



Our experience at Ballifield School

The playground at Ballifield opens out onto a shallow hillside that has long views across Sheffield and beyond. But the immediate environment however green has few places for children to sit and take shelter. The idea to develop a design for an external shelter was seen as a potential asset to the school and the beginning of a transformation of playground. The process of designing and making of the shelter involved many people and spans a six week period. The following text explains the various stages of the project.

Stage 1

Children were invited to take part in a modelling workshop where they could begin to explore ideas for a playground shelter using modelling materials like sticks, paper and modelling plaster. The children created a number of different ideas that could form the basis of the idea.

Stage 2

A mapping exercise of play space in the school grounds was designed to help establish where children may like to site a new shelter. Balloon markers were used positioned by pupils to represent areas of play and different colours matched various types of play. Rather than ask the children their opinions directly on the possible positioning of the shelter, they were engaged in an exercise that mapped current patterns of use, which could then be extrapolated by the students. This technique allows the children to take part but without relying on their educated decisions for design.

Stage 3

Designs for the shelter were then developed by the Students, who worked in close contact with the Headmaster. Looking at different materials and construction techniques, they established a design for a tiered timber bench and a demountable canopy to go above it.

Stage 4

The shelter was constructed over the school half term holiday, which shows what can be achieved in a week! This meant that the school was closed and the construction did not cause any health and safety problems. When the school returned, the shelter was complete bar small details.



Stage 5

The shelter is used at breaks and lunchtime by pupils, who run up and down the inclined ramps and sit in groups playing and chatting. During P.E. lessons, the shelter accommodates a whole class, where they can congregate whilst waiting to play games.

Stage 6

Although the shelter at Ballifield has been in place for five months, during which time it has not been attacked. After this time there have been two incidents where the wire to the gabions has been cut and pebbles removed and used to break windows around the school! Designing projects to be vandal-proof is extremely challenging, especially when people bring wire-cutters onto the premises in order to cause premeditated damage. It is advisable not to use pebbles in such projects.

conclusions

The school has an excellent shelter brought about by the combined effort of the students, pupils and teachers. The relationship between the parties in the projects remained superb throughout. The school regards the students very highly as design professionals, whilst the children still thank visiting students for their work [regardless of their involvement] whilst the students realised the potential of the school as a "captive audience to creativity."

The involvement of the school compared to buying a bench is easy to see. The pupils have played a part in improving their environment and now understand more about designing and making. In addition to this project, a number of other ideas have developed, offering opportunities to further improve schools like Ballifield and although untested, they could offer opportunities for schools to develop similar projects.

A project to try

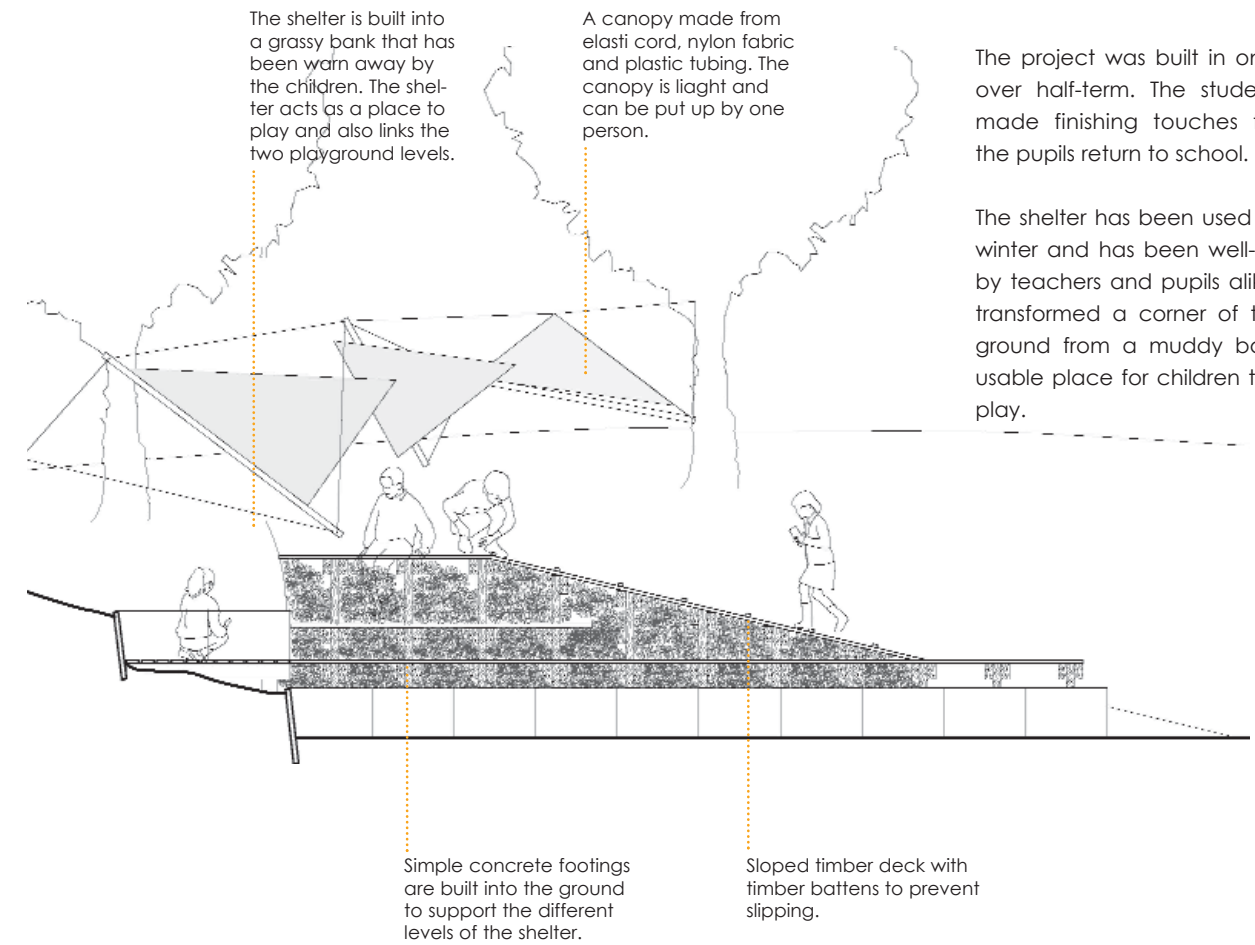
Seat and shelter

The 'Shelter thing' as christened by the pupils at Ballifield school, was designed and built by students from the University of Sheffield Architecture Department. The structure is located on a grassy bank in the playground that children use regularly. Whilst helping to protect the bank, the shelter links two levels of the playground.

During outside PE lessons the shelter is well-placed for children to wait or congregate, a place where the teacher can speak to the class.

During playtime, the shelter is a place to sit and a big piece of equipment.

when protection from the elements is needed. The canopy can be strung between the trees.



The project was built in one week, over half-term. The students then made finishing touches following the pupils return to school.

The shelter has been used over the winter and has been well-received by teachers and pupils alike. It has transformed a corner of the playground from a muddy bank to a usable place for children to sit and play.

Making it happen...



In order to get the children involved in the project, they were asked to make models of for their shelter designs.



Laying-out of the bench on the ground with pegs and string to determine it's size and position.



Getting the children involved in establishing a good size for the shelter.



Laying the footings and timber posts to hold the decking.



Securely fixing the timber joists to the posts and filling in behind the structure with pebbles held back by chicken wire.



Timber decking is nailed to the joists to provide a seating and play surface. The decking has a non-slip surface for safe use in wet/icy weather.



The canopy is demountable so that it can be taken in at the end of the day.



Timber battens are added to the sloped deck to prevent people slipping on the surface.



In the world today 2 billion people live in houses built from earth and soil.

consultations: age groups and the particular importance of talking to children

Consultations at different points in Brezoi were undertaken in order to try and encourage different groups of people to get involved. It was difficult to engage grown-ups in answering formal questions, their scepticism was far more visible than previously informal discussions.

During this process, the style of the question sheet was such that we could ask people to answer questions without needing an interpreter. The sheets were self-explanatory. This had an interesting affect on people, as they could not really say no! And if they did, we would probably not understand.

Through these consultation events, children were key to capturing the interest. Children are naturally eager, attentive and interested in new things. Their inquisitive and often naïve behaviour is essential to the growth of community interest and awareness of consultation processes. Children are the main conduits to growing interest in the local community, passing on information to parents and families. In Brezoi, during our investigations of the place, several members of our group happened across the local school. Children approached the visitors, invited them in to visit the school, they were introduced to teachers and classes throughout the school. After explaining the role of our presence in Brezoi and who we were, they left the school. Later that evening, one of the workers at the foundation recalled events at the school, that she had heard from a neighbour who's child had been at school. This exchange and delivery of information was largely achieved by the interest of the children.

It was clear to see that a lot of people were dedicated to improving the surroundings for the benefit of a community or network of communities. But a part of generating community awareness is about contacting residents that are cynical about change, that have mistrust of local government and are in opposition to local organisations. A complete stranger has the capacity to transgress these boundaries in order to elicit interest in future regeneration. This interest then needs to be transformed into belief and ultimately participation.



