



# JUDGES CHOICE AWARD

**Company:** Sarah Wigglesworth Architects  
**Project:** Mellor Primary School

Sarah Wigglesworth Architects' extension for Mellor Primary School provides a series of exciting and stimulating new spaces based on the school's 'Forest School' ethos and showcases timber at its finest.

Mellor Primary School is a popular and successful school in the Cheshire village of Mellor, close to the Peak District national park. As pupil numbers have grown, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects were commissioned to design an extension to the existing school building, which was originally built in 1995. The low energy building aims to harmonise with its natural setting, using locally sourced natural materials while featuring a striking habitat wall which was designed and built in partnership with the school's pupils.

The extension is in effect a 'tree house': a cluster of pitched roof forms set on a deck extending out into the landscape. Tree-like glulam frames support not only the deck but also the roofs internally and canopies externally, making a visual connection between internal and external spaces. The new classroom and library enjoy views into the surrounding tree canopy, and external deck areas can be used as outdoor classroom space as well as for informal play. Cedar shingle cladding reflects the school's

Forest School activities and allows the expanded building to sit comfortably in its greenbelt setting.

The habitat wall is a timber framework for accommodating different types of biodiverse habitats for birds, insects, small animals and plants. It takes the form of compartments which are filled with a wide variety of recycled and found materials.

Sarah Wigglesworth Architects worked closely with the school community during the design development phase. Meetings were held with staff, parents and governors and feedback from the Mellor Pupil Parliament also informed design decisions. Construction of the 226sq m building began in September 2014 and the project was completed in August 2015.

Timber was specified as a robust and sustainable material, offering clear benefits in terms of ecological sustainability, structural performance, durability, and long-term maintenance. Just as importantly, the use of timber



cladding and vertical boarding allows the building to blend well with its semi-rural location. Tree-like glulam frames, echo the surrounding woodland and support not only the deck but also the roofs internally and canopies externally, making an expressive and visual connection between internal and external spaces. The glulam frame forms a strong visual element in the new building and makes a link between the surrounding trees and the functional properties of timber. The glulam superstructure was erected relatively quickly in the space of four days, and the timber cassettes were installed within ten days. The use of offsite fabricated components also reduced site works, and mitigated some health and safety issues associated with more traditional forms of construction. All timber manufacturers were based relatively locally: timber cassettes from McVeigh Offsite in Cheshire, the glulam frame from Constructional Timber in South Yorkshire and joinery by Romiley in Stockport.

School Governor Andy Sokill said: "Faced with a difficult challenge - which included limited finances and a testing terrain - the architect combined brilliantly with our contractors to conjure a magical building which will delight generations of children and teachers. The tree-top type classroom dovetails perfectly into Forest School philosophy and the whole eco-inspired extension has already become the focal point of the appreciative village. This imaginative and practical addition to the school proves that, despite the constraint of constant institutional belt-tightening, it is still possible to conceive and deliver a distinctive community building."

The school has also been recognised as a centre of excellence in the wider Forest Schools network, and is being used as an inspirational hub and demonstration project for other schools looking to place the environment at the heart of their learning.

reflects the school's Forest School activities and allows the expanded building to sit comfortably in its greenbelt setting. All timber specified is from well-managed, renewable sources and is FSC and PEFC-certified. The external use of timber is intended to reduce long term maintenance costs for the school. The cedar cladding to the walls and roofs, for example, is a durable and attractive surface that will require minimal maintenance. It has been left untreated, and will weather gradually over time. Untreated timber is inherently recyclable and some of the site waste (such as timber offcuts) was used to fill the habitat wall.

Energy consumption is reduced thanks in part to improved airtightness, passive ventilation, good daylighting and a thick layer of insulation, including straw bales to the habitat wall elevation - again following the emphasis on using locally sourced natural materials wherever possible. The site adjoins an area of woodland with tall, mature trees. The western red cedar shingle



For all general enquiries, please contact:

[www.swarch.co.uk](http://www.swarch.co.uk)