

# CARLTON LEARNING PRECINCT

LE Solution Awards Project Dossier







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Carlton Learning Precinct (CLP) has transformed a prominent but unappealing and underutilised school site into an educational, social and urban design model for inner city learning.

Carlton Primary School (CPS) is a co-educational government primary school considered one of the most 'disadvantaged' schools in the state of Victoria due to its socio economic demographic. As the rest of the suburb of Carlton has gentrified, the school has been severely impacted by the 'white flight' phenomenon common amongst inner urban schools located next to public housing flats.

The Department of Education and Training's (DET) brief not only called for the revitalization and modernisation of CPS but also to raise the school's profile, increase student numbers and relieve the 'white flight' enrolment pressure within the broader geographic area.

A key aim of the project was to create a hub of community facilities where families would connect from early childhood through the primary years. In the existing three level school building this aim was achieved by opening up tired, single classrooms and improving light, ventilation and flow. An integrated Early Learning Centre (ELC), Family Services Centre and Community Hub inhabit the welcoming Ground Floor. The urban design strategy was to activate the street level with built form and landscape to positively engage with the broader community. A new COLA (Covered Outdoor Learning Area) on the prominent street corner now becomes

the focal point for both school activities and community use and its open structure creates a permeable connection to the street and surrounds.

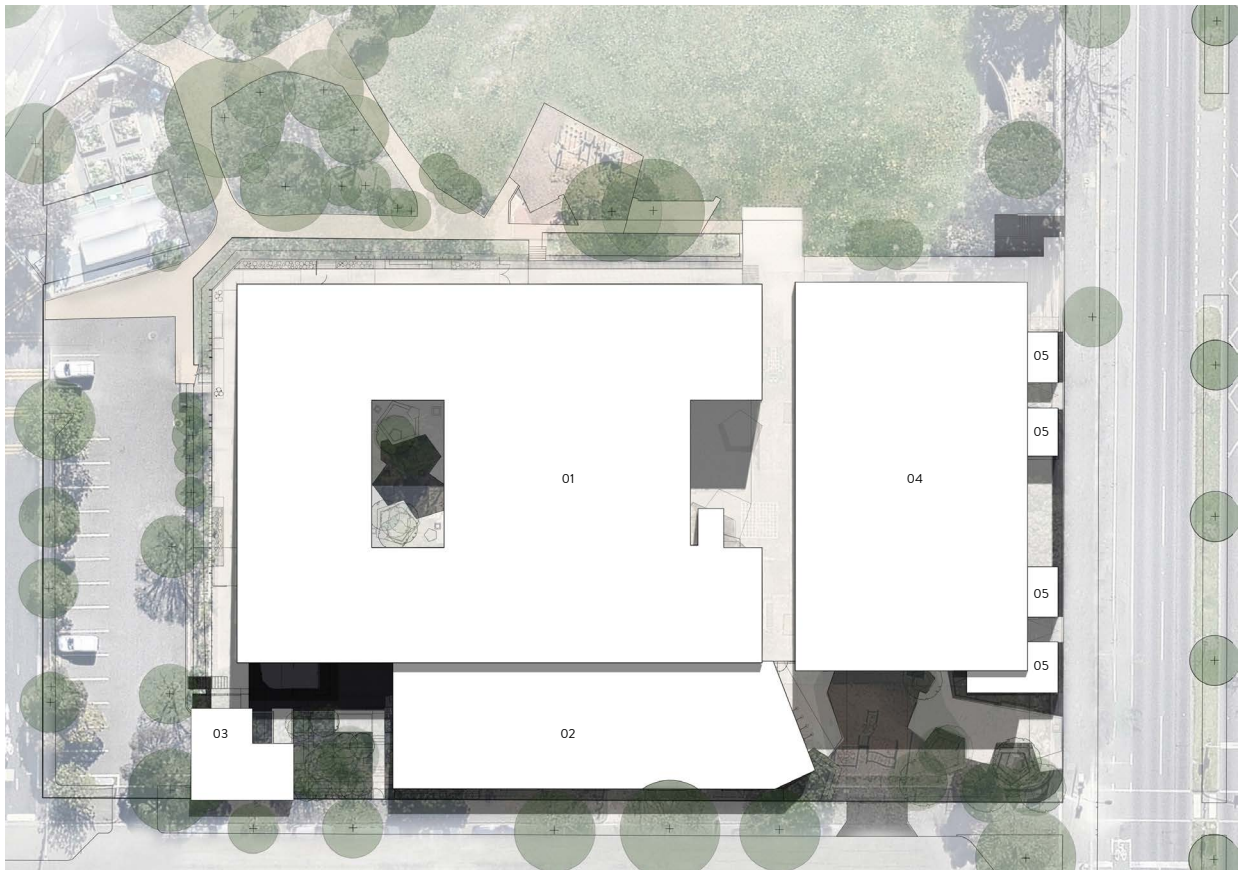
The redevelopment has brought an attractiveness and curiosity to this previously unloved corner site, creating a new face for the school, providing street presence and unlocking its urban design potential. This rejuvenation has had a direct impact on the immediate and wider community by reinvigorating this pocket of Carlton and now compliments and coalesces with the other surrounding community facilities such as the Carlton Baths and the recently reinvigorated Neill Street Reserve.

The urban design response of the built form in a multi-use urban area is sensitive to issues of mass, permeability and public interface. The complexities of building function & funding have not compromised the importance of creating beautiful built environments that serve the needs of the broader community.

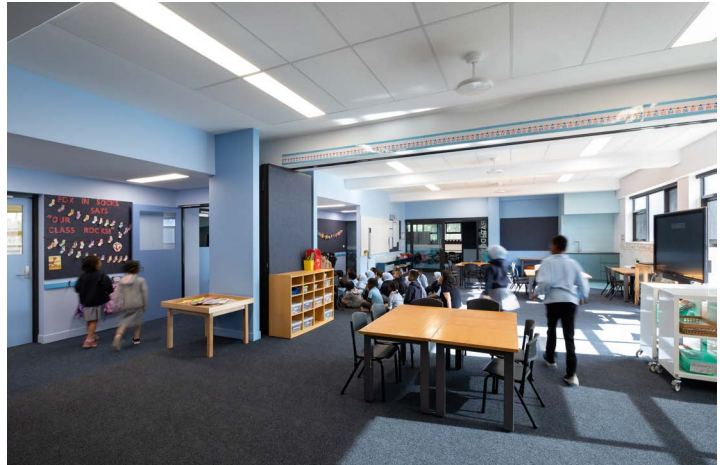
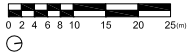
The Carlton Learning Precinct is a model for future facilities that embraces a 'whole of early years' approach to health, wellbeing and education. Such facilities can provide a welcoming heart for both new migrants and residents of Melbourne particularly in urban areas. Successful adaptive reuse of existing buildings is an ongoing opportunity for the City of Melbourne (CoM) and at the Carlton Learning Precinct, a considered and thoughtful design response has enabled a new lease of life for Carlton Primary School.



- KEY**
- 1 Ground Floor
    - Carlton Primary School (CPS)
    - City of Melbourne (Early Learning Centre)
  - First floor - CPS
  - Second floor - CPS
  - 2 City of Melbourne (family services centre) + Our Place (community assistance)
  - 3 Bike shed + Waste storage
  - 4 Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA)
  - 5 Toilet + Change room amenities



**SITE CONTEXT**





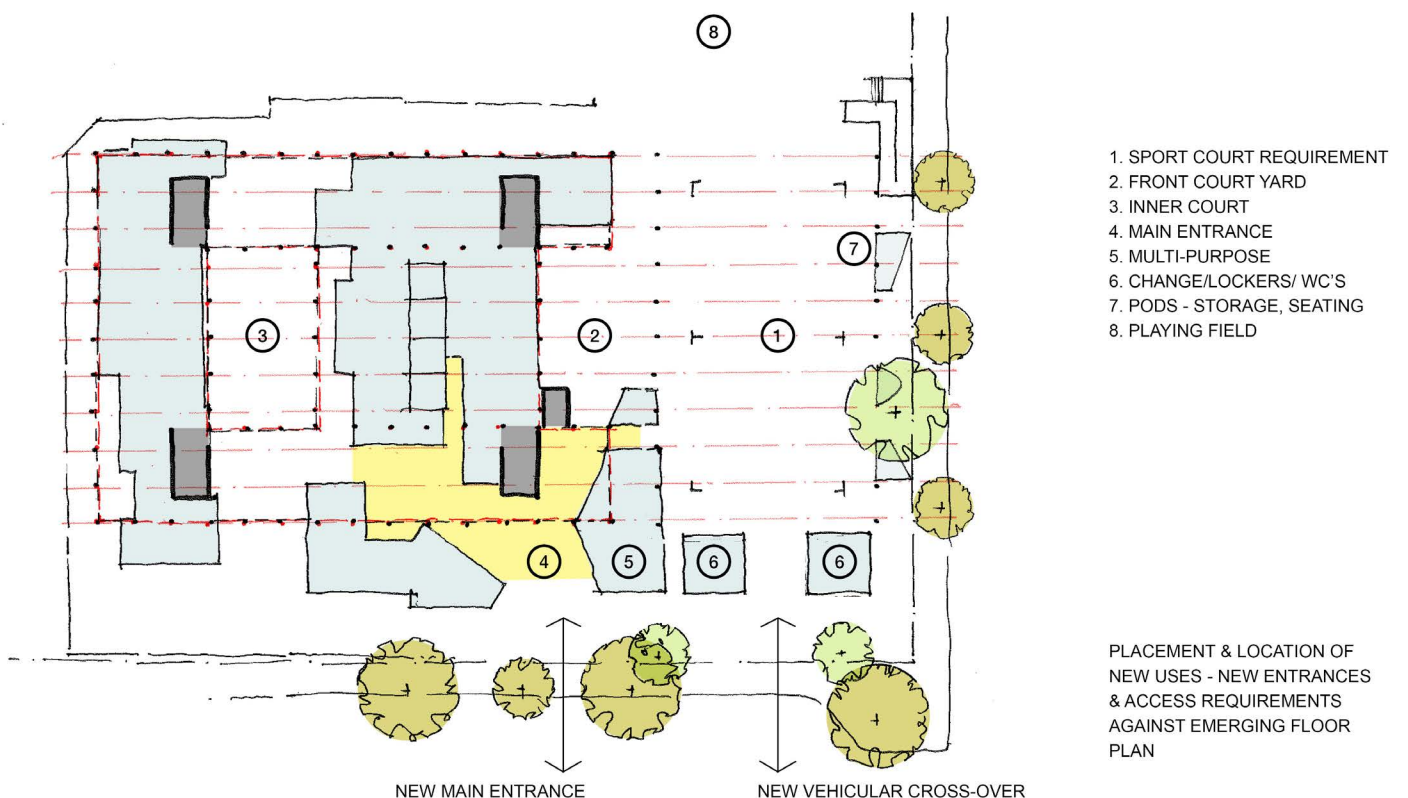
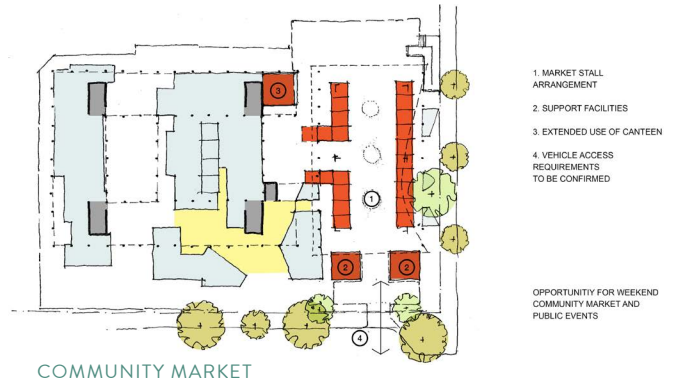
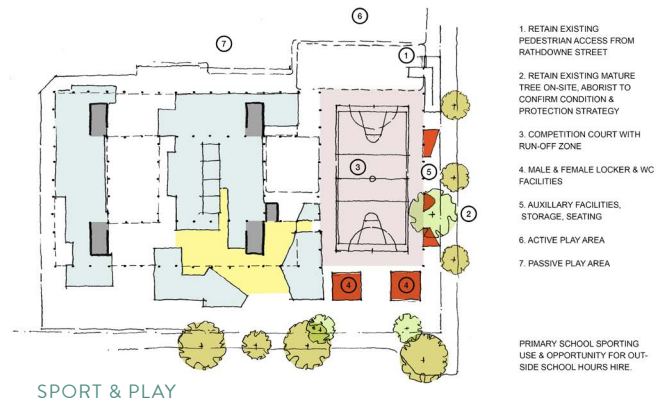
# SCOPE OF WORKS & BUDGET

The Carlton Learning Precinct redevelopment was the result of a lengthy, participatory design process that involved government and council stakeholders with the whole school community.

It was vitally important the end result reflected the unique characteristics of the School - a diverse, resilient community deserving of 21st century learning spaces to actively engage students and encourage higher levels of cognitive engagement, independence, deep thinking and self-directed inquiry.

One of the key challenges was designing for and managing multiple stakeholders - DET, CPS and the City of Melbourne with input from The University of Melbourne (UoM) and Our Place (formerly the Colman Foundation). All stakeholders were intensely involved during design and throughout the construction processes. More than twelve feasibility studies were undertaken to determine the best configuration of all site occupants. In the design stages, the stakeholder consultation focused on numerous and varied programmatic aspects of the brief:

- Ground Floor configuration and pedestrian flow through a shared entry
- Early Childhood Education briefing included adapting the existing windswept central courtyard and ground level undercrofts for outdoor play
- Conversion of first and second floor confined traditional classrooms into modern, flexible learning environments
- Proposal of an open Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA) in lieu of the required internal 'physical education space'





Partnership with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the UoM initiated pedagogical research, clinical observation, teacher practicum and action research. Opportunities arose for teacher professional development exchanges, student and university researcher interactions and student transitions to secondary schools. Staff conducted pedagogical site visits to several exemplar primary schools, reporting and analysing their findings at in-house professional development days in preparation for the change in learning environments.



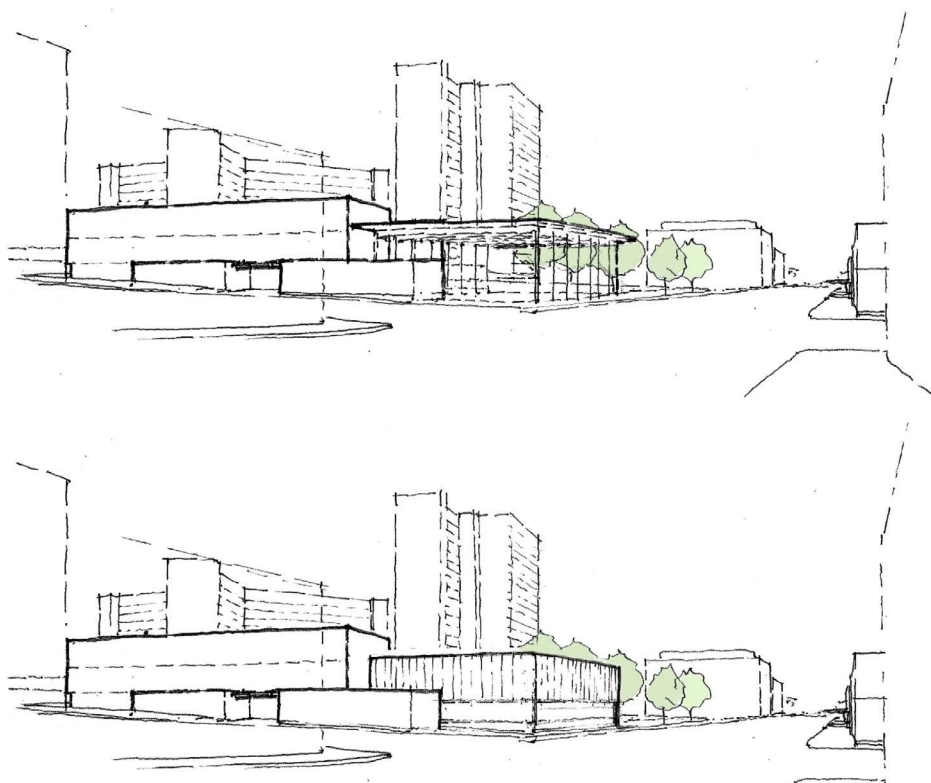
Prior to the project's completion, the staff focussed on understanding the link between pedagogy and space including strategies to maximise the use of flexible learning spaces. Prototype learning environments were created to mimic their proposed new facilities which enabled an ongoing interrogation of the design strategies. During construction, students were given a brief and budget to furnish their future learning areas with flexible furniture.



A critical challenge for the design team was to work within a DET budget and prescriptive facilities areas. The brief required a full sized enclosed gymnasium on the site without reducing the existing outdoor space. The budget would have allowed for a large metal shed with minimal windows on the prominent corner site which would have placed a significant metaphorical and literal barrier between the school and surrounds.

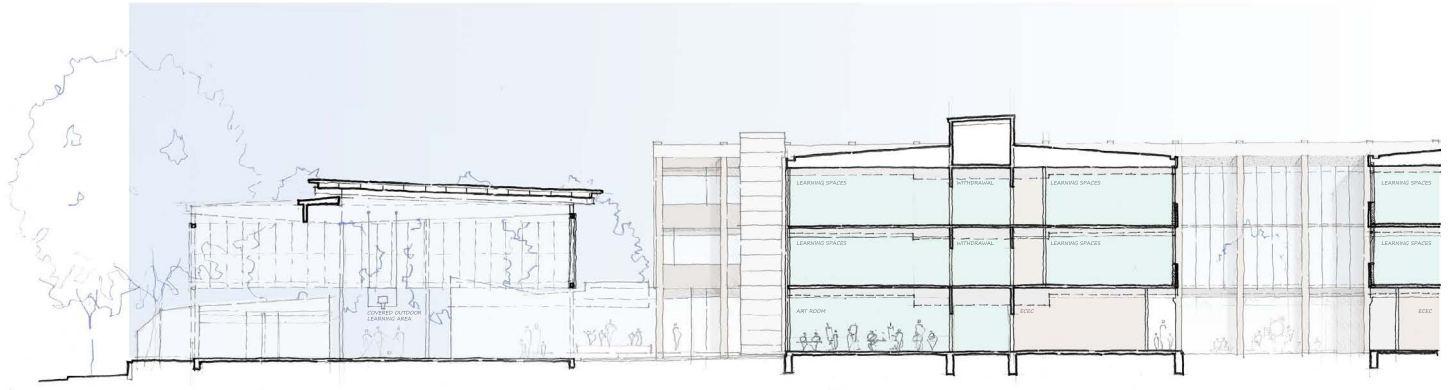
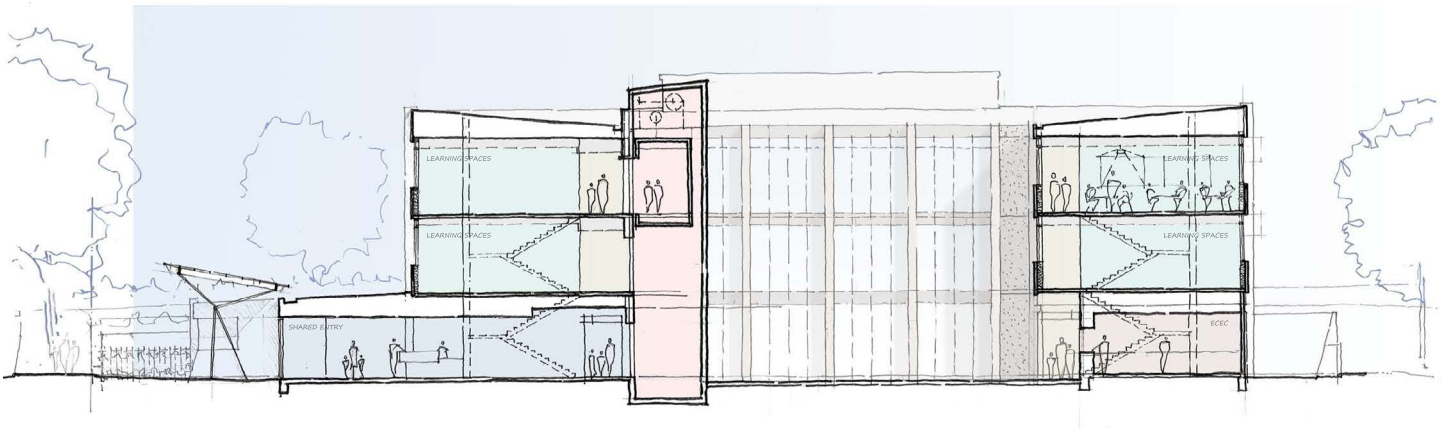


The breakthrough design moment was the stakeholders' acceptance that an open, Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA) would provide the amenity required but also facilitate the ongoing community use of the court surface for weekend markets and promote future community use.



GYM VS COLA COMPARISON

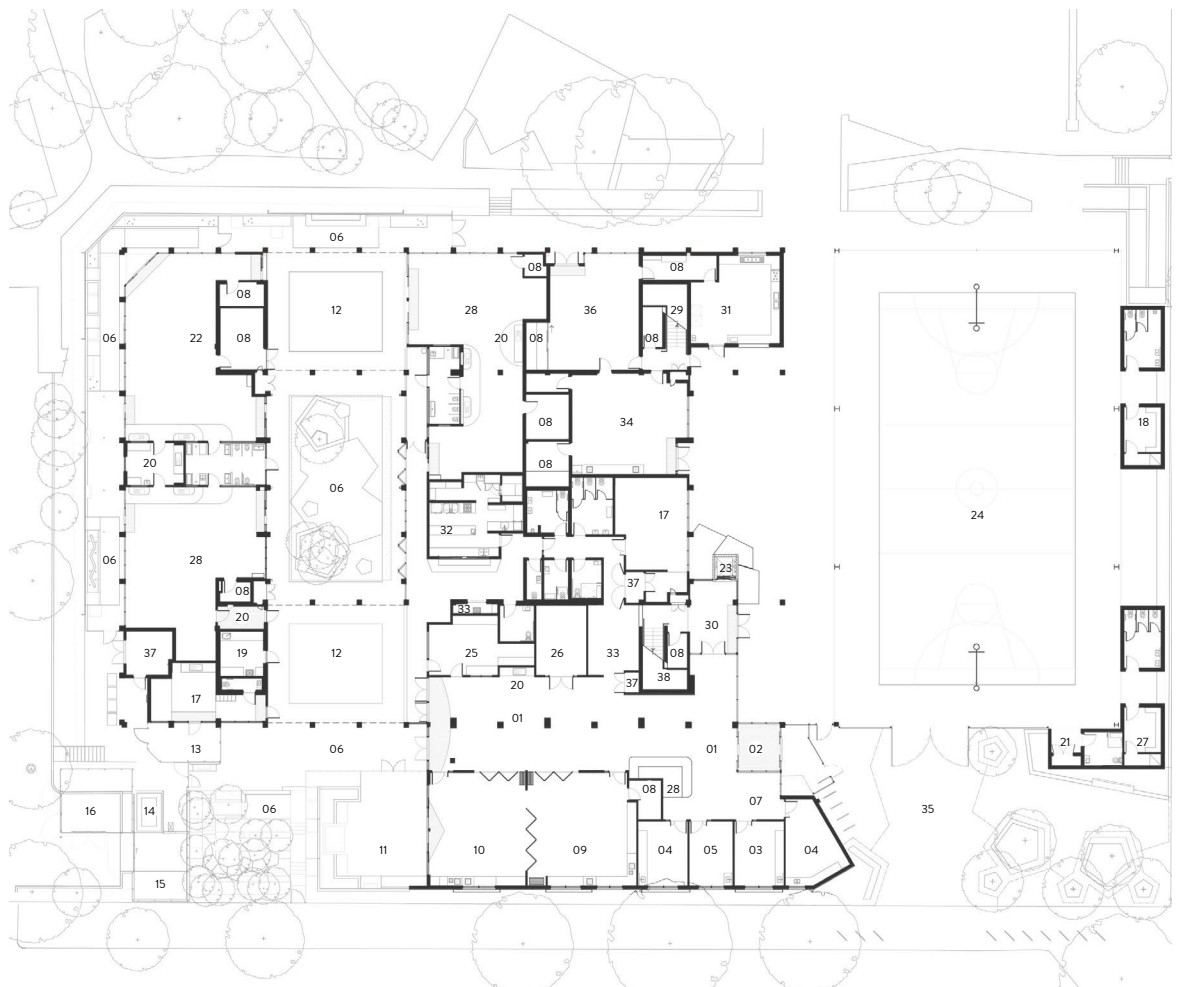




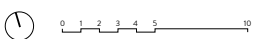
## PRELIMINARY SECTIONAL STUDIES

### KEY

- 01 COMMON ENTRY
- 02 AIRLOCK
- 03 FAMILY SERVICES
- 04 MATERNAL CHILD HEALTH
- 05 COUNSELLOR
- 06 ELC EXTERNAL PLAYSPACE
- 07 WAITING ROOM
- 08 STORE
- 09 MULTIPURPOSE ROOM
- 10 PLAYGROUP
- 11 EXTERNAL PLAYGROUP
- 12 ELC EXTERNAL COVERED PLAYSPACE
- 13 STAFF COURTYARD
- 14 WASTE HOIST
- 15 BIKE SHED
- 16 BIN STORE
- 17 STAFF ROOM
- 18 MALE CHANGE ROOM
- 19 LAUNDRY
- 20 CORRIDOR
- 21 ELECTRICAL SWITCH ROOM
- 22 ELC PLAYROOM
- 23 LIFT
- 24 COVERED OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA (COLA)
- 25 OFFICE
- 26 MEETING ROOM
- 27 FEMALE CHANGE ROOM
- 28 RECEPTION
- 29 STAIR
- 30 LIFT AIRLOCK
- 31 CANTEN
- 32 ELC KITCHEN
- 33 STORE
- 34 ART ROOM
- 35 FORECOURT
- 36 MUSIC ROOM
- 37 SERVICES



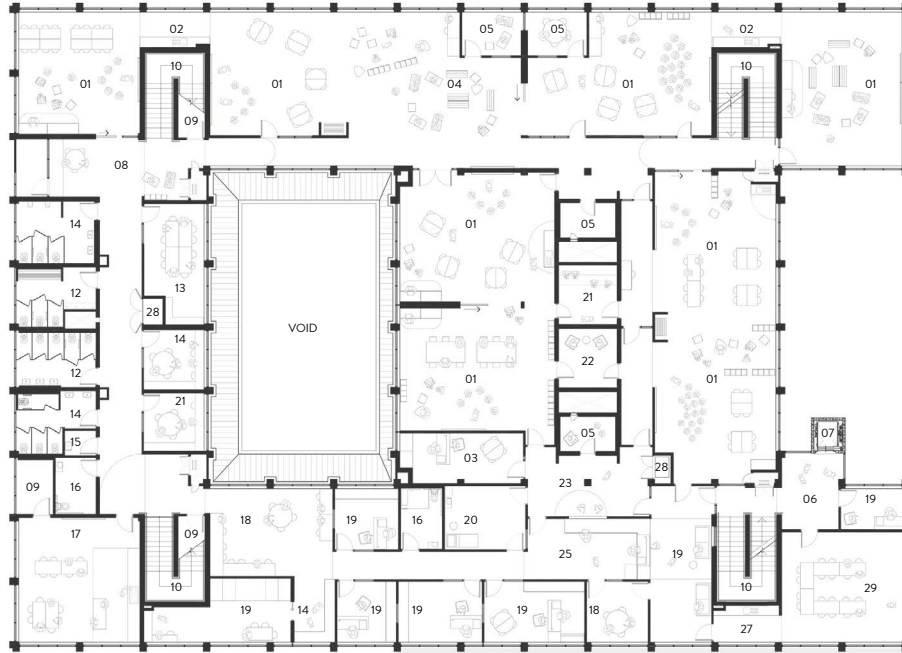
### GROUND FLOOR



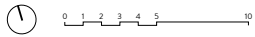


KEY

- 01 LEARNING AREA
- 02 PROJECT POD
- 03 WELLBEING
- 04 EXTENDED LEARNING HUB
- 05 WITHDRAWAL ROOM
- 06 LIFT LOBBY
- 07 LIFT
- 08 EXTENDED LEARNING
- 09 STORE
- 10 STAIR
- 11 STAFF TOILET
- 12 STUDENT TOILET
- 13 STAFF WORK
- 14 RESOURCE
- 15 CLEANERS ROOM
- 16 ACCESSIBLE TOILET
- 17 STAFF HUB
- 18 GENERAL OFFICE
- 19 OFFICE
- 20 SICK BAY
- 21 MEDIA + PRESENTATION
- 22 COSY NOOK
- 23 STUDENT RECEPTION
- 24 MEETING
- 25 RECEPTION
- 26 WAITING ROOM
- 27 KITCHENETTE
- 28 SERVICES

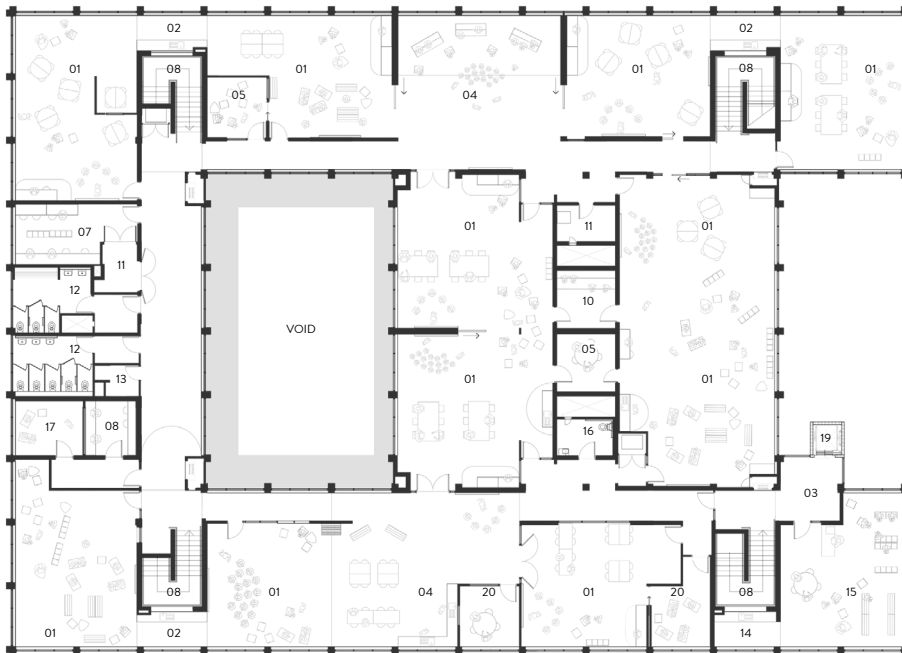


FIRST FLOOR



KEY

- 01 LEARNING AREA
- 02 PROJECT POD
- 03 LIFT LOBBY
- 04 EXTENDED LEARNING HUB
- 05 THINK TANK
- 06 EXTENDED WET LEARNING HUB
- 07 STAFF WORK
- 08 STAIR
- 09 STORE
- 10 MEDIA + PRESENTATION
- 11 SERVICES
- 12 STUDENT TOILET
- 13 SHOWER
- 14 KITCHENETTE
- 15 LIBRARY
- 16 ACCESSIBLE TOILET
- 17 RECORDING STUDIO
- 18 MEDIA HUB
- 19 LIFT
- 20 DISCUSSION POD



SECOND FLOOR







EXISTING SCHOOL - NORTH EAST CORNER

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Adaptive reuse is a growing opportunity especially for inner urban environments, so despite the existing three-storey building not lending itself to change, the decision to refurbish rather than rebuild was a considered attempt to reduce waste, with greater capital thus directed towards extensively reconfiguring and modernising the school.

Ongoing advice was sought from specialist consultants regarding the adaptive reuse, replacement or upgrade of the existing enclosure (windows, precast pebble-slab cladding), structure (to current earthquake requirements) & services (complete electrical, fire and ventilation upgrades).

Significant thought went into reconnecting the new learning precinct with the street and broader community. The entrance to the school was completely reoriented to a more prominent corner of the block with increased visibility and street presence.

The school shared the belief with the design team that the required 'box-like' gym would add further to the visual bulk already at play from the street, creating a further barrier between the school and community. The school needed something fit for purpose but open and inviting. A new COLA met the brief and the addition of a green facade on three sides added a much needed natural element and learning resource to the inner urban environment.

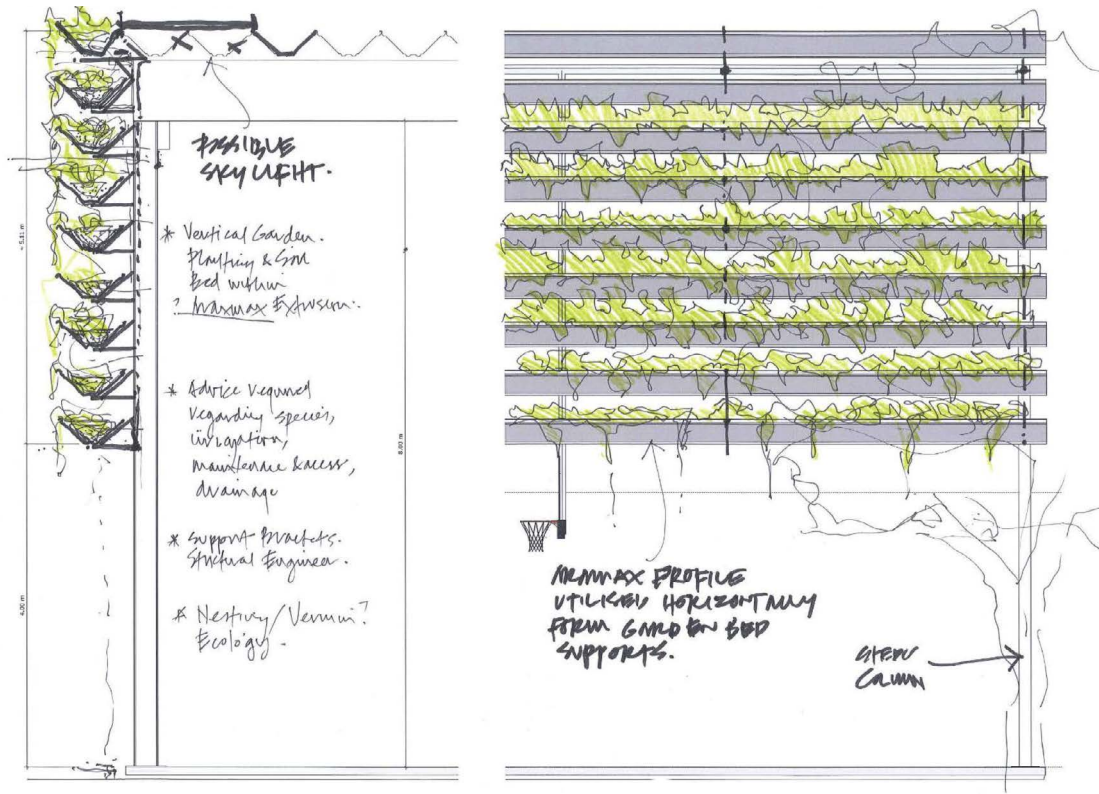


EXISTING SCHOOL - DEMOLITION



EXISTING SCHOOL - ENTRY



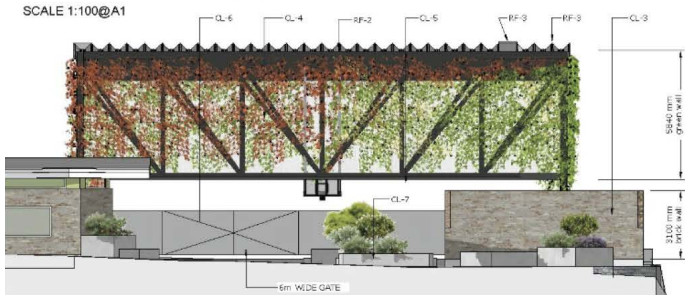


GARDEN WALL CONCEPT.



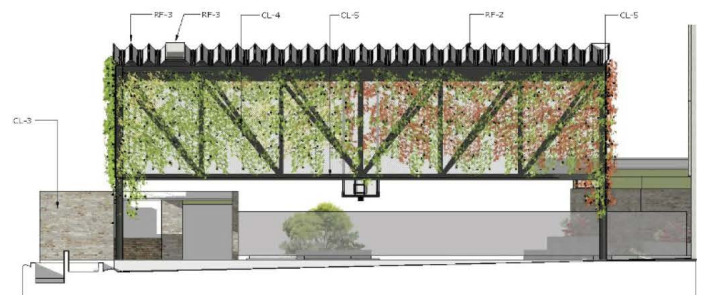
COLA EAST ELEVATION

SCALE 1:100@A1



COLA SOUTH ELEVATION

SCALE 1:100@A1



COLA NORTH ELEVATION

SCALE 1:100@A1



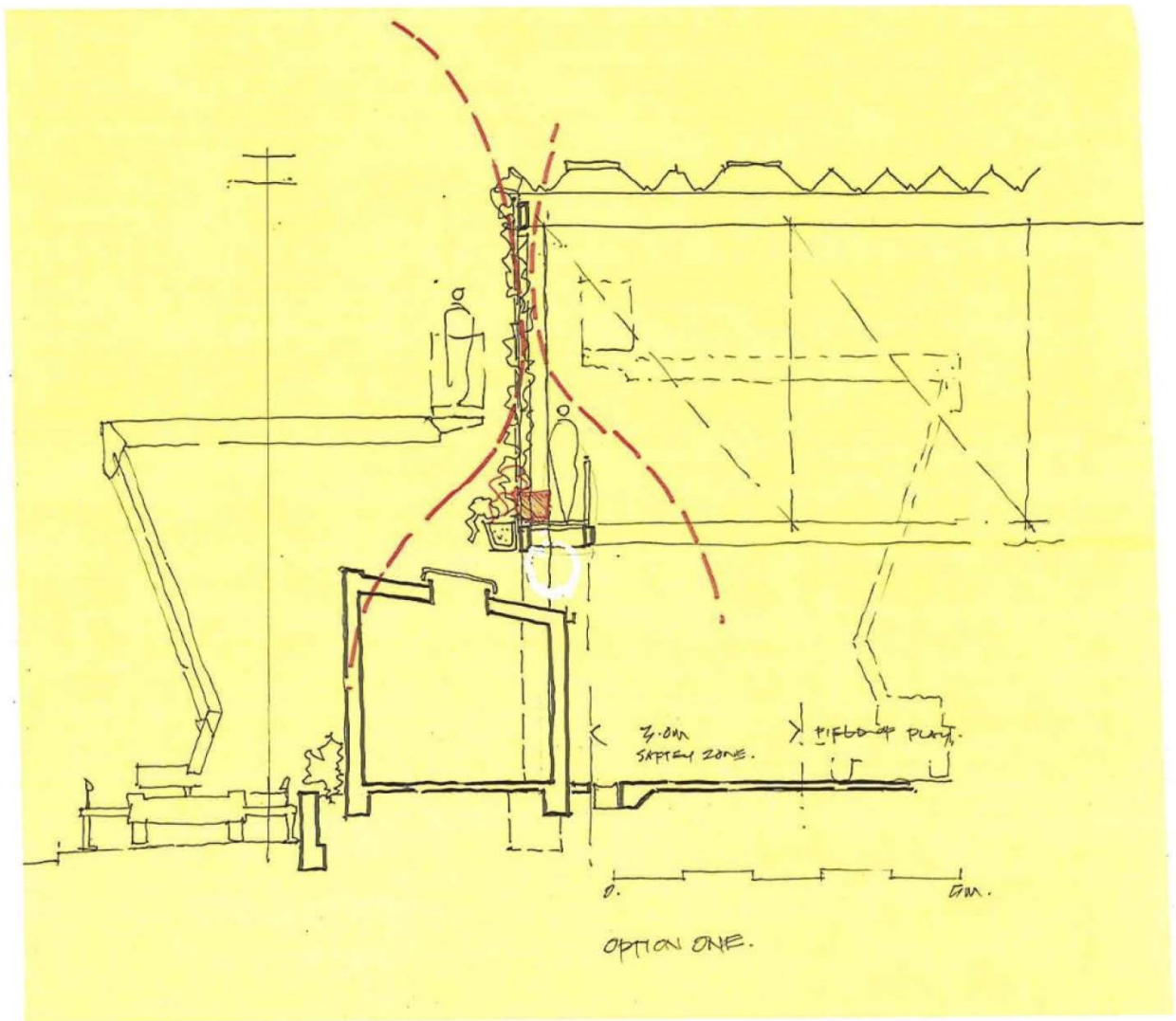
COLA WEST ELEVATION

SCALE 1:100@A1

NOTE: REFER TO STRUCTURAL ENG DRAWINGS FOR COLA STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS, LOCATION AND CONFIGURATION

NOTE: COLA - COVERED OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA





PRELIMINARY MAINTENANCE STUDIES









# EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Whilst retaining the existing concrete structure and rigid floor plate posed significant challenges, it also offered opportunities across all three levels to create a variety of learning environments that aligned with the school's 21st century educational directive - nooks/withdrawals, community facility connections, wet/cooking studios, flexible gathering spaces and much needed external covered areas. Closed, dark classrooms were opened up into flexible spaces providing greater light, ventilation and visual connection.

Staff can now exercise a range of teaching methods with increased internal glazing and large writable sliding doors that are able to open up several spaces for gathering or closed for focus groups. The quiet withdrawal and media rooms afforded by the inflexible existing structure now allow students to concurrently engage and be observed in a range of learning settings.

The result has facilitated co-teaching with students working in learning spaces that enable groupings in more collaborative and creative ways. The redesigned spaces support the 21st century pedagogies of the school's brief and better prepare students for the complexities of secondary schooling and beyond. A range of instructional practices - team teaching, peer observation and coaching have also been realised.

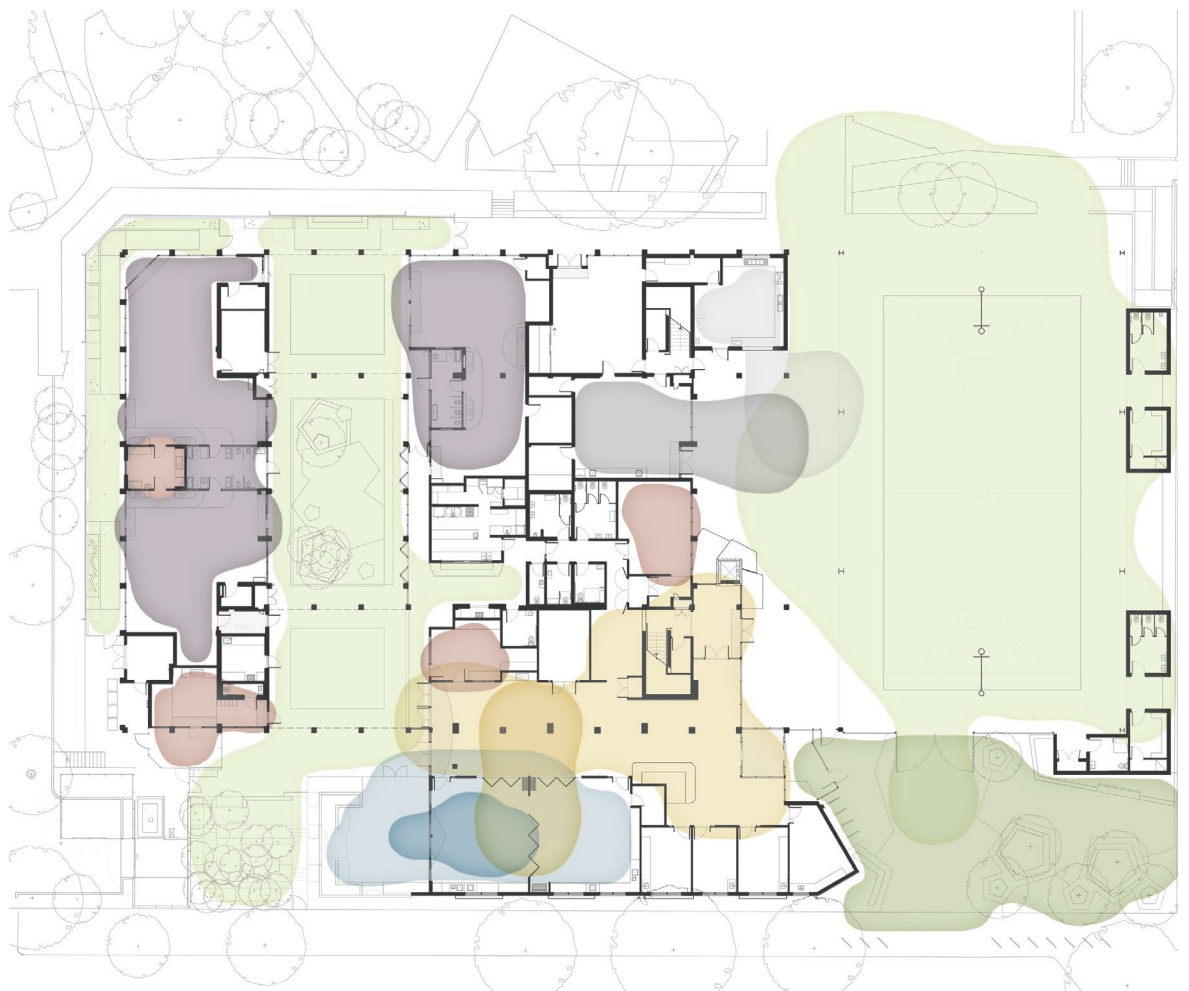


EXISTING SCHOOL INTERIOR



EXISTING SCHOOL INTERIOR

- KEY
- EARLY LEARNING CENTRE
  - SCHOOL - ART
  - SCHOOL - CANTEEN
  - OFFICES / STAFF SPACES
  - COMMON ENTRY / SHARED COMMUNITY
  - COMMUNITY GATHERING
  - PLAYGROUP
  - MULTI-PURPOSE
  - FORECOURT ENTRY
  - OUTDOOR LEARNING / ELC EXTERNAL PLAY



GROUND FLOOR SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

0 1 2 3 4 5 10

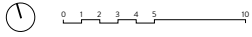


KEY

- PROJECT / WET STUDIO
- EXTENDED LEARNING
- THINK TANK / WITHDRAWAL / PRESENTATION
- STAFF SPACES
- COMMUNITY SPACES
- CONSULTING

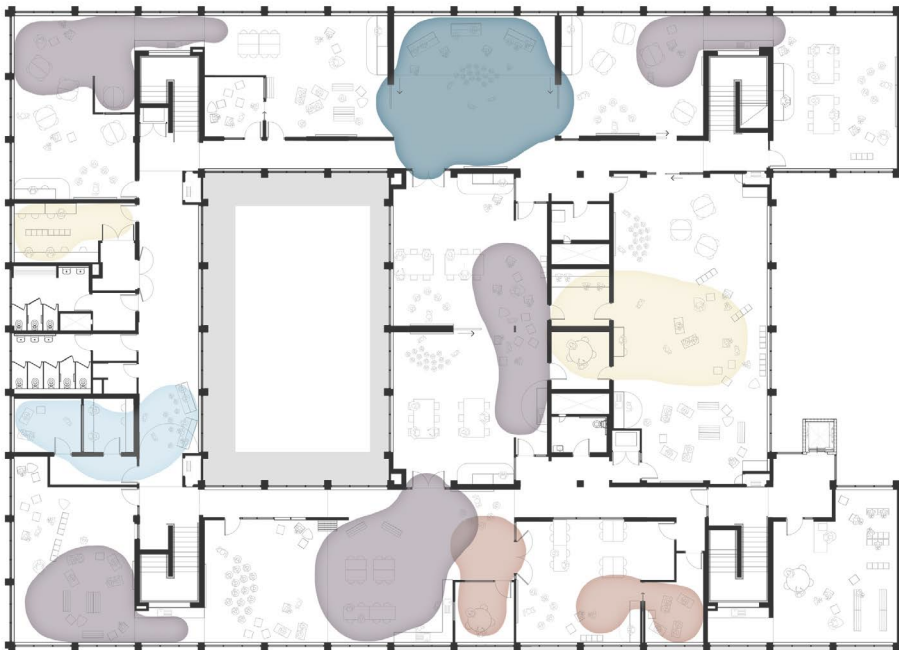


FIRST FLOOR  
ADAPTABLE LEARNING SPACES



KEY

- PROJECT / WET STUDIO
- STAFF WORK
- COLLABORATION / GATHERING HUB
- THINK TANK
- MEDIA HUB - PRESENTATION



SECOND FLOOR  
ADAPTABLE LEARNING SPACES













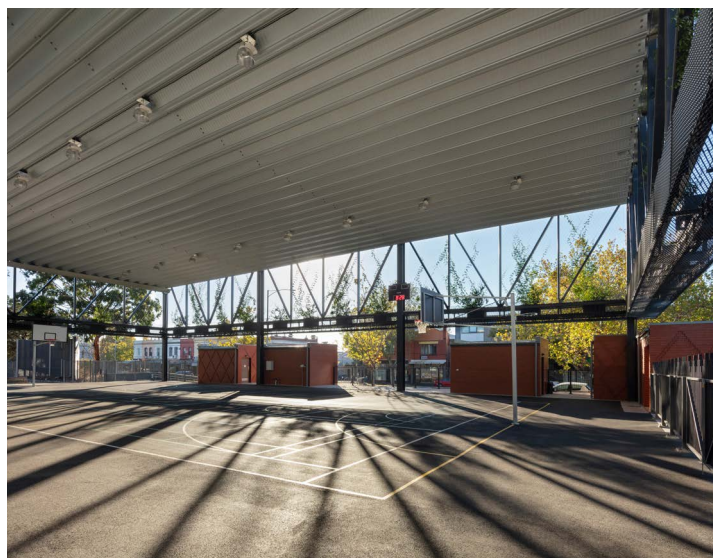


## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS & PROJECT

The CLP is the first in the CoM to combine Early Learning, Family Services, a Community Hub and a primary school into an existing school site, embracing a ‘whole of early years’ approach to health, wellbeing and education so families can connect from birth through primary school. The welcoming forecourt on the corner of Rathdowne and Palmerston Streets leads to a single point of entry and shared front door, bringing a simple message of equity and unity. The successful combining of multiple facilities and uses is a testament to the vision, perseverance and leadership of the stakeholders (DET, CPS and the CoM).

Through a complex set of cost, brief, urban design and stakeholder challenges the architectural resolution for an open-framed COLA not only provides a gymnasium amenity but its inherent openness also successfully invites the neighbourhood into the space, creating ownership beyond just the school. The COLA now frames the prominent corner site containing the school property whilst fostering visual connections between the school, street and broader community.

It has become a focal point for school activities and community use, with its permeable green façade providing a visually stimulating and welcoming urban entry for the precinct within. Communal amenities around the outside of the COLA provide direct access by community to facilitate the ongoing use of the court surface for weekend markets and promote future use.





The complexities between the brief, site and funding have not compromised the ability to deliver an exceptional educational facility that mutually serves the needs of the school and broader community. The design response of the COLA in a multi-use urban area is sensitive to issues of mass, permeability and public interface. The green wall system allows students to witness how plants grow and provides weather protection, itself becoming a learning resource.

Before and after school, the COLA has become the central, all-weather meeting place for the school community, facilitating a range of cross cultural interactions. The view of children playing in the space throughout the day and social basketball competitions held under lights at night has provided a facility for all of Carlton. The school is currently in discussions around further promoting the COLA for community use after hours and on weekends for markets, community and sporting events.

The Carlton Learning Precinct redevelopment has created a new face for the school; an increased pride amongst the school community and in time will no doubt lead to increased enrolments. The project showcases the potential of engaged collaboration, innovative adaptive reuse and urban design to challenge and ultimately change community perceptions.

