

STRABANE ACADEMY, STRABANE

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# BEST IN CLASS

DELIVERY OF THE NEW-BUILD STRABANE ACADEMY BY WOODVALE CONSTRUCTION BRINGS A PREVIOUSLY DIVIDED SCHOOL CAMPUS UNDER ONE ROOF – AND EARNS THEM A COVETED RICS AWARD ALONG THE WAY...

Strabane Academy was founded in 2011, following the merger of Strabane Grammar and High Schools and for many years, faced the logistical headache of operating from two separate sites for many years. Woodvale Construction provided the solution with a purpose-built, 10,000 sqm, state-of-the-art education facility constructed to BREEAM Excellent accreditation. Currently accommodating 516 pupils, the school includes a learning resource centre, information technology suite, school library, canteen and a sixth form centre. The seven-hectare site has two rugby pitches, a hockey pitch and five tennis courts. There is also a fully equipped gym within the school.

**SOCIAL IMPACT**  
The Strabane Academy construction has provided both short- and long-term employment opportunities for the local community. The excellent education facilities enable teaching in a broader range of subjects while the first-class sports facilities encourage community involvement and outreach to other schools and clubs. Commenting on the project, Emmett Teggart MCIQB, Contracts Manager for Woodvale Construction said, "It was important to us that the project provided measurable community benefits and we were extremely proud that the social value we delivered was recognised by the RICS, which awarded the project the

2020 Social Impact Award. "As a local contractor, we were aware that Strabane has one of the highest unemployment rates in Northern Ireland. We appointed a dedicated Social Impact Manager, Yvonne Conway MCIQB to liaise with Education Authority, Derry & Strabane District Council, SIB's Buy Social Team, regional colleges and schools and local training providers to ensure that the project delivered real and meaningful social value by providing employment work placements and apprenticeships for local youths." The RICS judges praised the project, describing it as "a huge achievement by anybody's standards." The project began in January 2018 and was delivered in two phases. Phase one

provided the new build with phase two delivering the rugby pitches, associated site and groundworks and demolition of the legacy school building. The school remained fully operational throughout the construction of the new facilities, with phase two completed and handed over in December 2020.

There were several major challenges and risks faced by the project team members who were able to conquer via a shared risk register. Emmett said, "There were cost challenges due to extensive rock outcrops, the topography of the site (necessitating substantial retaining walls), contamination by Japanese Knotweed, etc. The scheme also involved complex phasing to allow for the continued operation of the existing school on the site, followed by the demolition of the school after decant and the completion of the site roads, bus drop-off, car parking and playing pitches." The project was in safe hands with Site Manager Wesley Lindsay MCIQB. A

long-standing part of the Woodvale team with over 40 years' experience, Wesley reflected on the Strabane project, "The success of this build is the sum of its parts...good design combined with authentic construction skills and a level-headed client."

### RESOURCES

Digital construction skills were employed to access 3D models and documents from the Common Data Environment (CDE), Sherlayer. "Collaboration in a common platform and use of a 3D model of Strabane Academy straight from the CDE was beneficial at the early stages of the project lifecycle," explained Emmett, "as it afforded our subcontractors on site a view of the project for better visual coordination for works. The Covid lockdown presented an unprecedented challenge. Post lockdown, Woodvale created a Covid-19 secure workplace. A Covid-19 Compliance Officer was nominated, and they introduced site-

specific Covid-19 Risk Assessment and Safety Operation Procedures and a back to work induction. "It was our priority at this difficult time to deliver our services effectively, efficiently, but most of all safely."

### SUCCESS STORY

"On a personal level, this has been a fantastic project to be involved with," said Emmett. "It has seen the culmination of many years of hard work between the client's design and our site management team. We were very proud to handover the project to the Education Authority and wish Strabane Academy many years of success.

David Hampton, Principal for Strabane Academy, was full of praise for the work completed, "I have no hesitation in stating that Woodvale put the interests of the whole school community to the forefront and delivered a project of the highest standard," he said. "There is no doubt that there were periods of stress due to unforeseen problems, not least the outbreak of Covid -19. However, Woodvale have remained open-minded and understanding of the school pressures, and they worked tirelessly to support any request that we presented." Emmett added, "In conjunction with our supply chain partners, we are delighted to have delivered measurable social value in the Strabane area. We know we made a positive impact within the local community as recognised by our success at the RICS awards."

### PROJECT TEAM...

- Client:** The Education Authority
- Main Contractor:** Woodvale Construction Company Ltd
- Mechanical Contractor:** Vaughan Engineering Services Ltd
- Electrical Contractor:** Vaughan Engineering Services Ltd
- Architect:** Samuel Stevenson & Sons
- Project Manager:** Samuel Stevenson & Sons



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