



## EXPRESS AND STAR

16 OCTOBER 2005

School waiting for final slice of government cash for project

# £1.4m arts centre is set for go-ahead

By Kieran Larkin

A once-failing Netherton school is close to getting the go-ahead to create a £1.4 million arts centre under ambitious plans to attract international artists to the borough.

Hillcrest School and Community College has submitted spectacular designs for the Performing Arts Academy which would include a series of dance and drama studios equipped with the latest digital technology. The project is the latest achievement by the school, which has seen a remarkable turnaround since it came out of special measures in 1999.

### Exciting

"The pupils are going to have a designated space to rehearse and perform as well as a place to work with specialist equipment within the arts.

"There will be an exciting atmosphere around the building and the space will allow more students to become involved in extra-curricular activities.

"There will be more opportunities for us to bring in professional companies to work with and perform with the pupils."

The arts centre is set to be funded by £500,000 from school reserves, £294,000 from devolved capital and the £100,000 awarded for being granted specialist status.

An anticipated £400,000 from the Department for Education and Skills' Expanding Popular Schools programme would allow the project to go ahead.

The school in Simms Lane was awarded specialist arts status earlier this year and has been looking at ways of boosting services for Netherton and surrounding towns.

As well as the studios there will also be a music suite and large changing area.

Headteacher Dame Mo Brennan said: "We are looking for professional performers to take advantage of the facilities as well as the extremely talented children and staff at Hillcrest."

Head of art Samantha Shufflebottom said: "The new build is going to be fantastic for Hillcrest pupils and the community."

# DUDLEY CHRONICLE

8 DECEMBER 2005

hillcrest school  
and community college

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## School will get £1.4m dance centre

A ONCE FAILING Netherton school has been given the go-ahead to create a £1.4 million dance centre to attract international performers.

Hillcrest School and Community College was recently awarded the status of specialist school in arts and is now set to expand with ambitious plans for an International Performing Arts Academy.

The new building is to include two dance

studios, two drama studios, a music suite, changing rooms and toilets.

Ward Councillor Mahbubur Rahman said: "I welcome the proposed development for Hillcrest.

### Excellent

"It was a failing school, but now it is an excellent school. I congratulate staff and pupils - they have shown that a failing school can become successful and has also been able

to achieve a arts specialist status."

The Simms Lane school came out of special measures in 1999 and was awarded specialist arts status earlier this year.

The new arts centre is set to be funded with a £100,000 grant associated with the new status, £500,000 from school reserves and £294,000 from devolved capital.

The plans are pending to the confirmation of funding from the government's Expanding Popular Schools programme worth £400,000.



## EXPRESS AND STAR

6 DECEMBER 2005

### Dance centre gets the go-ahead

A once-failing Netherton school has been given the go-ahead to create a £1.4 million dance centre in a bid to attract international performers.

Students at Hillcrest School and Community College will soon be taught in high tech dance studios and music suites after Dudley councillors agreed the ambitious plans last night.

Councillor Mahbubur Rahman said: "I welcome this. It shows how a failing school can become a specialist school."

The Simms Lane school came out of special measures in 1999 and was awarded specialist arts status earlier this year. The new arts centre is set to be funded by £500,000 from school reserves, £294,000 from devolved capital and the £100,000 awarded for being granted specialist status.

An anticipated £400,000 from the Department for Education and Skills Expanding Popular Schools programme would give the project its final funding.



## EXPRESS AND STAR

11 JANUARY 2006

# Housing prices up as school improves

House prices have more than doubled in Netherton since a failing school was turned around by a pioneering headteacher.

Hillcrest School and Community College used to have a bad name but now it boasts a reputation as one of the best in the country thanks to the work of forward-thinking principal Dame Mo Brennan.

The rundown school was once ranked bottom of the class for its exam results, pupils were unruly and staff morale low.

People looked down their nose at the prospect of living in Netherton because the whole area suffered from a poor image.

But the transformation at Hillcrest has also improved standards in the community and now there is a high demand for homes.

### Incredible

Estate agent Beverley Southwick from the Netherton branch of Taylors said just six years ago a three-bedroom semi-detached house was on the market for between £45,000 and £50,000 but this has rocketed to around £125,000.

She said: "It's absolutely incredible how house prices have gone through the roof."

"I believe it is down to the transformation at Hillcrest because people are coming into the office saying they want to live in Netherton in order to be within the school's catchment area. As a parent with a daughter at the school I can tell you I only sent her there because Mrs Brennan is running the show and doing a fantastic job."

"The whole appearance of the area has changed, there is less graffiti and litter and the pupils look much smarter."