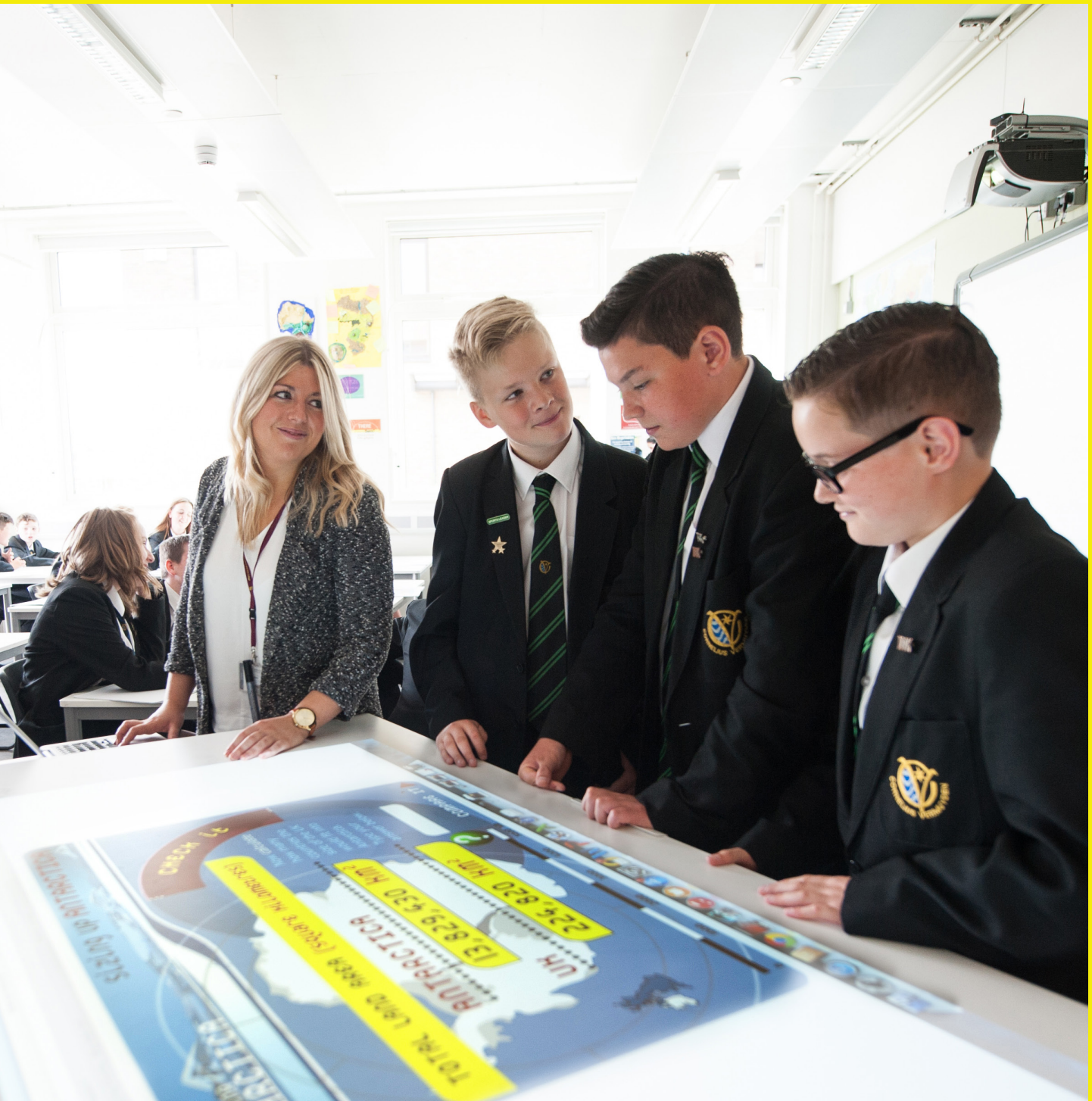


SKANSKA



Essex Schools

**Not just a shiny new building: Life and learning
at Cornelius Vermuyden School**



Overview

Success has come quickly for the new Cornelius Vermuyden School in Canvey Island, Essex, UK, since it was handed over in 2012 by the Skanska-led consortium responsible for creating it. Results have improved, demand for places has gone up and the school has converted to an academy, giving it more autonomy and access to greater government funding.

Impressive though these facts are, they are the result of the way the school delivers the vision of headteacher Carol Skewes to put the school's 900, 11-16-year-olds student at the heart of everything it does. In this context, the 21st century facilities of the school and the students' evident delight to be learning in them have driven the other improvements. The beauty of the architecture is also striking, giving one visitor a sense of 'purposeful elegance' that Carol Skewes quotes with pleasure.

The school, named after the 17th century Dutch engineer responsible for the seawall and dykes made Canvey Island habitable, was originally built in the 1970s. By the late 2000s, it had become a mismatched and run down collection of disconnected buildings scattered around the site, and was selected for the then UK government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) program.

Skanska and its partner RM plc won the BSF contract for four schools across Essex, including three PFI and one design and build, as well as a 26-year-operating contract covering hard and soft FM* in three of the schools. At Cornelius Vermuyden, a £22.5m development budget provided the opportunity to unite the whole school in a world-class facility that transformed the educational experience of local kids.

* Facilities Management

However, Carol Skewes' vision for the school extends far beyond the building: "I wanted us to do something genuinely different, and not just the same school in a shiny new building. We wanted to give teachers genuine flexibility to experiment with different pedagogic approaches without losing the balance with traditional teaching methods. We also wanted to provide safety and security for the kids without turning the school into a prison."

Working closely with the new school's architects, Nicholas Hare, Carol infused the new structure with a few simple but effective principles:

- One building with a logical flow and easy access between clusters for the different subject groups, with spaces within the clusters that can flex for different sized groups.
- **Every space is a learning space** – wherever you go in the school, individuals and small groups find space to work outside classrooms when they need to. In carefully designed corridors. In the canteen. In the grounds. Whatever the task or the learning style of the individual, there'll be a great space for it.
- **Innovative design** – the science department is based on 'Faraday Principles',

with a hypothesis room for brainstorming, laboratories for experiment and a 'superlab' that can be opened up into a massive space for collaborative working.

- **Technology, technology, technology** – the latest iMac equipment pervades the school, with networked links to every classroom supplied via a long-term ICT contract with RM. At the front of the school building, the ICT suite, where students learn to write computer code for apps, games and other programs, is given equal prominence to the multimedia resource area, which offers Internet access as well as a library of 8,000 books. An immersive room, which allows teachers and students to flood a 3D space with images, sounds and videos, stimulates creative writing, brings to life scenes from Shakespeare and Science, and provides a radical new outlet for Photography and Media.
- Sports and other activities, from 38 acres of landscaped sports fields in which the school is set, to a dance studio complete with mirrored wall and an auditorium that was recently the venue for a catwalk show, the school's extra-mural capabilities are second to none.





During the design process, the head's ambitions sometimes put finances under pressure and several tough commercial decisions had to be made. An unplanned climbing wall was funded by the school working with the Skanska ID team to find the most cost effective way to deliver it without affecting the construction program.

Once on site, the three-stage construction program on the other side of a hoarding from the working school was also very challenging. 'We spent two years working on a building site,' says Carol Skewes, 'and the truth is that we lost some of the potential students from Canvey island who didn't want to come here at that time. But we always had a strong relationship with Skanska and we always looked for solutions to the things that came up.'

The physical design of the finished school and its grounds highlights the importance of Carol Skewes' input. 'We wanted to give students a living sense of the arts and I was determined to find ways of recognizing their work,' she says, leading us past a beautiful triple helix sculpture that sets the tone for the white walled, double

height, glass and steel arcade that serves as a dramatic student art gallery. 'We put some leather couches in and the kids all asked if they could sit on them. They were very excited when we said they could.'

Showing the students they are valued in this way has had a clear impact on their behavior. The number of exclusions is significantly lower and, even after three years, the fabric of the school is clean and unmarked by vandalism, due equally to the Skanska FM team and the incorporation of strong asset management and lifecycle cost thinking throughout the whole solution. The designs included three of the highest scores ever given by CABE (the UK government's Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and provide a very strong interplay between school design and ICT, supporting current and future developments in the curriculum.

For Carol Skewes and her busy team, the culture of logging all maintenance issues has been tricky to embed, but the partnership with Skanska is strong and the new school is both







a strong physical presence and source of pride for the whole community. ‘The old school was dire and, despite my initial philosophical reservations about PFI, I know we wouldn’t have been able to achieve any of this without it.’

The project in brief

Located in the small community of Canvey Island, Essex, England, the Cornelius Vermuyden School comprises a collection of new and refurbished buildings. The school was completed in three phases.

• Floor area	7,898 m ²
• % New build	78%
• % Refurb	19%
• % Retained	3%
• Construction start	May 2010
• Construction end	February 2012
• Capex	£22,517k
• Total FM per annum	£394k

The Essex Building Schools for the Future program

Essex is northeast of London and is one of the UK’s most populous counties. Skanska and our joint venture partner RM Plc hold the contract to redevelop schools in Essex as part of the former UK Government’s Building Schools for the Future (BSF) program.

Essex Local Education Partnership (Essex LEP) is a special purpose company set up to deliver educational infrastructure projects in Essex. Shareholders in Essex LEP include Essex County Council (ECC), Skanska, RM and Amber Infrastructure.

A £73m contract for the development of the first four schools (three PFI, one Design & Build) was signed in May 2010 and the schools were handed over to the client in spring 2012.

Essex LEP are currently working with ECC to deliver a range of projects in Essex including primary and secondary schools and also special education needs schools. The strategic partnership agreement with ECC remains in place until 2020.

Photography Grow Co. (www.justgrow.co)

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