

Deicke
Richards

John Paul College *Kindergarten Extension* */New building*



2020 LESOLUTIONS DESIGN AWARDS ENTRY

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Note: Our contents directly addresses the awards dossier requirements

DESIGN TEAM:

DEICKE RICHARDS — Principal Consultant, Architecture and Interior Design
ASPECT STUDIOS — Landscape Architecture
BLIGH TANNER — Structural Engineering

John Paul College Kindergarten is located in Logan City, south of the sub-tropical city of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia. The kindergarten is part of John Paul College, one of Queensland's largest independent Early Learning and Kindy-12 co-educational schools. The college has adopted an Italian Reggio Emilia-inspired educational philosophy.



Executive summary



The design of John Paul College's new kindergarten extension needed to articulate the college's Reggio Emilia approach to learning and teaching within an Australian context.

Apply Reggio Emilia principles to an Australian context

To cater for a growing cohort and local population, John Paul College (JPC) Kindergarten needed to extend with a new building and outdoor areas. John Paul College had been applying principles of the Italian Reggio Emilia education philosophy to the design of the college's learning program for some time. The design of the new kindergarten extension needed to articulate the Reggio Emilia approach to learning and teaching within an Australian context.

The core principles of the Reggio Emilia philosophy support that: children are capable, resilient individuals that should be empowered and able to pursue their own interests; teachers should observe and guide rather than direct; and, environments should act as a *third teacher* – they should be open and free-flowing, where the outdoors is as important as indoors, and the presence of atelier spaces is key. There is no one right way for how to apply these principles to learning environments.

Consider the Australian context in relation to a kindergarten design

Within the Australian context there is a significant emphasis on the natural environment; it is not only valued but integrated within our urban centres. Australian understandings of civic space are also different. Main streets and awnings are the back drop for civic interaction rather than plazas or piazzas. Amid others, these two paradigms temper our approach to common areas within kindergartens.

Built form also needs to be contextual. While internal and external spaces have distinct boundaries in the European context, mainly due to their climate, there is much more ambiguity in Australia. The layering of space and transitions is different. What we see is something simple, such as a verandah. However, what informs the outcome is complex.

Meaningfully embed JPC Kindy's values in the extension design

John Paul College commissioned architects Deicke Richards to design the kindergarten's new extension and manage its construction. The intention was for the kindy's values to be meaningfully embedded in the extension's environmental design enabling the kindy to provide early educational experiences that support wonder, curiosity, independence and relationship. Deicke Richards was required to work with the college's broad stakeholder team in a co-design process to explore the core Reggio Emilia principles as they apply to an Australian educational context, and as they uniquely apply to John Paul College Kindergarten.

John Paul College Kindy's thoughtfully layered learning experiences exemplify how the values of a kindy – or any educational institution – can be meaningfully embedded in its environment design.

A successful co-design process

DR successfully facilitated a co-design process with project stakeholders which gathered information to inform a clear project brief and strategic framework, and preferred siting and design concepts. The team implemented a design framework that fosters engaging experiences with: climate; form (including external, internal and transitional spaces); light; colour; materials and texture; smell; and, sound. Concepts developed collaboratively. DR sought continuous input and review from the JPC Kindy project stakeholders. All feedback was carefully considered and integrated as much as possible.

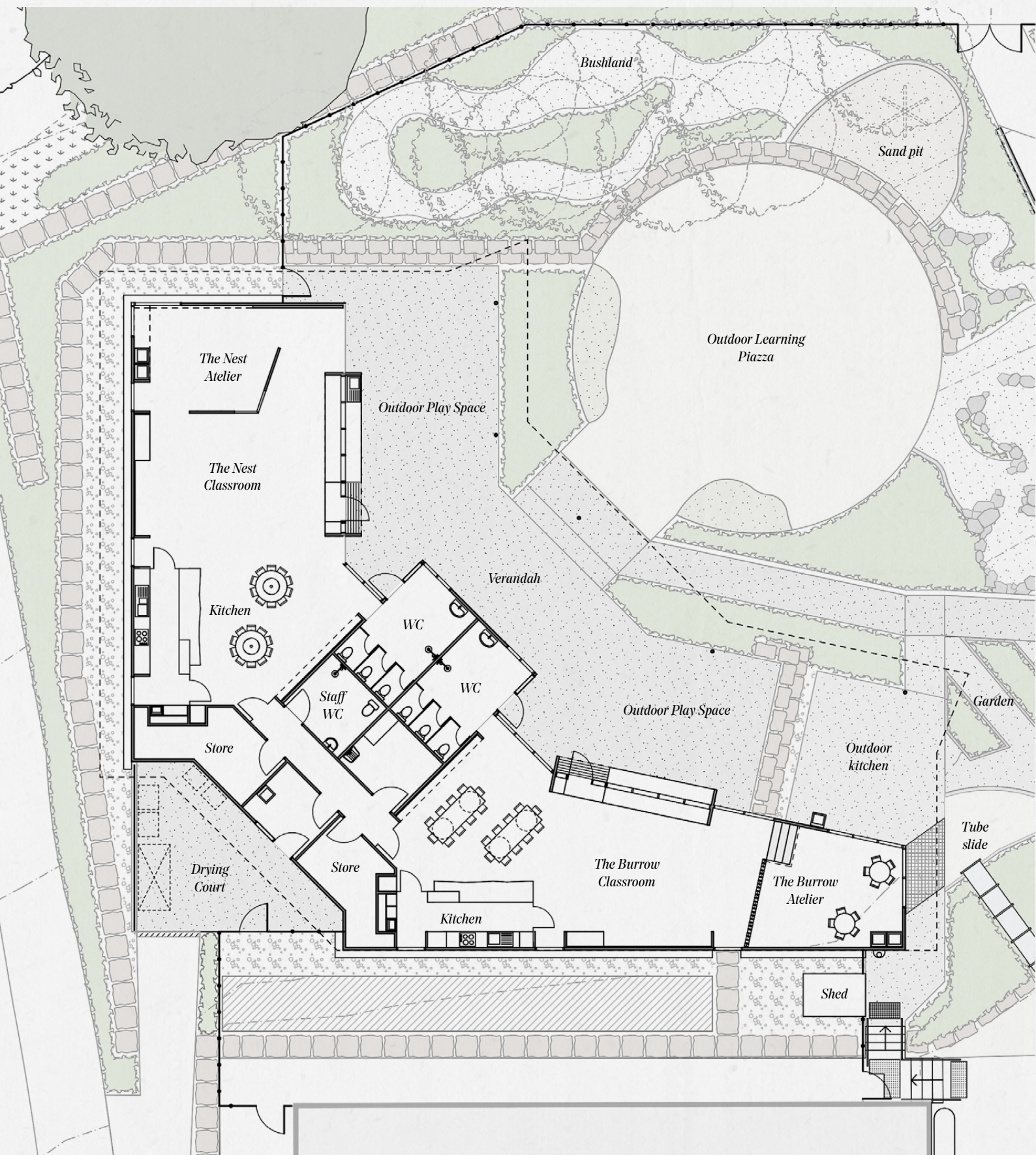
A bespoke kindergarten design, Reggio Emilia-inspired yet distinctly Australian

The design of the John Paul College Kindergarten extension successfully reflects the college's Reggio Emilia-inspired educational philosophy within an Australian context. The kindy's new building has a logical layout. Two classrooms are separated by a central amenities block and open onto a generous verandah that flows into the *piazza* or green heart. Each classroom is characterised by an internal *Atelier* form which offers focused respite from other activities – a sunken studio features in *The Burrow* classroom, while a playful house-like structure punctuates *The Nest* classroom. These unique Atelier spaces are dedicated to creative exploration and elevate the children's art-focused learning experiences.

Large and flexible *verandah* spaces invite easy transitions between indoors and out. These can be used as alternative learning and play spaces. Their form is a distinctively Australian architectural approach while also reflecting the Reggio Emilia value of encouraging connection with nature. Aromatic plantings, a dry creek bed with water pump, stepping stones, balance logs and vegetable patches also support this value. The kindergarten's new classrooms flank a green heart, a local take on the *Piazza* spaces advocated by the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy. These are central spaces that enable easy gathering and strengthen community relationships.

JPC Kindy's thoughtfully layered learning experiences exemplify how the values of a kindy – or any educational institution – can be meaningfully embedded in its environmental design. The new extension provides positive early educational experiences supporting wonder, curiosity, independence and relationship.

Site plan



Scope of work and budget



BUDGET

\$1,774,535 ^{EX GST}

BUILDING COST / FINAL CONTRACT SUM

SCOPE OF WORK:

Principal Consultant – Architectural and Interior Design Services –
for the design and contract management of the Kindergarten extension,
including a new building and surrounds.

Specifically, the scope of the work requested:

- Two new kindergarten teaching and learning spaces
- Atelier spaces integrated with the teaching and learning spaces
- Generous covered outdoor learning areas
- Outdoor play and landscapes

Refer to the site plan on page 5.

School and community engagement





One of the intentions was to create a new building and surrounding spaces that would encourage easier opportunities for gathering.

The community

The kindergarten neighbours the John Paul College primary school campus, which is integrated with the broader campus. In August 2020 the kindergarten's student cohort totalled 137, made up of 88 full-time students and 49 part-time students. The overall college cohort (Kindy-12) totals 1,742 students. Students come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds – 45 at last count. Historically, the kindy parent community has been relatively engaged. However, one of the intentions with the extension was to create a new building and surrounding spaces that would encourage easier opportunities for gathering and greater community involvement as a result. This has proven successful.

137

KINDY STUDENTS

1,742

OVERALL COLLEGE
STUDENTS (KINDY-12)



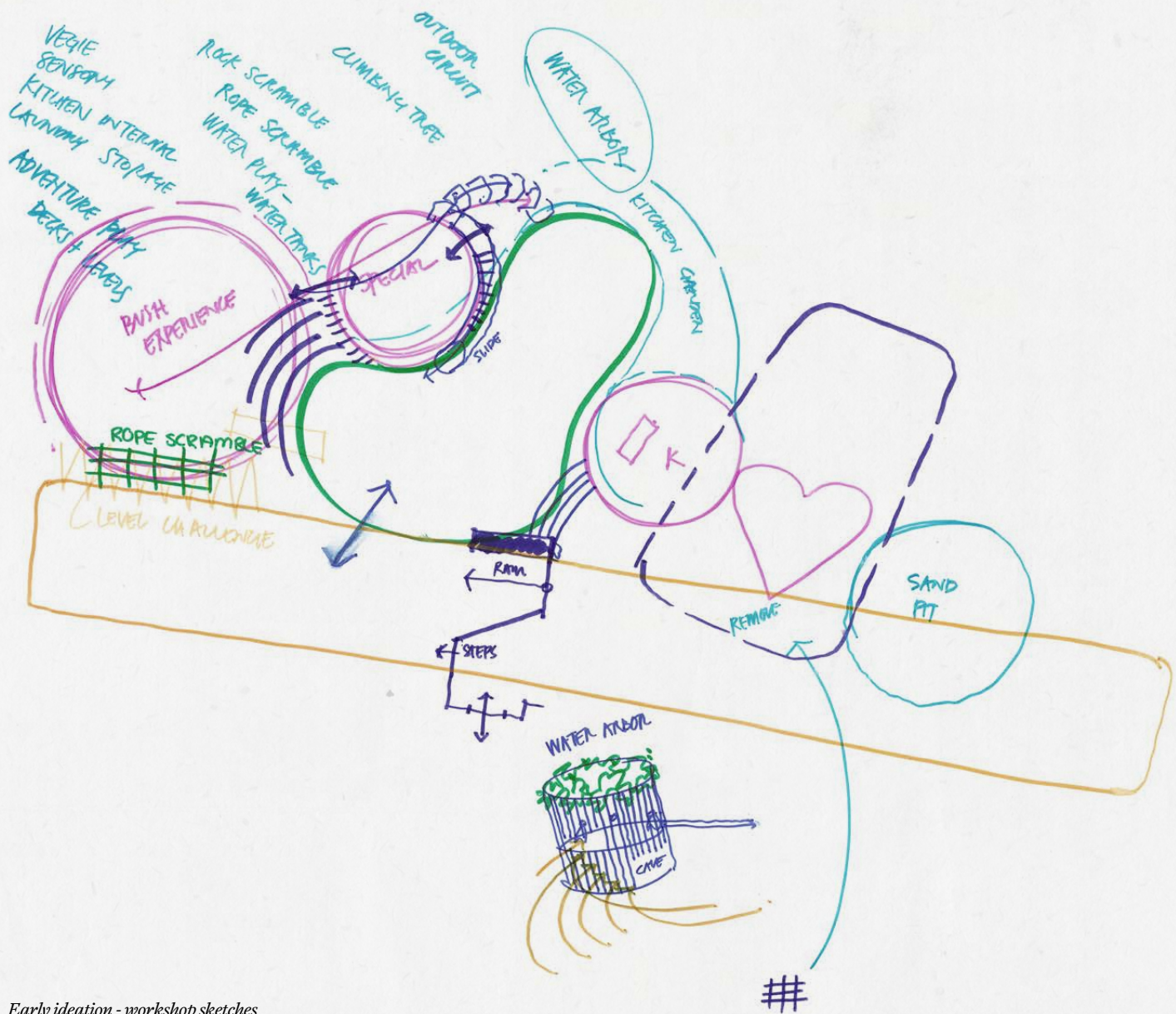
An early Enquiry by Design workshop harnessed discussion, design and drawing to brainstorm potential kindy futures.

The stakeholders

Deicke Richards led a collaborative process with a diverse stakeholder team to produce a design framework that fostered engaging experiences. Following a comprehensive site investigation, DR facilitated a successful Enquiry by Design workshop in October 2016 which brought together a small group of IPC representatives, two DR architects/designers, a landscape architect, and a university lecturer (Megan Gibson) from the Queensland University of Technology School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education. This workshop harnessed discussion, design and drawing to brainstorm alternative futures for the kindergarten. Information gathered at the workshop led to a clear project brief and strategic framework, and preferred siting and design concepts – including play areas, service spaces and

landscape concepts. These concepts were then further resolved to include an interior design and materials strategy with continuous input and review from the IPC team.

IPC stakeholders included the Head of Primary School, Head of Early Education (Leanne Zammit), Works Department Manager, Finance Manager and IPC students. The college also had one of its alumni, now studying architecture at university, assist with the design process. Reilly White (Alumnus 2018) completed a work experience placement with Deicke Richards, working with Director Cameron Davies and making a significant contribution to the kindy's state-of-the-art design.



Early ideation - workshop sketches

The challenges

The key challenge of the collaborative workshop process was to uncover JPC Kindy's unique values and explore the potential to embed these in the design of the extension. The key challenge was also to ensure the principles were interpreted appropriately to suit the Australian context.

The key challenge of the collaborative workshop process was to uncover JPC Kindy's unique values and explore the potential to embed these in the design.



*Looking toward the entrance to the kindy extension.
Behind, to the right is the existing kindy building.*

The available assets

As the new building and surrounds was an extension, the design team was able to observe the existing kindergarten building in operation throughout different periods of the day and then establish preliminary spatial requirements for the new building and outdoor area. This comprehensive site analysis enabled the design team to develop a greater familiarity with the kindergarten community and cohort. It also fostered a deeper understanding regarding how the kindy interacted with the broader college, and what possibilities were available for further future integration.

Outdoor areas are a natural extension of outdoor play. The Kindy opens up the site with a new prospect towards the neighbouring school.

*‘The fact that the
children can transition
between the spaces
really naturally is great.’*

Mrs Leanne Zammit
Head of Early Education
John Paul College



Balance logs

‘This central circle area is like our version of the Piazza area in the Reggio context. So we can get the whole kindy community out onto this grass at any one point if we want to talk to them about whole-of-kindergarten experiences ... It’s very flexible and a lovely space to be in.’

Mrs Leanne Zammit
Head of Early Education
John Paul College

The value of process and project to community

The process involved not only the JPC team but the students too. In keeping with the school’s educational philosophy – which acknowledges children as capable, competent, knowledgeable and full of wonder – the vision for the outdoor environment was designed in consultation with the Kindergarten children. The children thought of redesigning their space in the top playground to invite more *natural adventure*. They proposed *ropes to climb on like monkeys* and *big logs to jump on*. The natural carved timber posts and ropes, along with varying sized log steppers are both now present in the outdoor playground, just as the children had planned.

The college also facilitated one of their alumni, Reilly White, now studying architecture at university, to complete a work experience placement with Deicke Richards. This took place during the design process, enabling Reilly to gain practical, real world experience of the architectural profession – while contributing valuable insights into the design.

For the broader community, the comprehensive site analysis was valuable to ensure the design team had a deeper understanding of how the kindergarten functioned and to get a feel for the cohort and parent community. The design workshop was a powerful ideation session which brainstormed alternative futures for the kindy and produced innovative design ideas.

Two key ideas included:

1. Create a green heart: The two kindy rooms should open onto a piazza style lawn.
2. Emphasise the natural environment: The Australian climate means we love our outdoor rooms. Transitions between inside and out are harmonious and the large verandahs offer alternative programmable spaces.

Educational environment





The Burrow Classroom

Educational vision and goals of the school

John Paul College delivers a contemporary co-educational curriculum grounded in traditional values from Early Learning to Year Twelve. Students are at the heart of all the college does and this is reflected in its goals/purpose: *to educate, to inspire, to make a difference*. IPC knows that being prepared for the future – setting goals, choosing a pathway, overcoming obstacles and conquering challenges – gives a child a head start for their life ahead. IPC presents the ultimate preparation for that future, for the pursuit of their future self. IPC is proud to help prepare students for their personal quest to change the world, to make a difference.

John Paul College has embraced a Reggio Emilia-inspired educational philosophy, acknowledging children as competent, curious, natural researchers full of knowledge, potential and interested in meaningfully connecting with the world around them. This philosophy underpins the vision and the goals of the school.

‘Students are at the heart of all the college does and this is reflected in its goals/purpose: to educate, to inspire, to make a difference.’

John Paul College
Core purpose



The Nest classroom's atelier is a house structure. The interiors are light-filled, open plan arrangements that support broad-ranging activities; different children can pursue their different interests.

How does learning drive design?

JPC Kindy's design places the child firmly at the centre of their own learning, offering empowering and transformative early experiences. Reggio Emilia places emphasis on hands-on, discovery learning that allows the child to actively engage all their senses, guided by educators rather than directed. JPC Kindy's new environments have been intentionally designed to be like a *third teacher* (after the students and teachers) supporting the children's imaginative capacities to express themselves in many ways.

JPC Kindy's program is strongly art and nature-based, focused on encouraging children to creatively problem solve, engage deeply with personal and group projects, and to experience nature with freedom and wonder. To support this program, DR implemented a design framework that fosters engaging

experiences with: climate; form (including external, internal and transitional spaces); light; colour; materials and texture; smell; sound; and even, taste (bush tucker plants within the landscape and edibles in the vegie patches).

New layered interior learning spaces reflect the kindy's art-based program; two Atelier spaces dedicated to the children's focused creative exploration are an innovative addition to the learning spaces. A sunken studio in *The Burrow* classroom and a house-like structure in *The Nest* classroom infuse each room with distinct character, while offering the students the immersive experience of dedicated creative space.

Similarly, transitional and outdoor spaces offer layered opportunities for exploration, discovery, and a deeper connection with the natural environment.

An environment that supports diverse learning and teaching styles

JPC Kindy's environment has been purposefully designed to support diverse styles of learning and teaching. Deicke Richards visited JPC Kindy in June 2019 to gather feedback.

The quotes below describe some innovative uses of the new learning spaces. They have been drawn from an interview with Mrs Leanne Zammit, Head of Early Education, John Paul College.

Layered learning spaces *The Burrow* and *The Nest*:

'With the Ateliers, we have made a designated place for the children to be creative and expressive, and we're finding that their engagement in those spaces is more intense ... I think the acoustics of the Atelier in the Burrow room allow the children to be more focussed as well. Because the level is different, the children are unencumbered by what's happening in other spaces around them.'

Outdoor spaces:

'In the dry creek bed the children are investigating lots of things with water, the flow of water and where it goes. There's also lots of social interaction ... The children soon worked out that you can't pump water and collect at the same time – they needed to invite some friends to support that. So it's developing that cooperative and social play.'

Verandahs and form:

'The design allows that natural interaction with the environment which impacts our teaching and learning ... The fact that the children can transition between the spaces really naturally is great ... We do have that indoor/outdoor flexibility.'



Timber benches in the kitchens have been lowered to the children's natural level to facilitate their hands-on involvement.

An environment that is adaptable and flexible

Spaces are layered yet connected; a clear structure supports meaningful engagement. These layered spaces create opportunities for children to flex their curiosity and pursue different interests. The design of the environments supports diverse ways of thinking, playing, exploring, speaking and doing.

Spatial planning is resolved to encourage collaboration and communication. The interiors are light-filled, open plan arrangements that support broad-ranging activities. Materials, lighting, textures and colours are very natural and restrained with the intention of encouraging children to delve deeper into their interests, rather than dominating their senses.

The two Ateliers, the *Burrow* and *Nest*, have been designed to support JPC's art-based program, encouraging focused activity with customised lighting and acoustics. According to Kindy E Teacher, Lyn Irvine:

'Once the kids understood the purpose of the space, and that it was a designated place, then they became very independent with getting their own paints and setting up their own experiences ... It is a very independent space for them.'

The spatial ideas also reference our vernacular architecture and links to nature. Elements of the environment have been specifically adapted to empower the students and to enable flexible use of space. For example, the timber benches in the kitchens are made of single slabs of live edge timber with evident growth rings, sap wood and heart wood. They have been lowered to the children's natural level to facilitate more meaningful interaction in the kitchen in an active, home-like way.

Large and flexible *verandah* spaces invite easy transitions between indoors and out. These can be used as alternative learning and play spaces.



'Once the kids understood the purpose of the space, and that it was a designated place, then they became very independent with getting their own paints and setting up their own experiences ... It is a very independent space for them.'

Lyn Irvine
Commenting on the
experiential aspect
of the ateliers
Kindy E Teacher
John Paul College

*Focused activity in
The Burrow atelier*

Physical environment





The Burrow classroom looking from the kitchen across to the atelier space

Illustrate the physical attributes of the environment

The kindy has a logical layout, two rooms are separated by a central amenities block. These rooms open onto a generous verandah that flows into the *piazza* or green heart. Each room is characterised by an internal *Atelier* form which references our vernacular architecture and offers focused respite from the rooms' other activities:

- In *The Burrow* a sunken creative studio is separated from the rest of the room by timber battens which filter natural light and add visual interest.
- In *The Nest* a 'house-like' structure, dedicated to painting and creative exploration, punctuates the flow of the single level space. A window invites visual connection and imaginative play.

The large verandahs are a central idea not just a passive design element. Their form is a distinctly Australian architectural approach while also reflecting the Reggio Emilia value of encouraging connection with nature. They support varied interactions and easy flow between indoors and out. The *piazza* or green heart and surrounding landscape is arranged in a natural, unforced way to encourage gathering, exploration and play. There are opportunities for interaction and modification by the children, including the water pump, dry creek bed and veggie patches.



The prep playground can be seen toward the back of this image on the left. While shade structures connected to The Ark can be seen on the right.

Illustrate how the facility fits with the school community

The kindy is oriented in a way that enables lines of sight to the Prep playground and the primary school’s central meeting place, *The Ark*. The kindergarten educators regularly take their students on journeys to the Prep playground and the students also occasionally engage in activities at *The Ark*. This means that the children develop greater familiarity with the wider school which has resulted in easier transitions into Prep.



Garden beds / vegetable patches have engaged the children more holistically with cooking experiences

How the project inspires and motivates

JPC Kindy's extension is the result of a highly collaborative co-design process where a diverse team considered the site and interpreted the Italian-conceived Reggio Emilia principles in relation to an Australian context. This project's co-design process inspires the field of educational facility planning by exemplifying how the values of a unique kindy or institution can be meaningfully embedded in its environmental design.

JPC Kindy values creative expression and the new layered learning spaces beautifully reflect its art and nature-based program; two unique Atelier spaces support the children's focused creative exploration and diverse outdoor spaces inspire exploration. A specific example of the way the design inspires certain interests are the garden beds, which have flourished.

The flourishing garden beds are a specific example of the way the design inspires certain interests. According to Head of Early Learning, Leanne Zammit:

'The children have been growing and harvesting vegetables to use in their cooking experiences: vegetable pizza, vegetable pasta, and Kale chips, have all been on the menu. Gardening is teaching children about their role in planting and caring for new plants, and developing patience while waiting for plants to grow. The children are also learning about nutrition.'

Results of the process and project





How the project achieves educational goals and objectives

JPC Kindy's design places the child firmly at the centre of their own learning, offering empowering and transformative early experiences. Deicke Richards visited JPC Kindy in June 2019, after it had been open for one year, to gather feedback about how the students' learning experiences had evolved.

Key findings included:

- The designated *Atelier* spaces have enabled the children to engage more intensely with their creative projects, with the understanding that they could leave projects and come back to them.
- Understanding the art-focused purpose of the ateliers, the children become very independent with setting up their own experiences.
- The children transition between the indoor and outdoor spaces really easily – the flexibility is great and the children love the outdoor space.
- The central *Piazza* space functions as the *green heart* of the kindy – a flexible space where the children gather and play and the whole kindy community can come together to share ideas.
- The dry creek bed and water pump invite lots of social, cooperative play since you can't pump and collect the water at the same time.
- The kindy enables lines of sight to the Prep playground and the primary school's central meeting place, *The Ark*, so the children develop greater familiarity with the wider school and have been transitioning easily into Prep.



Sandstone blocks border the piazza and double as bench seats or steps. Outdoor areas encourage sensory exploration and play.

How the project achieves school district goals

JPC Kindergarten is located in Logan City, a local government area within South East Queensland, situated between Brisbane to the north and the Gold Coast to the south. The area had a population of 326,615 in June of 2018, and continues to grow. Logan City is a diverse, multi-cultural area, home to families from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. JPC Kindergarten’s educational philosophy and design is well equipped for this. Its layered learning spaces create opportunities for children to pursue their different interests. The design of the spaces/environments supports diverse ways of thinking, playing, exploring, speaking and doing.

How the project achieves community goals

In relation to the school community, JPC Kindergarten is providing smooth transitions from kindy into Prep and has integrated the kindy nicely with the primary school.

The kindy’s new green heart, or Reggio-Emilia style *Piazza*, provides a valuable gathering space for the kindy community and can hold the whole five classes and extended families. It is a central space that enables easy gathering to share ideas, celebrate milestones and generally strengthen community relationships.

Any unintended results and achievements of the process and project

In June 2019, Deicke Richards Director, *Cameron Davies*, who led the JPC Kindy project, was invited to be a presenter at the Queensland Early Education and Care Conference, the largest conference of its sort in Queensland. The conference was hosted by C & K, one of Australia's most highly regarded providers of Childcare and Kindergarten experiences. Cameron's presentation explored how a kindy's values could be meaningfully embedded in its spatial design, and specifically how JPC has applied Reggio Emilia design principles within an Australian context to their kindy design. The presentation was based on feedback DR received from a post-occupancy visit where we conducted interviews with the kindy educators and were able to observe and document the kindy day in action.

In June 2020, JPC Kindergarten's new building and extension jointly won Overall Winner in the 2020 Learning Environments Australasia Awards for Excellence in Educational Design. Judges provided the citation to the right:

'John Paul College kindergarten is a delightful expression of the Reggio Emilia philosophies in an Australian context. Transparent, child-centred, visually connected interiors bring abundant sunshine into the buildings, and deep verandahs create shade for outdoor learning and play. The Reggio piazza is reimagined as an outdoor green heart for the centre and ateliers, created to suggest a nest and a burrow, provoke wonder and curiosity. This child-centred environment is indeed the third teacher in a local context.'

LEA judges citation

JPC Kindy was 2020 Overall Winner / Learning Environments Australasia Awards for Excellence in Educational Design

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