

2024 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA DESIGN AWARDS



OVERALL WINNER 2024:

Aitken College, Cumberland - Junior School Years 3-6
1010 Mickleham Rd, Greenvale, Victoria, Australia

Architect: Hayball

Summary Citation

A comprehensive planning process underpinned the Aitken College project, articulated by a pedagogical vision. Its guiding design principles are intrinsically connected to the educational brief, and serve collaboration, different teaching styles and learning activities.

A gallery with an adaptable spine of exhibits and project learning foldout facilities deftly links the specialized learning hub and the common learning spaces. The spatial layout reflects a hierarchy of learning communities catering for the overall primary school to the individual student. Multifunctional and interconnected spaces work hard to resolve a complex and demanding brief. A variety of integrated external play areas offer a joyful creative approach to learning through risk taking and in turn, to building student confidence. Importantly the spaces are designed to challenge and nurture the inquisitive and developing minds of primary school children in a truly innovative learning environment.

Full Citation

A comprehensive planning process underpinned the Aitken College project. It involved and engaged stakeholders and school leadership, and articulated a pedagogical vision formalized as part of an overall masterplan. The project guiding design principles represent a solid foundation for the design features, which are intrinsically connected to the educational brief, support collaboration, different teaching styles and learning activities.

Design resolution from the macro scale of the masterplan to intimate spaces for the individual is deftly handled and well resolved. The facility provides a variety of formal and informal learning environments, organized to provide clear zoning, interconnection, and flexibility.

The building has two precincts, a shared specialist learning hub and a common learning space with related neighbourhood learning areas. The gallery space linking these precincts and the building entrance is multifunctional. It is serving as entry foyer, primary social space, exhibition area, and a space for project learning. This is typical of the approach where all spaces are hardworking providing multiple modes for teaching and learning.

The spatial layout reflects a hierarchy of learning communities. Students can seamlessly interact and identify with the whole learning community with well-designed and carefully placed common facilities. Adjacent learning commons, each with two learning neighbourhoods, accommodate year groups and individual classes. A fine grain of nooks and small pods accommodate small groups or individuals. The gallery hints at connection to the wider community beyond.

The interior palette is calm and muted with the natural feel of timber and plentiful and interesting daylighting. This restrained approach emphasizes the important participant – the student and their work.

A variety of integrated external play areas offer a joyful creative approach to learning through risk taking and in turn, to building student confidence. These spaces balance delightfully with the variety of indoor cubbies and nooks for students to retreat or perch to suit individual learning tasks whilst remaining connected to their learning group or the outside world.

The thorough design approach extends to the building's environment performance. Both active and passive sustainable features provide a light-filled, well ventilated, warm environment while limiting the building's carbon footprint. A monitor in the gallery highlights the building's environmental performance, providing a live demonstration to students of the school's commitment to the environment.

The comprehensive overall design approach ranges from the macro and micro scales incorporating sustainable design principles and a thoroughly implemented approach to the school's pedagogy. Importantly the spaces are designed to challenge and nurture the inquisitive and developing minds of primary school children in a truly innovative learning environment.