Centre of the Cell opens inside Alsop's Blizard Building

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A children's science education centre has opened inside a working research laboratory in London.

The centre at the Whitechapel campus of Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry (part of Queen Mary, University of London) will offer children and teenagers an insight into what scientists actually do and how their work influences real life, through a series of interactive games.

The Centre - which was opened today (3 September) by Blue Peter presenter Helen Skelton - is free to visit and can host 40,000 visitors each year. Centre of the Cell's major funders include the Wellcome Trust, the London Development Agency, the Mercers' Company and Queen Mary, University of London.

Centre of the Cell is a giant orange 'pod' suspended within the atrium of the RIBA award winning glass Blizard Building designed by Alsop Architects.

The pod had sat empty since its completion in 2005 but has now been fitted out and reworked internally by design and exhibition consultancy Land Design Studio. The vacant blob had originally contained a dividing floor.

Visitors approach the pod via a colourful glass walkway and, as they enter, look down on the scientists working in the building's vast subterranean laboratory.

Once inside, visitors gather around a central 'nucleus' for a powerful audiovisual display, projected around the walls of the pod, which introduces them to cells - the building blocks of life. The nucleus then opens to reveal interactive games; visitors can try their hand at virtual experiments, observe real body parts and diagnose disease using high-power microscopes. More than 80 top scientists and researchers have contributed to the world class content of the Centre.

Professor Fran Balkwill is Director of Centre of the Cell and a leading cancer researcher in the School of Medicine and Dentistry. She says: 'I am so thrilled that Centre of the Cell is now open. This is a unique way for kids to get engaged with science. There's a lot to learn about science here and children will learn in a way that's meaningful and fun. 'The aim of the Centre is to inspire young people to take an interest in science, to improve their knowledge of science and perhaps to lead them to becoming scientists themselves one day.'

Local children and young people have been central to the design and development of the Centre with more than 8,000 pupils from schools in Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham contributing to the design and content.

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