

Within two decades, **London** has revolutionised the prospects it offers children. When New Labour stormed to power in 1997 as the first left-wing government for eighteen years, a sixteen-year-old completing final school exams (General Certificate of Education, or GCSE) in London had a sixteen per cent chance they would achieve five A* to C grades – compared to 45.1 per cent nationally. Growing up in London was a barrier to academic success; one not singularly explained by higher rates of poverty, and one that prevented school leavers to progress on into college and higher education.

London schooling

UNITED KINGDOM — TEXT: ISABELLE PRIEST, ILLUSTRATION: SYLVAIN TEGROEG

TOUR GUIDE

Exploring a city, region, or theme

In the last eighteen years, however, there has been a dramatic turnaround. Now, disadvantaged children in inner London are more likely to go to university than better-off peers elsewhere. London's GCSE results have not only caught up with the improving national standards of 63.2 per cent five A* to C in 2014, but outpaced them by 1.8 percentage points. It is an international success story: London is currently the only capital city in the world where pupil achievement is higher than the national average. So what's its secret?

Factors affecting performance are being hotly debated. Conclusions range from the high levels of immigrants and ethnic minorities who see education as a route to social mobility; the good supply of young, motivated teachers; through to the low prevalence of private schools. Others simply quote improvements in teaching.

To those with a bleary eye on architecture, however, the unparalleled investment in buildings during

this period is notably missing from the list. On a tour of Zaha Hadid's Evelyn Grace Academy in Brixton after it won the 2011 Stirling Prize, one of the teachers told me that they did not believe architecture improved exam results. However, given that this period has coincided with what one former education minister called 'the biggest wave of new schools since the Victorian era', it surely had some influence. Investment in school buildings over the past eighteen years has been phenomenal. Not just in London, but in the country as a whole.

Three policies in particular (see timeline this page) have transformed them: the launch in 2000 of City Academies, a type of self-governing school; the €74 billion fund from 2004 to 2010; and most recently, the right-wing-led coalition government's Priority Schools Building Programme, which limited refurbishing/rebuilding ambitions to just 261.

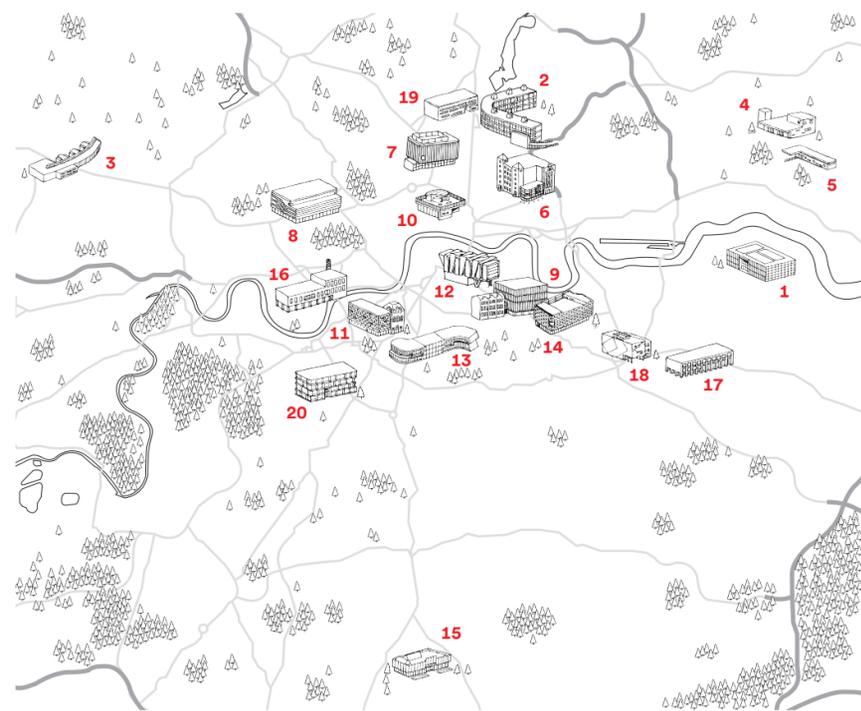
Many recipients have been in the capital, and alongside specific London-centric education-led

initiatives, dozens have redeveloped their buildings and improved. Here are the best examples.

In the early days of London's educational transformation, Britain's big-time architects were hired in to stamp their mark on Labour's flagship policies. There was a lot of variation. Our tour begins on the outskirts at the launching project, **Business Academy Bexley (1)**. Opened in 2002, and the UK first school designed by Foster + Partners (there are now nine), this school set out the government's blueprint for 21st-century schools: mammoth buildings combining all facilities – from classrooms to sports halls – under one roof, brought together by an atrium, or in this case, three. Foster's corporate HQ-style steel and glass design radically rethought the traditional school by introducing internal courtyards for gathering, classrooms with movable walls, public use in out-of-hours and connections to 'real world' experiences, such as a miniature stock exchange. ▶

TIMELINE

- 1997 Tony Blair for New Labour elected
- 1998 Sure Start – early education, health and family support through outreach and Children's Centres
- 1999 Fresh Start initiative for failing inner city schools
- 2000 Excellence in Cities launched to tackle under-achievement in urban areas
- 2000 City Academies launch as self-governing schools funded directly by central government, free from local authority control
- 2002 First three City Academies open
- 2002 Teach First teacher training scheme launched in London
- 2004 Building Schools for the Future launched with promise to invest €74 billion to refurbish/rebuild every secondary school and half of all primary schools by 2020 (actual investment overruns)
- 'City' removed from Academies
- Building Bulletin 98 and 99 outline good school design practice, including provision for outdoor learning and shared community use
- 2007 Gordon Brown becomes prime minister
- 2008 National Challenge targets 638 'failing' state secondary schools with 'no excuses' warnings to improve GCSE results or face closure
- 2010 David Cameron becomes prime minister in Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government as New Labour complete 203rd academy
- The Academies Act leads huge and rapid expansion of academies, including provision for Free Schools, set up for and run by parents
- Building Schools for the Future programme scrapped, suspending plans at 715 schools
- Priority Schools Building Programme to rebuild/refurbish only 261 schools by 2017
- 2012 Baseline Design introduced to standardize schools and minimize costs; restrictions on room sizes and storey heights, bans on curved forms, dog-leg walls, glazed curtain walling and ETFE roofs.



1 BUSINESS ACADEMY BEXLEY (2002)
Architect: Foster + Partners
Address: Yarnton Way, Erith, Kent, DA18 4DW
Info: www.fosterandpartners.com



2 MOSSBOURNE COMMUNITY ACADEMY (2004)
Architect: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners
Address: O100 Downs Park Road, Hackney, London, E5 8JY
Info: www.rsh-p.com



3 WEST LONDON ACADEMY (2006)
Architect: Foster + Partners
Address: Bengarth Road, Northolt, London, UB5 5LQ
Info: www.fosterandpartners.com



4 WILLIAM BELLAMY PRIMARY SCHOOL (2006)
Architect: DSDHA
Address: Frizlands Lane, Dagenham, RM10 7HX
Info: www.dsdha.co.uk



5 JOHN PERRY NURSERY AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE (2006)
Architect: DSDHA
Address: Auriel Avenue, Dagenham, RM10 8BS
Info: www.dsdha.co.uk



6 CHISENHALE PRIMARY SCHOOL (2007)
Architect: Ryder Architecture
Address: Chisenhale Road, Bow, London, E3 5QY
Info: www.ryderarchitecture.com



7 ST MARY MAGDALENE ACADEMY (2008)
Architect: Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Address: Liverpool Road, London, N7 8PG
Info: www.fcbstudios.com



8 WESTMINSTER ACADEMY (2007)
Architect: AHMM
Address: The Naim Dangoor Centre, 255 Harrow Road, London, W2 5EZ
Info: www.ahmm.co.uk



9 ADDEY & STANHOPE SCHOOL (2010)
Architect: HKR Architects
Address: 472 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6TJ
Info: www.hkrarchitects.com



10 GOLDEN LANE CAMPUS (2008)
Architect: Nicholas Hare Architects
Address: Golden Lane Campus, 101 Whitecross Street, London, EC1Y 8JA
Info: www.nicholashare.co.uk



11 CLAPHAM MANOR PRIMARY SCHOOL (2009)
Architect: dRMM Architects
Address: Belmont Road, London, SW4 0BZ
Info: www.drmm.co.uk



12 PHOENIX PRIMARY SCHOOL (2010)
Architect: HKR Architects with John Pardey Architects
Address: Marlborough Grove, London, SE1 5JT
Info: www.hkrarchitects.com



13 EVELYN GRACE ACADEMY (2010)
Architect: Zaha Hadid Architects
Address: 255 Shakespeare Road, London, SE24 0QN
Info: www.zaha-hadid.com



14 TIDEMILL ACADEMY AND DEPTFORD LOUNGE (2012)
Architect: Pollard Thomas Edwards
Address: 11 Giffin Street, Deptford, London, SE8 4RJ
Info: www.pollardthomasedwards.co.uk



15 THE HAYES PRIMARY SCHOOL (2014)
Architect: Hayhurst and Co.
Address: 98 Hayes Lane, Kenley, Surrey, CR8 5JN
Info: www.hayhurstand.co.uk



16 CHELSEA ACADEMY (2010)
Architect: Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Address: Lots Road, London, SW10 0AB
Info: www.fcbstudios.com



17 STATIONERS' CROWN WOODS ACADEMY (2012)
Architect: Nicholas Hare Architects
Address: 145 Bexley Road, Eltham, London, SE9 2PT
Info: www.nicholashare.co.uk



18 ELTHAM HILL SCHOOL (2013)
Architect: Hawkins+Brown
Address: Eltham Hill, London, SE9 5EE
Info: www.hawkinsbrown.com



19 STOKE NEWINGTON SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM (2011)
Architect: Jestic + Whites
Address: Clissold Road, London, N16 9EX
Info: www.jesticwhites.com



20 BURNTWOOD SCHOOL (2014)
Architect: AHMM
Address: Burntwood Lane, London, Wandsworth, SW17 0AQ
Info: www.ahmm.co.uk

(London schooling)

Moving chronologically and north of the river to Hackney, we find Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners' more experimental approach at **Mossbourne Community Academy (2)**. Located on a triangular site, it is one of the largest timber-framed buildings in the UK, but disguised as a Pompidou by external suspended metal walkways, and yellow and blue paint. The V-shaped plan turns its back on the adjacent railway to face the park for peace and tranquillity. Mossbourne, perceived by some as ugly and others like the mechanisms of an upright piano, has become one of the star academies. In 2011, 86 per cent of GCSE students received five A* to C grades, leading Lord Adonis to remark, 'Hackney parents used to fight to get out of Hackney schools, now they fight to get into them.'

Foster + Partners pops up again, several of its own schools later, on the other side of the city in Northolt, at the dramatically different **West London Academy (3)**, completed in 2006. Abandoning the steel and glass of Bexley for a warm red cedar cladding, West London accommodates more than 1300 students and 200 staff. It brings together a nursery, primary, secondary, special needs school, community sports centre, as well as adult-learning facilities. The layout creates a sense of community and continuity between these different groups through its six-winged arrangement along a single spine with six double-height 'enterprise zone' internal courtyards.

Jumping back across to an area only absorbed into London in 1965, the **William Bellamy Primary School (4)** and **John Perry Children's Centre (5)** are two similar projects also completed in 2006 by the then-young London practice DSDHA. Seeds were planted nine years previously with the Sure Start initiative to build support places for preschool children. These schemes – the John Perry with its glowing facade and soft, ply internal walls, and the William Bellamy with its celestial aluminium cladding and colourful animal graphics – radiate the hope of a new beginning for Dagenham.

Although smaller in scale, a similar effect is felt at Ryder Architecture's extension at **Chisenhale Primary School (6)** in Bow, east London. The single-entry school had been placed in special measures before the project was initiated, but was turned around. This compact infill provides better ICT facilities and visitor and staff rooms. Clad in copper at the first floor, the building takes many cues from the original Victorian red brick building, but distinguishes itself by the continuous glazing at ground level, tapered corner and projecting windows. It is a sophisticated response to a school brief that quite regularly results in garish colours and shapes.

Which leads us – with the exception of Feilden Clegg Bradley's 2008 **St Mary Magdalene Academy (7)** in Islington – to a cluster of good, bright and cheerful schools completed between 2007 and 2010. The first, AHMM's **Westminster Academy (8)** is in a gritty neighbourhood in the heart of London. Another self-contained school, it demonstrates the effectiveness of renewal. Within one year of opening, the percentage of pupils achieving the five GCSEs standard soared from 23 to 42 per cent. The school is designed as a long, rectangular block with a 'marketplace' linking communal areas to the full-height atrium. Its open internal configuration is claimed to allow students to take control of their education, while its stratified exterior of green-to-yellow-tiled bands provides a civic landmark. Figures published in 2008 even suggest that crime had dropped by fourteen per cent in the vicinity.

'Foster's corporate HQ-style steel and glass design radically rethought the traditional school.'

Leaping across to Deptford in south-east London, HKR Architects' **Addey and Stanhope School (9)** similarly uses graduating coloured panels (this time in blue, hung vertically) to animate the area. The 8095 m² building contains a new entrance, reception, dining room, and sports hall. Colourful, simple, like Westminster before, its complex but legible barcode motif makes it a bit more captivating.

The remaining examples in this cluster are primaries: Nicholas Hare Architects' **Golden Lane Campus (10)**, dRMM's **Clapham Manor (11)**, and HKR/John Pardey Architects' **Phoenix Primary (12)** in Southwark. Of these, Clapham Manor is the most brilliant, and was rightly shortlisted for the Stirling Prize. It is a 927 m² free-standing addition to an existing, standard-issue Victorian school in the south of the city. The four-storey building plugs into the three-storey original through a series of stairs, lifts, and voids. It's the rainbow-coloured, brick bond-patterned cladding, though, that turns an efficient plan into something magical for young children and the cityscape beyond. The Phoenix Primary School is intriguing for its decision to split the cantilevered first floor facade into pink and blue panels. It's elegant and subtle, but somehow reminiscent of the separate boys' and girls' entrances of days gone by.

Further west, Zaha's prizewinning **Evelyn Grace Academy (13)**, with its running track slicing through the zigzag section, signals an end to the convention-breaking, brave new school architecture of the noughties. From 2010, schools take on a more durable appearance and serious tone, cast into stature by the new Conservative coalition in 2012. Colour fades away in an architectural equivalent of settling down. Exceptions are the perforated metal facades' golden matt-effect at **Tidemill Academy, Deptford (14)**, by Pollard Thomas Edwards and glimmering **The Hayes Primary School (15)** in Croydon by Hayhurst + Co, but the need to grab attention has passed.

Three of the final projects are brick and lack full-height glazing. The first two – FCBS's **Chelsea Academy (16)** and Nicholas Hare Architects' **Crown Woods Academy (17)** in Eltham – are again whole-school projects and stunning for the sense of tranquillity they impart from their dappled brickwork, repeated window settings, columns, cloisters, arcades, and courtyards. Near the latter, and where we began our tour, Hawkins\Brown's **Eltham Hill School (18)** opts to lose this tranquillity in favour of a bold, geometric, and on trend, red and blue brick structural polychromy. This three-storey project replaced a 1960s extension while retaining the 1920s original, but perhaps more interesting is what Hawkins\Brown has organized for pupils in terms of learning opportunities: work placements in the office, construction industry careers events, and a student competition to design artwork for the atrium. Nevertheless, the portico and spaciousness over nine 'pavilions' probably make Crown Woods the most attractive to actually attend.

Concluding our tour, the final two projects were completed in 2011 and 2014, respectively. While still conforming to a stricter appearance, they are Brutalist. **Stoke Newington Academy (19)** by Jestico + Whiles is an 80 per cent refurbishment, 20 per cent extension for additional classrooms, a new entrance, and sports complex. It is characterized by offset strip windows and a Cor-Ten steel facade; robust enough to complement the adjacent red brick and bush-hammered concrete. Meanwhile, south of the river, AHMM's **Burntwood School (20)** in Wandsworth, like Crown Woods, uses an arrangement of four-storey pavilions dispersed by lawns, playgrounds, and gardens. Classrooms are arranged in each block along a central corridor with voids and double-height spaces; the plan's regularity is followed through to the elevation with faceted precast concrete panels that correspond to the 7.5-metre module. The simplicity of the exterior is brought to life by colourful tiles at the entrances and inside. ◀

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

EUROVISION: ESTONIA

What happened after the famous Tallinn Ten changed the face of architecture in Estonia in the 1980s? Guest-editor and dedicated A10 correspondent Triin Ojari, director of the Museum of Estonian Architecture, reflects on the situation after the crisis. How does the up-and-coming generation of architects redefine the role of the architect? In what way is the quality of public space a crucial issue in the contemporary city of information flows? And how can Russian cultural heritage be best dealt with, now that the Russian presence at the country's borders is looming once more, despite the nation's independence since 1991?



↑ Liberty Square by Alver Architects, 2009

INTERCHANGE

Under 40, but with a lot of experience. KOKO's debut at Expo Hannover in 2000 with a perpetual mobile pavilion set their career in motion in Estonia. Since then, they have wisely escaped the shopping malls and office blocks that came with Estonian building boom and focused on the transformation of cultural heritage and housing. Now they have won the Young Estonian Architect Award. So what's next? And what's that little door in the kitchen of their office?



↑ Estonian Maritime Museum by KOKO, 2012

TOUR GUIDE

To take the pulse of architecture in Glasgow today, one must investigate its urban core, an impressive 19th-century grid. But one must also see the conference centres and sports facilities being built on the site of the city's now redundant docks, and the new social housing breathing fresh life into its post-industrial working communities. Culture and education hold a big place in contemporary Glasgow, and throughout the city there are fine examples of new galleries and studios, schools and workshops – both bold conversions of existing buildings and new creations – that respect the context yet bring fresh ideas and new facilities to this ever-changing, dynamic city.

SECTION

Brick

...and much more. A10 #63 issue will be published 1 May 2015.