

Watling Academy – Western Expansion Area

Giving generations of young people the 'very best start'

£34m

/ Project value

February 2019

/ The project commenced

February 2021

/ The project completed

Situated in the “heart” of the Western Expansion Area (WEA) of Milton Keynes, Watling Academy is the largest secondary school to be built in the Buckinghamshire town. Funding for the £34m development was provided by Milton Keynes Council in order to meet “substantial demographic growth” arising from the continued expansion of the WEA. The new purpose-built, 1,800 capacity school consists of a large three-storey super block with separate sports facilities including playing fields, and expansive car/cycle parking. This new modern facility will provide “generations of young people with the very best start in their academic journey”.

The brief

This project was procured through the LGSS Framework, which Milton Keynes Council (MKC) is a full partner and co-owner of. In line with MKC's “commitment to provide local services”, we were appointed to design and construct the Watling Academy project as part of the Whitehouse Development Scheme.

The decision to create a new school was based on the increasing demand for secondary school places on the western flank of Milton Keynes.



“I am grateful for the hard work and flexibility of Milton Keynes Council and those at GRAHAM to maintain the momentum with the main build over the last few months.”

Ian Bacon
Watling Academy Head of School

“Watling Academy is a key part of the council’s plan to provide high quality education for all children as our city expands.”

Cllr Zoe Nolan
Cabinet Member for Children and Families

The challenges

The coronavirus pandemic presented obvious challenges during construction. However, intelligent alterations to the build programme ensured that work remained on track and the new facility was delivered on programme. Additionally, a British Pipeline Agency (BPA) pipeline was located within the school boundary. Our experts developed a design solution that meant no permanent structures were built over this important underground infrastructure.

The solution

Watling Academy, which sits on an area of 10.88 hectares, will bring the “highest quality education and support” to 1,800 students. Equally, the “highest quality” design and construction processes were implemented to make it a reality. Beginning in February 2019, the £34m development incorporates a broad range of student facilities including laboratories, studios, general teaching spaces and a main hall with retractable seating. A suite of indoor and outdoor sporting facilities, notably a sports hall designed to Sport England requirements, are further significant features. The “super block” is a rectangular shape with a structural frame that consists of steelwork and SFS infills. Metal decking has been applied to the upper floors. The elevation treatments incorporate facing brick and glazed bays, while the main entrance and the stair core areas are fully glazed. Internal services fit-out and compartmentation were also part of our programme, as well as associated external works and landscaping. To meet the bespoke demands of the school, we hosted a range of consultative workshops involving teaching staff, end users and designers to ensure individual classrooms were kitted out appropriately with the right mix of interactive whiteboards, overhead projectors and specialist equipment.

Outputs & Benefits

- Virtual Reality:** We hosted a visualisation workshop for the design team, the client, stakeholders and end users. By using VR, participants were able to experience and explore the digital building model through its development, to visualise how the spaces feel and work together in real time
- Resilience:** Our team responded intelligently to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in the new facility being delivered on time
- Technical expertise:** The project demonstrates our ability to seamlessly complete a range of disparate tasks from design, to construction, interior fit-out and extensive landscaping
- Delivering lasting impact:** Our work will help to meet the “growing demand” for school places in the developing Western Expansion Area of Milton Keynes



For more information on how we’re delivering lasting impact:

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