

In 2012 Kensington Prep school set out to equip their girls for a changing world. Following a three-year exploration of teaching methods, they commissioned ArchitecturePLB to design the physical environment to facilitate these changes. An ambitious programme of refurbishment was designed to 'create more opportunities for girls to experience self-directed learning, independent exploration and collaborative work.' The result has been to advance their thinking and provide spaces that not only allow for innovative teaching methods but also embrace health and well-being in the modern world.

### Explore Floor

In February 2016, ArchitecturePLB completed the 'Explore Floor' a large, flexible space designed to encourage independent learning.

The space is brightly coloured with colour themes inspired by Central America, East Asia and Africa. Bespoke floor pillows and moveable foam block furniture can be configured to suit any group size and activity and fold out scribble walls are designed to promote collaborative working.

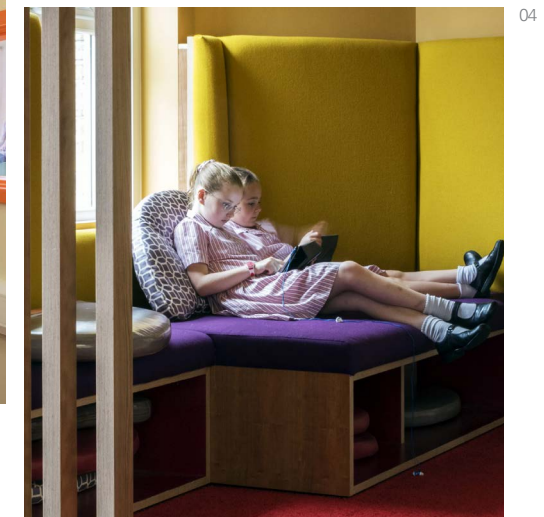
The space is kitted out with the latest technology, containing interactive learning stations at different heights as well as a fully equipped sound lab for the girls to explore video and sound media.



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01 Explore Floor with bespoke foam furniture and moveable pillows  
02 Scribble walls provide space for collaborative working  
03 Specialist sound lab looks onto the main space



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- 01 'Cosy Corner'  
 02 'Forest refresh' theme provides biophilia  
 03 Agile furniture allows classrooms to be easily reconfigured  
 04 Shared breakout space

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## Exemplar Classroom

Following the Explore Floor, ArchitecturePLB were commissioned to create a set of exemplar classroom spaces as part of the school's refurbishment programme.

Working with the school, ArchitecturePLB carried out a combination of teaching and work environment research to find a creative solution to complement the school's drive to do the best for their students. The design breakthrough occurred when the need for one desk per pupil was reduced by combining the need across two classes. Tests requiring desks are held one class at a time and are not onerous to schedule. The classrooms are average UK size and even with the opening up to a shared breakout area, do not allow for much flexibility in furniture or settings.

Research into the teaching environment came, in the main part, from the publication *'The Third Teacher' 79 Ways you can use Design to Transform Teaching and Learning*. The most appropriate and exceptional ideas were cherry picked and developed, to create a space designed to improve the health and well-being of its users;

- **Shuffle the deck** – Change the location of regular activities so children can explore new surroundings with their bodies and their minds.
- **Bring the outside in** – Transport the community, the landscape, and faraway places into the classroom with visuals and objects that call them to mind.
- **Make peace with fidgeting** – Think of it as brain development, which it is. Then think of how to accommodate it in the classroom.

- **Make classrooms agile** – A learning space that can be reconfigured 'on a dime' will engage different kinds of learners and teachers.
- **Build a nest** – Children need comfort just as much at school as they do at home. Give them a soft, quiet and cosy area to play in by themselves or with a few friends.

Biophilia and its effect on health and wellbeing is rarely considered within traditional classroom design. This simple theory researched by Bill Browning and captured in the publications *'The Economics of Biophilia'* and *'14 Patterns of Biophilic Design'* prove that connections to nature improve our lives. Through scientific research it has been proven to reduce blood pressure, better attentional focus and improve healing rates. Submersion in nature even for just minutes shifts the brain into another mode and allows for the eureka moment. Although real is better, representations of nature suffice. The classrooms benefit from large windows and good daylight but being in central London offers no significant view of nature. As a consequence, a corner of the classrooms have been designed in a 'Forest Refresh' theme, complete with real plants.

The result is a design that excites the users, broadens the appeal to learn and accommodates personal learning and teaching styles to facilitate maximum success.