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Hazelmere Infant School

Essex County Council

 **Client:** Essex County Council  **Sector:** Education (SEND)  **Location:** Colchester, Essex

The Brief

Essex County Council required a new adaptive standalone SEND building at a live primary school in Colchester, Essex. The project demanded a full turnkey solution, incorporating off-site manufacture, delivery and installation within a fixed school programme.

The new facility needed to provide a flexible SEND classroom, sensory spaces and inclusive hygiene facilities, while achieving net zero carbon in operation and full compliance with DfE guidance, Essex County Council standards and Building Regulations. Delivered within an operational school, the solution had to minimise disruption, safeguard pupils and staff, and provide a durable, future-ready learning environment.

 **Project:** New Adaptive Standalone Building

 **Location:** Colchester, Essex

 **Project Cost:** £548,298.39

 **Timeline:** Delivered within the 2025 school year programme.

 **Key Features:** Adaptive SEND classroom, sensory spaces, hygiene room, net zero operation, off-site manufacture, minimal disruption

The Main Features

Outside

- ✔ **Modern Facade-**
Plastisol-coated cladding panels, robust detailing and a low-profile roof form provide a durable, contemporary appearance that integrates sensitively with the existing school estate while reducing long-term maintenance requirements.
- ✔ **SEND-Focused Access-**
Part M compliant external doors, level thresholds and clearly defined routes ensure safe, inclusive access for pupils, staff and visitors, supporting daily operation within a live school environment.
- ✔ **Integrated Services-**
External plant areas, ventilation grilles and condensers are discreetly positioned to support the all-electric building services strategy without visual impact or disruption to school activities.
- ✔ **Low-Maintenance Envelope-**
Durable materials and finishes were selected to withstand intensive educational use, reduce lifecycle costs and ensure long-term performance throughout the building's operational life.
- ✔ **Sensitive Site Integration-**
The building's scale, form and material palette were carefully considered to respect the surrounding residential context and maintain a cohesive appearance across the wider school site.



Inside

- ✔ **Adaptive SEN Classroom-**
A large, flexible classroom space supports up to 16 ambulant SEND pupils, with layouts designed to accommodate a range of teaching approaches and individual learning requirements.
- ✔ **Sensory Support Spaces-**
Dedicated sensory rooms provide calm, controlled environments that support emotional regulation and focused learning, directly connected to the main teaching space.
- ✔ **Inclusive Hygiene Facilities-**
A fully equipped hygiene room and accessible WCs provide dignified, compliant facilities tailored to pupils with additional learning needs.
- ✔ **Clear Circulation and Supervision-**
The internal layout promotes straightforward circulation, clear sightlines and ease of supervision, supporting both safeguarding and day-to-day operational efficiency.
- ✔ **Robust Internal Specification-**
Durable finishes, secure fittings and carefully selected materials ensure the building withstands daily use while maintaining a safe, welcoming learning environment.



Challenges

The project presented numerous challenges, which we addressed with determination and creativity. Some of the key obstacles included:



Live School Environment

Delivering the project within an operational infant school required careful safeguarding, logistics planning and communication. Off-site manufacture significantly reduced on-site activity, while tightly managed delivery and installation windows ensured pupil and staff safety was maintained throughout construction.



SEND-Specific Design Requirements

The building needed to support a wide range of additional learning needs while remaining adaptable for future use. Achieving this within a compact footprint required careful spatial planning and early engagement with the client team to resolve layout, circulation and supervision requirements.



Net Zero Carbon in Operation

Meeting stringent energy performance targets required a fabric-first design approach combined with all-electric building services. Early coordination of insulation, airtightness and building services ensured compliance with net zero operational requirements.



Services Coordination

Integrating new mechanical and electrical systems with existing site infrastructure required detailed surveys and early coordination. This ensured connections were completed safely and efficiently without disrupting wider school operations.



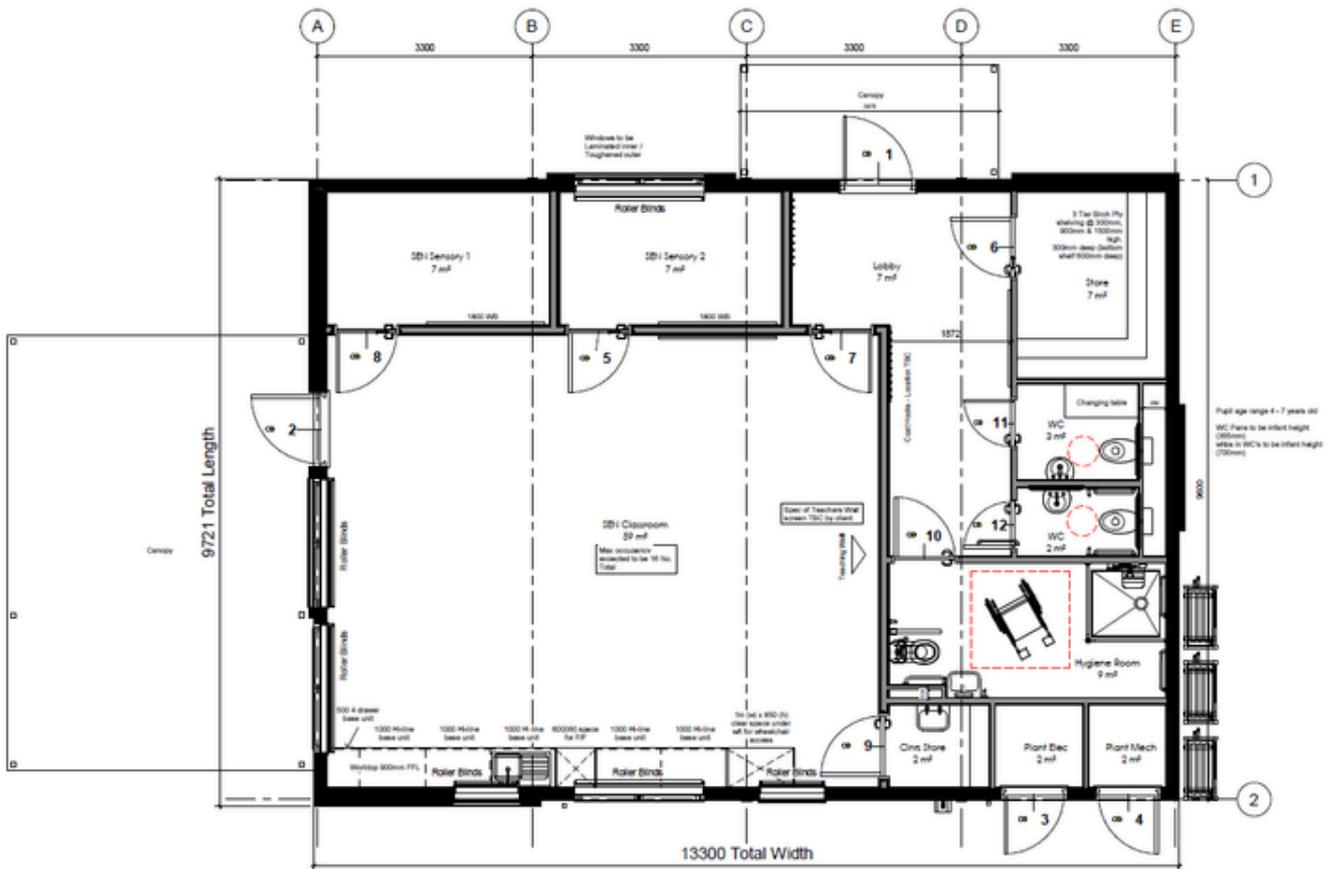
Programme Certainty

The project was required to meet a fixed completion date driven by school operational needs. Parallel design, procurement and manufacture were essential to maintaining programme certainty and mitigating risk.

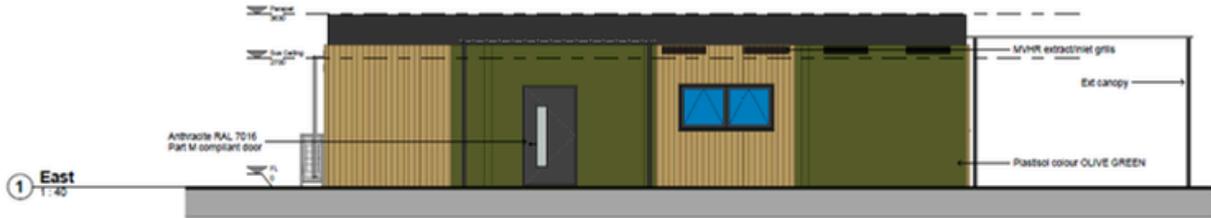


Quality and Compliance

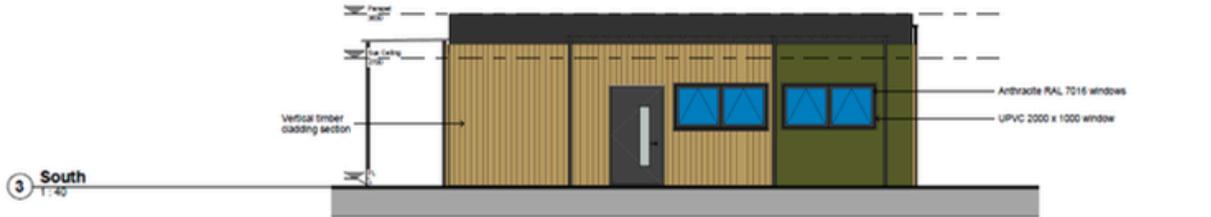
The building was required to comply fully with DfE specifications, Essex County Council technical annexes and Building Regulations. Factory-controlled manufacture enabled consistent quality assurance and reduced compliance risk prior to arrival on site.



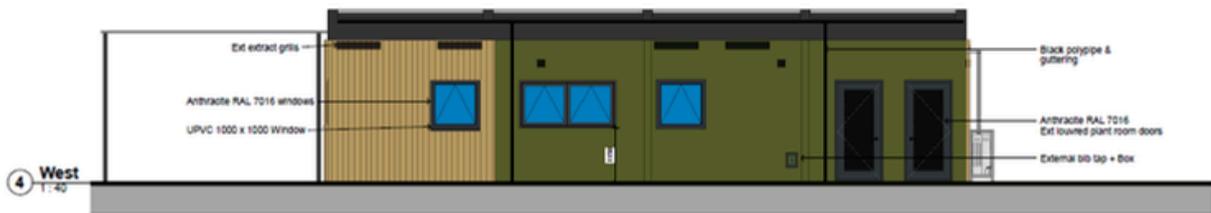
1 FL
1:1



1 East
1:40



3 South
1:40



4 West
1:40

Design Process

The design phase focused on delivering a robust, inclusive and adaptable layout that met SEND-specific requirements while maximising the efficiency of modular construction. The general arrangement was developed around a large central classroom supported by adjacent sensory rooms, hygiene facilities and plant areas. Accessibility, safeguarding and ease of supervision were key design drivers, alongside early coordination of structure, services and external interfaces to support rapid installation and long-term operational performance.



“

Thanks to everyone at Elite Systems for all their hardwork on the project. The children (and staff) love the new space!

– Steven Turnbull *Headteacher*

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The Results

SEND, Support and Shared Learning

The completed SEND expansion at Hazelmere Infant School has delivered a high-quality, inclusive learning environment within a clearly defined and well-controlled programme. The building was manufactured off site while enabling works progressed in parallel, allowing installation to take place in a single day in late October and significantly reducing disruption to the operational school.

Follow-on works, commissioning and final approvals were completed efficiently through November, enabling Building Control sign-off and handover in early December. This structured approach ensured certainty of delivery, safeguarded pupils and staff throughout construction and provided Essex County Council with a robust, compliant and future-ready SEND facility that meets both immediate and long-term educational needs.