Library? No, it's a big new idea store

LUKE LEITCH

It is jammed full of books and you are allowed to borrow them - but don't call it a library.

This is Whitechapel's "Idea Store", an example of a new generation of libraries designed to lure children (not to mention adults) away from their PlayStations and into the world of books.

The building was designed by London architect David Adjaye, 38, whose clients include actor Ewan McGregor and Turner Prize-winning artist Chris Ofili.

Designed to resemble a shop, the building replaces the crumbling Whitechapel Library, which was closed months ago to a chorus of complaints.

The old building, which opened in 1892, was known as the "the university of the ghetto" because of the diverse community it served and was famous for being the place where the scientist and historian Jacob Bronowski learned to read English.

However, traditional libraries are failing to attract the numbers they used to. It is hoped the new Whitechapel building - five storeys high and built at a cost of Pounds 7.3 million - will help reverse the slide.

Idea Stores have already opened in Bow and Poplar with the result that visitor numbers have increased by 400 per cent.

As well as books, the latest Idea Store offers DVDs and CDs to rent, a programme of classes, free internet access, a children's library, a crèche and a space for teaching dance and complementary therapies.

It is hoped the library will eventually be joined by Idea Stores across Tower Hamlets.

Denise Jones, the borough's councillor for culture, said: "The council is investing millions of pounds to create a network of adult education, library and information services in state-of-the-art buildings, all in local shopping centres."

Rowan Moore, the Evening Standard's architecture critic, said of the new building: "It is accessible, not patronising, crowd- pleasing but not dumb, glamorous but not glib."

www.ideastore.co.uk