

A **BEST** Success Story

#1 – Pix Brook Academy: The Opening of a New Free School



When Pix Brook Academy in Stotfold opened in September 2019, it became the ninth academy in the Bedfordshire Schools Trust family.

The free school spent its first year in a temporary home, in a purpose-built, standalone facility in the grounds of another BEST site, Etonbury Academy.

Meanwhile, just around the corner, farming land off Arlesey Road was being transformed into the school's new permanent home.

In less than 12 months, those fields quickly became the new 9-16 extended secondary school that 200 Year 5 and 6 pupils moved into at the start of the new academic year.

It was a remarkably quick turnaround, especially with the extra pressures the project found itself facing due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

For BEST, it was the realisation of a vision dating back six years, when the idea of a new school was first explored with Central Bedfordshire Council.

Now, the school is set to serve its community and deliver high quality education for years to come.

This is the story of the opening of Pix Brook Academy.

PIX BROOK AT A GLANCE

- 6FE extended secondary school (Year 5-11)
- 1,260 pupils when full capacity reached
- 55 classrooms
- Facilities including sports hall and activity studio available for external hire

‘ The school will go from strength to strength in its new home and deliver **high quality education** to families in this area for generations to come

– Sue Howley MBE, Chair of Governors

Pix Brook is a school built for the future

With predicted housing growth and a rising demand for school places in the area, the opening of Pix Brook Academy's new building is just the start of its journey. The capacity of 1,260 pupil places will be very much needed, with 5,400 new homes set to be built in the area over the next 10-15 years.

Principal Steve Adams said: "Obviously the school is much bigger than the need at this point in time, but Pix Brook has been built with the future in mind and the expectations in terms of housing growth in this area are significant."

Mr Adams believes building and opening the school is only half the story, and that Pix Brook will now be judged by the quality of its provision going forward.

"The next stage to continue our growth is to make sure we've got the pupils in here experiencing high quality education, and then it's about standards.

"It's about making sure that what we're delivering in terms of the quality of what pupils experience matches the quality of the place in which they're experiencing it."

BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith, who was the project manager for the build, agrees.

He said: "Pix Brook is a fantastic asset for this trust and for the community. But it will only work if it serves its community, is well led, delivers outcomes and gets outstanding Ofsted reports.

"It is lovely to have a brand new school but it's only the platform for success. You have still got to have a fantastic headteacher driving the school to be as good as it can be and I'm confident Steve will achieve extremely high standards across the board at Pix Brook."

September 2019



January 2020



September 2020



December 2019



Opening timeline:

- | | | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------|---|
| 2014 | Central Bedfordshire Council and BEST (then Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust) first explore plans for a new free school in area. | Nov 2018 | BEST appoints Steve Adams as Pix Brook Academy's first principal – he starts at Easter 2019. |
| 2016 | School bid formally submitted to the Department for Education. | Sep 2019 | Pix Brook Academy opens in a temporary block at Etonbury. Meanwhile, work begins on new school site off Arlesey Road. |
| 2017 | DfE signs off bid and the search for land to build the school on begins. | Sep 2020 | First phase of Pix Brook's new permanent building opens. Final handover follows in December. |

A facility the whole community can use

Pix Brook Academy is more than just a school – it's an amenity the entire community is able to use. BEST is making some facilities available for external hire, to meet a need in the area and help cement Pix Brook's place as an invaluable community asset. Principal Steve Adams said the school had been designed with this in mind. He said: This community needs more facilities, so things like the sports hall and activity studio will be

available for the community from the end of school and over the weekends. "My hope and plan is for these facilities to be used fully, because I do think schools should do that. "Given where we are, given the space we've got and given what we've got, we have a chance here to do that. "There's benefits for the whole community having that opportunity, and also benefits for the school, making it part of the area – and that's a really good thing."



“The sense of meeting a promise given to the community that we would open the school on time is **tremendously pleasing**”

– Dr Alan Lee, BEST CEO

BEST Chief Executive Officer Dr Alan Lee is full of pride over the opening of Pix Brook Academy.

He said: “I’m tremendously proud we’ve been able to deliver the school for the families of Stotfold, Arlesey and Fairfield Park on time, despite all the COVID-related challenges, which clearly bucks the national trend.

“Many free schools do not open on time, so the sense of meeting a promise given to the community that we would open the school on time is tremendously pleasing.

“I’m really proud of the quality of the build. The design, the sense of light and space, the environment for learning is top class, there’s no doubt about that.”

Dr Lee believes the opening of Pix Brook truly underlines BEST’s three core values: to put children first, to collaborate but compete with other schools in the trust and to provide community-based provision.

“The vision for Pix Brook goes back to 2014. We saw growing numbers of children in the area and, in partnership with the local authority, we started to think about the vision of creating a new school.

“Essentially it would be very close to Etonbury and would collaborate but also compete with them to provide cutting-edge provision for the people who live in the area. It was a pupil-led and community-demanded initiative.

“To see the project come together and celebrate the potential of the school to offer outstanding provision for over 1,000 pupils at the heart of the community for a generation to come is quite breathtaking.”



WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- A fantastic offer for the local community
- A superb platform for delivering an outstanding educational experience
- Built on time and on budget
- A great example of teamwork with the key agencies working in partnership with each other. We thank Central Bedfordshire Council and Willmott Dixon.

