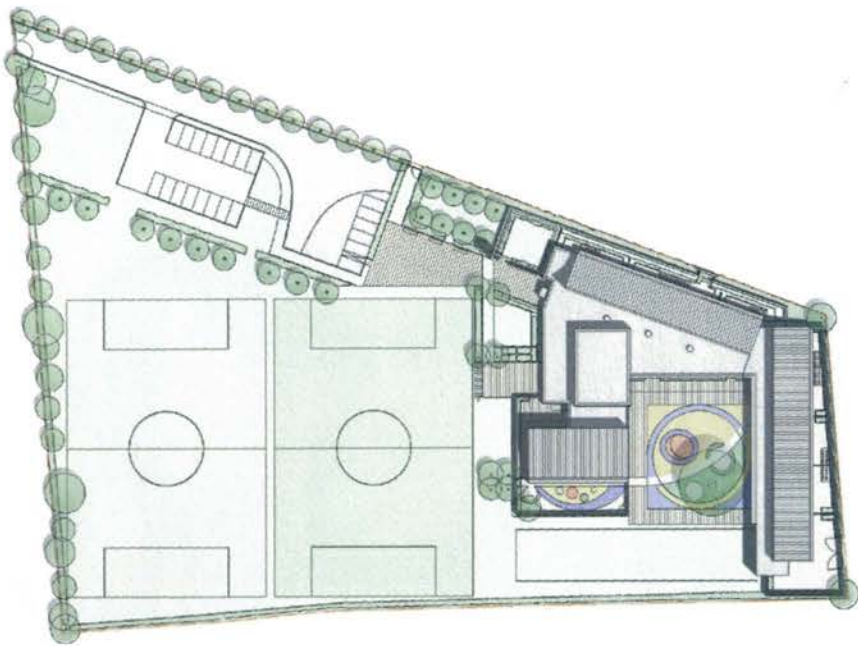


October 2006

Schools of thought – from nursery to academy:

Penoyre & Prasad, DSDHA, East, Foster & Partners, Kay Hartmann, Hawkins Brown, Meadowcroft Griffin, O'Donnell & Tuomey, John Pardey Robert Harbison on Victor Gruen • Jamie Fobert in Sarajevo Stephen Bates on Wingender Hovenier • Richard Meier in Rome Brighton Pier competition • Refurbishment, Plumbing & drainage



Sensitivity for social activity and meaningful built form are the hallmarks of a Dorset primary school by John Pardey Architects with Colin Stansfield Smith.

Frome Valley First School is located in Crossways, a village eight miles to the west of Dorchester in Dorset. The site for the new school was created by a section 106 agreement attached to a neighbouring housing development.

The new school, which opened in July, is approached through an obstacle course of residential roads (envisaged with the fiction of a Poundbury-style world) before arriving at open land, much of which is destined to be future Poundburyville, *writes John Pardey*. We therefore wanted to announce the school with a civic gesture – this resulted in a nine metre high clock tower with a bell from the same Whitechapel foundry that made Big Ben.

The school is planned as a two-form entry primary, but the first phase provides only sufficient accommodation for a school relocated from the nearby village of Owermoigne; it awaits the second phase that will enclose the play court at its heart.

The design was based on the idea of enclosure – a kind of ‘walled garden’ that cultivates children rather than plants – to



create a sanctuary. The plan places two classroom wings to the outer edges of the tapered site, sheltering behind walls that create small pocket gardens – play spaces – outside each classroom. An inner play court is contained by one of the (yet to be built) classroom wings, a hall and resources space.

The buildings are clad in western red cedar and teaching blocks have an asymmetric section formed by a convex ski-slope roof that appears internally as a concave belly, like a cloud billowing overhead. The generous floor-to-ceiling heights in the classrooms provides space for increased daylighting through clerestory glazing as well as high-level stack effect natural ventilation with stale air convected above the heads of occupants.

The hall has a flat lid, hovering over a perimeter clerestory, supported on six slender columns and carried on three parallel beams with a metal bow-truss. The space is lined in birch ply panels.

The structure comprises a very lightweight steel frame infilled with structural insulated panels (SIP’s) – while this may



Above Classrooms open onto external spaces defined by high brick walls.





seem something of a contradiction as the panels are not used structurally, they do offer very good thermal and acoustic properties at a reasonable price. The use of timber also has a particular resonance as a sustainable resource in a semi-rural location, and it also offers a fast response building fabric for intermittent usage.

The design seeks to optimise social spaces within the school, so the classrooms open into an informally shaped, shared-use resources area punctuated by three coloured circular rooflights. The play court has coloured hard surfaces in a design by Jennifer Coe that evoke crop circles, as well as the vapour trails and roundels of the Spitfires that flew from the nearby airfield more than sixty years ago.

Project team

Architect: John Pardey Architects in association with Prof Sir Colin Stansfield Smith; structural engineer: Barton Engineers; m&e: Anthony Gale & Associates; qs: Denley King; landscape: Jennifer Coe Landscape; client: Diocese of Salisbury/Frome Valley School (head teacher Helen Boyce); contractor: RG Spiller.

Selected subcontractors and suppliers

Steel frame: Test Valley Engineering; SIP panels: Build It Green; windows: Interwest; window system: Sapa DualFrame 75; roofing: Sarnafil; timber floor: Boen; bell: The Whitechapel Bell Foundry.

