



INSPIRING HEALTHY HAPPY COMMUNITIES ST MARY'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL, MANCHESTER

The project to redesign and build the new Key Stage One playground at St Mary's Church of England Primary School saw BuroHappold Engineering work with the children, families and teachers to create a space that promotes the happiness and wellbeing of the children, while enriching their creative learning. BuroHappold's team worked with the school as part of our Sharing of Skills Programme, which dedicates time to delivering projects in communities that are most in need.

The vision for the design development was to fully involve the children directly in the design, contributing to their understanding of making and shaping places, as well as enabling them to absorb knowledge and create memories. Our team's approach sought to involve the pupils with a range of engineering principles we work with daily, demonstrating how they can be employed to create quality, healthy and happy spaces.

This approach aimed to develop the children's communication skills, understanding of the environment and sustainability, as well as an awareness of the role of engineers, architects and designers.

The initial stages of the project included introducing pupils to different spaces to inform the design of the playground. In order to strengthen the principle that learning can take place both in the classroom and further afield, our team encouraged outdoor learning, taking the children on an exploratory walk to nearby Hulme Garden Centre to look at a range of different design features and explain how these affect the spaces they occupy. While at the garden centre the children took part in a series of sessions that investigated how design interventions affected their sensory experience of space, with the results captured in a series of drawing and making exercises.

CLIENT

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

COLLABORATOR

Manchester School of Architecture and places

SOS TIME AWARDED

9 Days

PROJECT FOCUS

Refining and leading the way for learning

BUROHAPPOLD ENGINEERING

This session allowed the children to understand how senses – light, smell, noise and touch – related to design principles, as well as enabling our team to observe how they experienced space.

Using the earlier work at the garden centre as the basis for initial designs, the pupils then built a series of temporary structures to include in the playground. This allowed them to directly experience the difference to their environment and understand how they had impacted on it. By working in this manner we were able to see a huge transition in the way pupils viewed their space – with original ideas for the play area ranging from swimming pools and slides, ideas moved on to solutions including installing willow structures that provide shade and absorb ground water.

Throughout this project our team has encouraged the pupils to be curious about the natural world that surrounds them, combining elements of art and science to help the children observe, empathise, visualise, construct and reflect on ideas and outcomes that they have created together.

Following on from our work with the school on the design, we then installed the new playground over the summer holidays ready for the next academic year. The project is a real demonstration of how successful spaces are created through people centred design, involving communities from the very outset to deliver projects that enhance wellbeing and quality of life.

