



NISHKAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

Nishkam Primary in Birmingham is a Sikh ethos primary school and part of the Nishkam School Trust. It serves the inner city area of Handsworth and the surrounding community, the school itself being housed within a listed 18th century building.

The schools trust is faith-inspired, and committed to rejuvenating dilapidated buildings to use as school premises. They aim to forge partnerships with community organisations to motivate and inspire the community.

THERE ARE FOUR
NISHKAM
SCHOOLS
LOCATED IN
BIRMINGHAM,
LONDON AND
WOLVERHAMPTON.



ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES



The school is located in a pair of semi-detached houses. It has a Stucco, slate roof and is two storeys high. It has Corinthian pilasters left and right of the windows, and between the 2 houses. Each house has a central panelled door with rectangular fanlight. The first floor of each building has six sash windows with marginal glazing bars and moulded surrounds.

The modern adaptation of the building retains the original structure and faces backwards, having a large covered conservatory to create more space for the school. There is a sense of both historical eras and both architectural styles coming together in harmony, as well as creating an interesting "inside/outside" sensation.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

3% of the population of Birmingham identify themselves as Sikh compared to the average figure of 0.8% for England and Wales. A large majority of Sikhs residing in Birmingham live in the East Handsworth neighbourhood.

We met Shuranjeet Singh Takhar, local resident and culture and healthcare champion who invited us to get to know Handsworth's Sikh community.

The community is dedicated to selfless service (nishkam sewa) and spirituality, having grown since the mid-70s within the economically disadvantaged area of Handsworth. Initially, this was through building Handsworth gurdwara, which has now developed into the largest in Europe (see relevant case study). Nishkam schools' project is building on over 30 years of a community's remarkable self-reliance within an area of high unemployment and urban deprivation, in forging local community well-being and regeneration. The Gurdwara is run on a completely volunteer basis with community donations, serving up to 25,000 free hot meals a week for all.



Soho Road, the street upon which the primary school is located, in the early 20th century

REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

At Nishkam Primary School, the Sikh community has been at the heart of the design and planning. The neighbourhood has been consistently overlooked by town development plans, so they stepped in to drive the area's growth, securing funding to conserve historic buildings in disuse. Nishkam Heritage Centre is a space where new narratives about local histories are being uncovered, created and shared.

As well as serving the community, linking up together, this case study highlights how places have been rethought from their original or primary use by looking at derelict buildings that surround them. It sees value for the community's future as well as a respect for it's heritage.

REFLECTIONS

“When (developers) were doing the initial kind of clear-out of the building, they tested the paint on the outside, went through the surface level and found that yellow colour. That was the original colour of the building in the late 1800s. They decided to use that same colour for the school to develop an appreciation for what has been, and understanding that, for all of these things, it’s a part of a process, as opposed to things that happen in isolation throughout time. By looking to that colour, it’s appreciating what was, and now, what is, while trying to acknowledge the two at the same time. I think all of this links to conversations that are being had locally about the importance of heritage in helping people establish a sense of place.”

- Shuranjeet Takhar, DPhil student researching the place of power in youth involvement in mental health research

