

## **The Howe Dell journey**

### **December 2006**

The construction of the new building is progressing steadily, and there is a great deal of activity on-site: complete rooms can now be seen starting to take shape at one end of the building and the last of the concrete planks has been laid, a turning point in the construction process.

### **School involvement**

The children of Howe Dell School have been very involved in the project from the outset, and with less than a year to go, they are very excited about their new school. Representatives from the school Children's Council, Lauren and Ted, have been out and about, telling people about the latest developments for their new school and sharing examples of publicity and news reports from fundraising initiatives planned as part of the school's unique enriched Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) curriculum.

A pupil led Eco Squad has been launched, who will work with the landscape architect and other adults involved in the project and liaise with the Children's Council.

The landscape architect has been to visit the new school and is working closely with the children, helping them to harvest 100 acorns for planting at the new site. Parents are also collecting cuttings, ready to plant in the new site.

Headteacher, Debra Massey, and Christine Stewart, the school's ESD subject leader attended the Teaching for Tomorrow Conference at the University of Hertfordshire, where they gave an overview of Howe Dell's ESD journey to date.

Pupils carry out regular visits to the site to see how work on their new school is coming along.

Plans for the existing site remain unchanged, and Hertfordshire County Council is still under contract to sell the site of the school buildings. The contract is subject to planning permission: a planning application has been made to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, but it will not be determined until additional environmental information is supplied in respect of whether there are any bats roosting on the site. We won't know this until the bats come out of hibernation in the spring!

The proposal is still that the existing listed building will become an independent school, and the more modern buildings will be replaced by a courtyard style residential development.

### **January 2007**

The New Year has begun well, and the building is really starting to take shape. The weather has made things a little difficult, as recent high winds have prevented contractors from being able to work on elevated areas, but despite this slight setback, construction is progressing steadily.

The steel frame is now complete, and the concrete planks that make up the first floor and roof are in place. The concrete topping has been laid on the roof and first floor to tie the structure together, so work can begin on the roof insulation and aluminium roof deck.

The manufacture of the eco-friendly windows (timber frames surrounded by aluminium to protect from weathering) is 80 percent complete, so by the time the cladding work begins, they should be ready to install.

Eco-activity at the school is still as fervent as ever: the eco-squad have been busy collecting 150 pairs of shoes to be recycled through the Blue Peter Shoebiz appeal, whilst eco-minded staff sponsored the planting of 100 trees in the third world instead of sending Christmas cards.

The new school will soon get a lively splash of colour too - a community artist is currently working closely with Howe Dell art subject leader Katie Hawton and school governor Sally Graham on an art project to illustrate the hoardings. The materials are being supplied by MACE.

### **February 2007**

A transformation has been underway at The Runway this month: the internal walls and staircases of the new building are really taking shape, giving a much better sense of what the final school will look like. Excellent progress has been made on building work, despite days when it had to go on hold due to wind and snow.

Headteacher, Debra Massey and vice chair of governors, Barbara Bramley have begun the exciting task of researching furnishings. They visited a local furniture producer earlier this month, where they examined the quality of the products and assessed the sustainable features of fixtures and fittings such as sink tops made from recycled yoghurt pots.

### **March 2007**

Building work has come a long way in the past couple of months.

Headteacher, Debra Massey, was taken on a guided tour of the building earlier this month. She said: "It was awe-inspiring to finally walk into every new room. To see this dream evolve from the plans to the current building, is the result of many committed experts within the local authority and the vision and dedication of current and past staff and governors. I look forward to walking the new school with former headteacher Sally Somerville in September."

### **April 2007**

The building contractors have continued to work at a considerable pace this month, and some exciting developments have taken place at Howe Dell.

Celebrations were in order when the final touches were added to the roof, a significant milestone in the Howe Dell journey. In honour of the event a 'topping out' ceremony was held, to which a select group of parents and grandparents of children at the school were invited in recognition of the support they have given the school, especially with fundraising.

At the ceremony, project manager Richard Watson gave a presentation about the

new school, explaining more about its sustainable features such as the interseasonal heat transfer system under the playground, which will store heat in summer for use in the winter. The privileged group were taken on a guided tour of the new school, so they could see first hand where their children and grandchildren will be spending their days when the new school opens.

### **May 2007**

The construction of the new school is continuing well, and good progress is being made on the various components.

The oak cladding is now almost complete and most of the Velfac window frames have been installed, which gives a much more completed look to the building: "The tinted windows make a dramatic contrast against the oak-clad exterior," said headteacher Debra Massey after her recent visit to the site.

The main entrance and community hall areas will soon have their rendered finishes applied, and a parapet detail is being fitted all around the building as a finishing touch to the external features.

The landscaping is also progressing steadily: two of the hard play areas are finished and work on the others is well underway. The soil for the soft landscaping is being prepared, and the tree pits have been dug in preparation for tree planting. The pond liner and growing membrane have also been fitted.

Interior decor is coming along well too. Most areas have been plastered and the classrooms are now being fitted out with their services, decoration and lighting. Many areas have had their aluminium doors fitted, and the sound-proofing is in place: "I was amazed at what a difference the sound-proofing system makes," enthused Debra.

The classrooms will all have projection facilities with interactive whiteboards, so provision is currently being made throughout the building for the IT systems.

In April, the eco-squad undertook a research visit to the Hertford-based furniture suppliers Crossbrook, and they reported back on the visit this month by giving a powerpoint presentation in assembly. The main classroom furniture has since been confirmed and staff have selected PE, music and early years equipment.

Representatives from the eco-squad will also visit the University of Hertfordshire this term to give a ten minute presentation on climate change.

It is not just the eco-squad who are spreading the green message: Jordan in Year 4 has suggested introducing bird-nesting boxes in order to encourage wildlife to the new site, and five-year-old Joe is reminding people to switch off their laptops when they have finished with them in order to save energy.

Meanwhile plans to celebrate the end of an era at the old Howe Dell School are well underway. Staff and governors will enjoy a summer ball Howe Dell will also open its doors to ex-pupils and local families for a Tudor Revels role-play workshop, in honour of the Tudor heritage of the building and a Picnic in the Park event, with magicians and a barn dance.

## June 2007

Changes to the new school building have been dramatic this month. The decoration of a prototype classroom has now been completed, so staff and visitors can get a real sense of what the final classrooms will look like.

When headteacher Debra Massey visited the new building to take a look at the classroom, she was quite overwhelmed by the experience: "As I walked through the beech door, it was the first time I saw everything together – from the colours that I chose months ago, to the carpet, lino, lights and recycled yoghurt pot sink tops! The shafts of light coming in through the ducts that provide extra daylight to the classrooms were wonderful – it was all quite moving."

Despite the unexpected heavy rain, a lot has been happening outside too: landscaping of the grounds has begun, with planting taking place around the wetland area. Early next month, Katie Hawton – a member of staff who runs the Ground Force club at the school – will be working with landscape architect Jo Watkins and a group of children to choose the trees for the play areas.

On a practical level, all the staffing arrangements for September are in place, and the school has a fully staffed team of teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants. The school is also delighted to welcome Christopher Dean to the team, the new facilities manager who will be starting in August.

End of term celebrations are definitely in full swing. 'Reuse, reduce and recycle' was the motto of a bring and buy sale held by the school to encourage people to recycle unwanted items and to help the school get rid of surplus bits and pieces before the move. A cake in the shape of the old Howe Dell school building, which was made by one of the Year 1 mums, was raffled off as part of the event.

Other events organised by the school for children and families across Hatfield have also been a huge success. A Picnic in the Park took place on Friday 29 June, with magicians and square dancing to keep the crowds entertained. A serendipitous break in the June rains meant that everyone could enjoy their picnics in good weather.

A summer ball was held for staff and governors on the Saturday, and on the following Monday a Tudor day took place at the school for children across Hatfield, this time with steel drummers providing the lively entertainment.

Another exciting event that took place this month was when Debra Massey and the chair of governors Brian Dummer were treated to an experience of a lifetime: a helicopter, which had been booked to take aerial photographs of the old school building for posterity, then whisked the two staff off for an aerial view of the new site...arriving just in time to drop them off for a meeting that they were due to attend there!

The school has also developed a new website, which will be launched at the end of term. Keep an eye on it over the summer for any updates and news about the new site. To visit the website, follow the link to the right of this page.

## **July 2007**

Howe Dell has been celebrating once again this month: the school has been awarded the ECO Green Flag accreditation, the highest level of award granted by the nationally recognised eco-schools programme.

The programme enables schools to look at how they can reduce their environmental impact on the community. The children are very involved in the process, and are encouraged to take responsibility for the future of their own environment by looking at how it can be managed in a sustainable way.

Everyone at Howe Dell was delighted with the award, and pupils of all ages enjoyed the 'butterfly launch' which was held at the end of term to celebrate the achievement.

It was a positive and fitting end to the school's residency at Old Rectory Drive, the last few days of which were tumultuous, to say the least! Unfortunately, the school had to close a few days early, due to a health and safety issue with one of the ceilings. Swift action by the school ensured that the children and staff were not in danger, but an inspection by experts from Hertfordshire County Council resulted in the closure of the school for the last few days of term.

The following week, the terrible storms that swept across the UK earlier this month damaged the phone lines and caused a tree to fall on the driveway of the school: the old building really did seem to be saying that it had had enough!

And so, as the summer term drew to a close, the tired but dedicated staff spent a week packing up everything ready for the move to the new Howe Dell building next term.

## **August 2007**

After months of anticipation, there is great excitement amongst the pupils and staff of Howe Dell School, as the brand new eco-building opens its doors on Wednesday 5 September.

The school has been a hive of activity in the past few weeks. Site staff have worked tirelessly into evenings and through weekends in order to get the ground floor of the school ready for the school community to move into. They will be continuing to put finishing touches to the first floor for the first few weeks of term, but this is being carefully managed so that the school can run as normal.

The whole school community is excited about their new environmentally friendly school. The sustainable theme starts as soon as you walk in, with a reception desk made from recycled mobile phones!

The hall looks amazing with its sprung beech floor and the dining room has a sustainable bamboo floor which makes quite a stunning feature. Classrooms are kitted out with sink-tops, splash backs and coasters made from recycled yogurt pots.

### **Howe Dell innovations**

It is not only the bright new building visible above the ground that has got everybody buzzing, but also the innovative, ecologically sensitive, invisible elements beneath the ground.

Howe Dell School is the first building in the world to benefit from Interseasonal Heat Transfer designed by Icac Limited.

The school, like most buildings in Britain, will enjoy many hours of sun over the summer months. The surface of the playground will attract heat and often be more than 10 degrees centigrade higher than the air temperature on a sunny day.

Most buildings waste all the surplus heat they receive, however Howe Dell has been designed to capture it by means of water circulating through a series of pipes just beneath the surface of the playground and store it in an insulated thermal bank which has been constructed under the foundations of the school building.

The heat is stored until it is needed to heat the school on winter days when it is released under computer control through heat pumps to achieve the desired temperature.

The school, which has been designed with a high level of heat insulation, also captures solar energy through roof top collectors to pre-heat water for use in the school kitchens and washing facilities. Surplus heat from this source is also fed into the Interseasonal Heat Transfer system (especially in the hot summer holidays) and stored for winter use.

Headteacher, Debra Massey, believes strongly in education for sustainable development, and the children are learning in a unique school which is the embodiment of it.

"The children have helped to create the vision for their school of the future," said Debra. "Our curriculum has sustainable education principles at its core, encouraging pupils to take responsibility for the future of their own environment. They are very excited about actually using the school they have had a hand in planning."

#### **Nearly there...**

The excited children have been watching through the fence this month to see their timber play equipment being installed, complete with a granite bear! He will soon be joined by wooden sheep, as well as bird sculptures made of recycled horseshoes by local artist Tom Hill, which will adorn the wetland area. The bird sculptures have been kindly paid for by the local Rotary Club.

Other outdoor features include a tropical plant corner, recycled glass tiles on the pedestrian walkway, green sedum roofs on the offices and community hall and solar and voltaic panels on roof which can be seen from the outdoor environmental classroom.

The staff are certainly gearing up for the start of term, with a team-building day facilitated by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Continuing the eco-theme, the buffet lunch for the day was provided by a local company that supplies locally-produced food.

#### **September 2007**

It was all eco-systems go at Howe Dell this month: after months of anticipation, the new building finally opened its high-performance, energy saving doors to welcome excited children, staff and parents.

This is the start of an exciting new era for children at Howe Dell, as they look forward to a greener future in their new state-of-the-art eco-school.

Things certainly got off to a good start when Ofsted visited the school in the first week of term and rated the school's eco-curriculum as outstanding. The school is certainly very proud, as the report includes comments such as: "This good school promotes an exceedingly caring ethos in which pupils flourish emotionally" and "the headteacher's dynamism combined with a 'can do' attitude has successfully brought all members of the school community together towards the common goal of improving pupils' achievement."

The children are very excited to be in their new school, taking in all its environmental features. Sophie, aged 6, said that her favourite part was the acoustic boarding in all the classrooms "because it looks like cheese!"

Josh and Katie were very practical with their praise, because they were particularly impressed that the toilet lights came on automatically and the toilets flushed with recycled rainwater.

"I strongly believe that if our children can be enthused about the importance of caring for their environment from a very young age, they will carry that message with them throughout their lives. I'm proud that Hertfordshire is setting the benchmark for other authorities with this exciting new building," said David Lloyd, Executive Member for Education.

### **October 2007**

Now that school life has been underway for over half a term at the new Howe Dell, things are starting to settle down. The children are becoming accustomed to their new eco-environment, and are thrilled to be in the new building.

The children have even designed their own Eco Code, which the whole school abides by.

Headteacher, Debra Massey, is a great champion for the school, but prefers to let the pupils speak about it themselves: Year 6 students Harry, Alexis and Emily recently gave a presentation about the school to launch the Hertfordshire Forward annual conference at the Fielder Centre in Hatfield, proudly sharing the bill with Peacechild International.

### **Going green**

As well as learning about the sustainable elements of the building's design, the children are discovering new eco-features inside the building every day. For example:

- Office staff use recycled yoghurt pots as coasters on their desks
- The front reception desk is made of recycled mobile phones
- The library counter is made of recycled drainpipes
- Small squares of recycled glass has been set into the front driveway, giving the impression of lights up the centre of a runway
- The classroom storage trays are made of sustainable materials
- Many cleaning products and other supplies used in school are environmentally-friendly

- All carpet used is recycled
- Terry-towelling nappies are used for the babies that are looked after in the baby room

Connecting the inside of the building to the outside, 'The Runway' is a long ramp which provides disabled access to the playground. It can be used by disabled and able-bodied people alike, so the children can go out to play together. The signs around the school are accessible too, as they are also in Braille.

The sunny October days have been perfect for using the outdoor classroom, a space which aims to encourage children to learn in different ways. It has a weather station and the children have a close-up view of the photovoltaic cells.

The good weather has also given the children the opportunity to explore Kingfisher Island, the wetland area in the corner of the playing field. Any recycled rainwater that is not used to flush the toilets makes its way to this wetland area, where the children can study and learn about local wildlife.

To adorn the wetland area, the school has had two bird sculptures donated by the local rotary club. The sculptures, a one metre high heron and a slightly smaller duck, were made by local artist Tom Hill. The children also have outdoor play equipment, wooden sheep and a huge granite 'stroking' bear which they can sit on when they need a hug!

As a thank you from the University of Hertfordshire for the contributions that Debra and her students have made towards a research project, Gavin Maughfling, artist-in-residence at the School of Education, has produced two paintings for the school.

The paintings mark the transition to the exciting new eco-building and commemorate the much-loved previous location at the old rectory in the centre of Hatfield.

The reminiscences of former and current pupils about the old school site were the inspiration for the first painting:

"I remember the open fires in all the classrooms – we used to dry our clothes by them after the rain."

"It was an enclosed world – just trees: no cars, no roads and no houses."

The second painting takes its inspiration from the bright, breezy feel and great sense of space of the new building: pupils say the building gives them "space to think."

The two pieces of artwork are intended to be viewed together, so hang side-by-side in the main hallway of the new school.