



## UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK NURSERY AND CAFÉ

By Karen Faux

One of the first experiences the University of Warwick Nursery had after moving into its new building was to watch the swans on the nearby lake sitting on their eggs. ‘We then watched the eggs hatch and saw the cygnets learn to swim and grow into beautiful swans,’ says nursery manager Debbie Castle.

Designed by MJP Architects for 78 children on the university campus, the nursery succeeds in maximising the beauty of its setting, with full height windows providing views of the surrounding open landscape, its lake and wildlife.

The architects worked closely with Ms Castle to achieve her vision for a building that would offer children high-quality spaces with good natural light and ventilation, and easy, direct access to the external play areas. The bright and spacious home base areas are designed to easily sub-divide into smaller play zones. They are grouped around a shared play area, which forms a focus for the nursery.

The nursery entrance leads directly into the shared play area – a large and colourful top-lit space at the heart of the building. It serves a number of functions, including a space where parents can spend time with their children in the morning and evening, and a relaxed place to meet staff.



Ms Castle says, ‘We had strong ideas about how we wanted the building to work for us and the ambience we wanted to create. We wanted a nursery building where everyone felt comfortable and at home; where parents felt welcome to come in and play with their children, or just sit and watch, and where they could meet other parents and chat.’

The centrally placed ‘shared area’ allows the nursery staff to work together as one; it is wide enough to accommodate the children’s cloakroom and storage boxes for spare clothes and personal belongings, as well as a comfortable seating area for parents or visitors. Parents often sit and read stories to their children in



**The lake is just feet from the perimeter fence, which has been constructed so that the lake can be seen through it from the nursery without disturbing the geese, ducks, moorhens and swans that live there and swim past the nursery every day**

this area before they go into nursery, and staff members bring small groups of children into this area for varied activities. With light flooding the rooms through skylights and glass walls, and bright, sunny colours chosen for decoration, the whole building feels bright, warm and welcoming.

Ms Castle says the new space has had a huge impact on how staff work. ‘Simple things like having running water in each room, and the children’s toilets being next to where they are, means that staff can encourage the children to be far more independent,’ she says. ‘We are also delighted with other facilities such as the comfortable staff room that is separate from the children’s area, and a comfortable office where I can meet parents in private. All these features enable us to provide a much better service.’