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CLASS ACT

The ongoing need for building, extending and improving educational establishments is creating new opportunities for top class education flooring solutions says Navjot Dhillon, Marketing Manager, Gerflor Limited.

As the population grows, the Office of National Statistics predicts that the number of state school places needed could rise by 1 million in less than ten years. Secondary school numbers are forecast to rise to 3.3 million pupils in England by 2024, along with 4.7 million pupils attending primary schools.

However, the National Audit Office has calculated that £6.7 billion is needed just to bring existing school buildings in England and Wales to satisfactory standards. Plus, the cost of restoring schools is likely to increase as older schools continue to deteriorate. A report by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) found that too many UK school buildings are poorly designed or insufficiently maintained places where children underperform and teachers consider leaving.

Building and refurbishing more schools

Clearly, many new, extended and refurbished schools are required and these schools need to be built, expanded or improved upon as economically and quickly as possible. With the increasing requirement for 21st century learning facilities that meet today's educational building design and environmental standards, building materials, including floorings, must be dependable. Products that add value, and not only comply but exceed current requirements, will help future proof tomorrow and be in high demand.

Unsurprisingly, educational buildings of modular design are a growing sector. With classrooms pre-fabricated off site using specialist materials under controlled conditions, production is considered to be streamlined and some students have been able to move into new schools or extensions to existing schools more quickly.

Complex buildings

In order to meet changing needs, educational facilities are becoming more complex. For example, a greater number of all-through schools taking pupils from 4-19 years of age are emerging where internal spaces require greater flexibility. This also applies to the shift towards how space is being re-defined in modern school buildings, impacting on floorings which increasingly need to be multi-functional. More than ever, it is important for flooring manufacturers to play a part in the specification, procurement and build process at an early stage to ensure the best possible choice of flooring.

As new style education buildings evolve, added examples of well designed schools, colleges and universities appear. For example, the main aim of Penceod Primary School, Bridgend was to deliver an environment suitable for all its pupils' needs. With the old school buildings being located across several sites serving previous generations of local people, the modern integrated facility needed to provide the best educational environment.

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With Compliments:

Gemma Beech
The Studio 4
Grosvenor House
Central Park
Telford
TF2 9TW
Tel: 01952 234 005
Email: pr@thestudio4.co.uk

Issued on behalf of:

Navjot Dhillon
Gerflor
Wedgnock House
Wedgnock Lane
Warwick
CV34 5AP
Tel: 01926 622 600
Email: contractuk@gerflor.com

New and remodeled schools therefore tend to have planned, multi-functional areas such as dining areas that open into social space, study or sports areas. Large open spaces also provide access, way-finding and collaborative areas. Such spaces, reflect the move towards naturally lit, well-designed educational environments that encourage motivation and interaction, so high performance, appropriately specified floorings play a vital role.

Floorings that get top marks

Manufacturers that design and develop flooring solutions for education are aware that hygiene, resistance and acoustic qualities are mandatory requirements for the sector. Suitable for heavy traffic, safe, easy-to-maintain and sustainable, floorings must combine technical performance with the highest environmental standards and contribute positively to the health and well-being of the building's users.

But today's floorings must also be flexible with properties suited to multi-functional spaces and sport. Point elastic resilient floorings offer comfort, safety and different levels of shock absorbency: P1, P2 & P3. It is therefore possible to match the specification to the need by using, for example, P1 multi-use floorings in primary schools where multi-function rooms are used regularly for different activities like sport and dining.

P2 and P3 floorings are multi-sport floorings. By opting for a P3 flooring, the higher level of protection, it equates to the requirements of an elite indoor sport flooring immediately absorbing impact with the floor. The addition of surface treatments that lower the friction temperature will also reduce the risk of friction burns caused by sliding on the floor. In addition, P3 floorings provide greater protection from long-term injuries.

For general school areas with regular amounts of heavy traffic like secondary schools, colleges and universities, slip-resistant, high quality, heterogeneous and homogeneous floorings are a reliable choice. Modern day wearlayers provide outstanding abrasion and scratch resistance. Plus, as better acoustic values reduce the negative impact on learning and teaching, a 16db, or higher, acoustic flooring will help reduce impact sound transmission.

For improved aesthetics, durable bright colours embodied throughout the thickness of the wearlayer are less likely to fade and vinyl floorings with inlaid, decorative mineral crystal particles and coloured chips without carborundum, remain bright and clear despite heavy traffic. In-built, protective surface treatments also give added resistance to soiling and staining and allow easy cleaning and longer lasting good looks.

Resilient vinyl floorings for education are designed to be hygienic, however the addition of anti-bacterial and fungicidal treatments will ensure maximum hygiene. Resilient vinyl floorings also provide high levels of indentation resistance. Where furniture and educational equipment are likely to be re-arranged, P1 floorings offer excellent resistance to indentation in multi-use areas and P2 and P3 floorings in multi-sport areas.

Dedicated floorings for education are therefore fit-for-purpose and ready to meet the challenges and changing needs of the many different educational establishments ranging from nurseries to higher education.

For more information about Gerflor solutions, contact us on 01926 622600 / email: contractuk@gerflor.com or visit www.gerflor.co.uk

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