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Contracts Signed On City's Biggest Ever Schools Investment

Newcastle City Council today (July 5) signed the contract for a multi-million pound project that will transform teaching and learning.

The £180 million scheme is bringing outstanding new facilities to 16 schools across the city, which are all being either refurbished or rebuilt.

The project is managed by a Local Education Partnership made up of Newcastle City Council, Aura Learning Communities and Building Schools for the Future Investments.

It represents the biggest ever investment in schools in the city and is funded partly through the Private Finance Initiative and partly through the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Coun Nick Cott, Executive Member for Children and Young People at Newcastle City Council, said: "The signing of contracts today is a major milestone in our mission to develop educational resources that will benefit thousands of young people across the city.

"We are determined that young people in Newcastle will have the very best learning opportunities and this investment will go a long way towards achieving this."

Kirsty Thirlwell, Chief Executive of the Local Education Partnership, said: "We are delighted to have achieved financial close on such an important contract for the transformation of education in Newcastle.

"Aura fully supports the council's strategy for education in the city and we are proud to be part of a team that will leave a lasting legacy for children and young people in Newcastle."

Tim Byles, Chief Executive of Partnerships for Schools, said: "We congratulate the Local Education Partnership on reaching this milestone. This is not only good news for young people, teachers and the wider local community in Newcastle, but excellent news for the national programme as a whole.

"BSF will see every single one of our schools in England transformed, providing inspirational learning environments that help our young people to unlock the talent that each of them has and to reach for excellence."

The investment will provide:

- Imaginative and stimulating buildings, classrooms and outside spaces that encourage and inspire learning.
- Access to new technologies that support teaching and motivate pupils.
- Better sports and physical education facilities to help promote health and fitness.
- Improved facilities to enable all children and young people to achieve the outcomes encompassed within the national Every Child Matters agenda.
- A wider range of extended services, facilities and activities for out-of-school access by young people, families and communities.
- Opportunities for young people to access a wider range of vocational opportunities, including work-based learning and apprenticeships provided through the Local Education Partnership.
- State of the art facilities designed specifically to enable pupils with special educational needs to thrive and achieve highly at school.

The work will be carried out in two phases. The designs for the eight schools in the first phase have all been completed and planning permission for these schools has been granted.

The first school due to be finished as part of phase one is Canning Street Primary School, which is being refurbished and is expected to be completed by Easter 2008.

A new children's centre, offering services to families with children under five, will be set up at the school and a second will be set up at Stocksfield Avenue Primary School, which is also in the first phase of the project.

In addition to the £180 million investment an extra £22 million has been secured through Building Schools for the Future to provide new ICT equipment and software in nine of the city's secondary, three middle schools and three secondary special schools.

And an extra £1.7 million from the Big Lottery Fund and £100,000 from Kenton School will enable additional school and community sports facilities to be provided at this secondary school.

END

Notes to editors: Aura Learning Communities is a consortium including Sir Robert McAlpine, Robertson Capital Projects and PB (Parsons Brinckerhoff), all of whom are locally-based.

The eight schools in the first phase of the scheme are Walbottle Campus, Kenton School, Benfield School, Thomas Bewick School and Walkergate, West Jesmond, Canning Street and Stocksfield Avenue primary schools.

There are seven schools in the second phase of the project. They are St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School, St Cuthbert's Catholic High School, Walker Technology College, Trinity School, Sir Charles Parsons School, Gosforth High School and Gosforth Junior High School.

All Saints College is the final school in the scheme. Work to create new sports facilities at the college was completed earlier this year as part of a 'quick win'.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) is the government's flagship capital investment programme that will see every one of England's secondary schools rebuilt or renewed over the next 15 years. It is the largest single schools capital investment programme for over 50 years and will facilitate a transformation in the delivery of education.

Partnerships for Schools (PfS) is the delivery agency and national programme manager for Building Schools for the Future. PfS was established in April 2004 as a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and is operated and funded under a joint venture between the Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly Department for Education and Skills) and Partnerships UK.