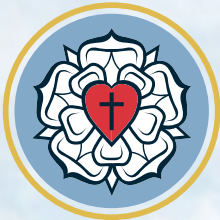


OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

ST JOHN'S PRIMARY CAMPUS
33 ABERDEEN STREET,
NEWTOWN, VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA



GEELONG
LUTHERAN
COLLEGE



MINX ARCHITECTURE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An open minded group of educators and an innovative design solution has provided GLC St John's Primary School with a flexible outdoor learning environment that addresses the needs of the students, staff and broader community. The comprehensive master planning process identified that the school's existing facilities did not support the emerging pedagogy.

Opting for a cost effective, simple but sophisticated design response on a tight site, the new Outdoor Learning Environment provides the school with a solution exceeding the expectations of the brief.

This project encapsulates the ability for anywhere, anytime learning while celebrating biophilic design.

SCOPE OF WORK & BUDGET

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Covered competition sized basketball and netball court
- Storage sheds and stage
- Play and outdoor learning spaces
- External Works and Landscaping.

CONSTRUCTION BUDGET: \$1,147,500 AUD



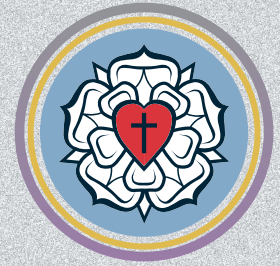
SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



COMMUNITY

St John's Primary School Community

Geelong Lutheran College services the regional community of Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula with Lutheran education across two campuses. The St John's campus provides education for kindergarten and primary level students between the ages of 3 & 12.



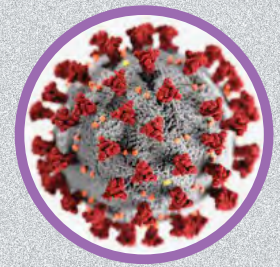
STAKEHOLDERS

- Lutheran Education
- Staff and Students of St John's Primary School
- Parents, Friends and Parishioners of the Geelong Lutheran Community
- St John's Choir - School Choir
- Local Community Sporting Groups - Basketball and Netball
- City of Greater Geelong - Local Authority
- Minx Architecture - Master Plan and Project Architect
- Magellan Projects - Construction Contractor



CHALLENGES

This was a project on a very small site with very big aspirations. The challenge was to provide a facility to address facility shortfalls identified through the Master Planning process within a tight budget. There was significant resistance to development from neighbouring property owners. This was managed through consultation with the local authority and providing a sophisticated design response to their concerns.



Construction during the COVID pandemic in the world's most shut-down city, supply issues, restrictions on numbers of workers allowed on site and lock downs provided additional unforeseen challenges to the project.

CONSULTATION

The planning process commenced with a workshop involving all stakeholders, taking into consideration the Master Planning of the whole school site. Emerging from this process, the scope and budget for the project was defined.



A series of user group meetings were held with the Architect to enable a comprehensive understanding of the school's pedagogy. Detailed cost planning supported each stage of the design development, with approvals sought from the planning committee. During the development of the project a number of options were considered. The outcome demonstrates how a collaborative approach can result in a solution that directly responds to the brief, even when the budget is modest.

ASSETS

The existing portion of the school site developed in this project contained two asphalt paved basketball courts, perimeter bench seating, mud pit, off the shelf playground equipment, and maintenance sheds.



CONTEXT:

"Our school aims to provide a student-centred environment in which students feel safe and are encouraged to serve others in their community with confidence.

In our holistic approach to students we value equity, diversity, individuality and multiculturalism and we recognise our role as environmental stewards and accept responsibility for promoting sustainable practices"

Educational Brief
St John's Primary School

VALUE

Through a process of considered consultation, the St John's Lutheran Primary School Master Plan identified a number of objectives that formed a strategic plan for future improvement and building works.

The school Hall had outgrown its capacity and was over-subscribed in the timetable. There was an immediate need for a large sheltered space to gather and to use for physical education classes. While an indoor gymnasium and performing arts centre would have been an ideal solution, the available budget and constrained site did not support this response.

Through a series of planning meetings, the Outdoor Learning Environment project was identified as a priority. The resulting facility can be enjoyed in a variety of ways.

This small project provides enormous value to a school on a constrained site. It is an extremely flexible space supporting the students, staff, and broader Geelong Lutheran community.

EXISTING

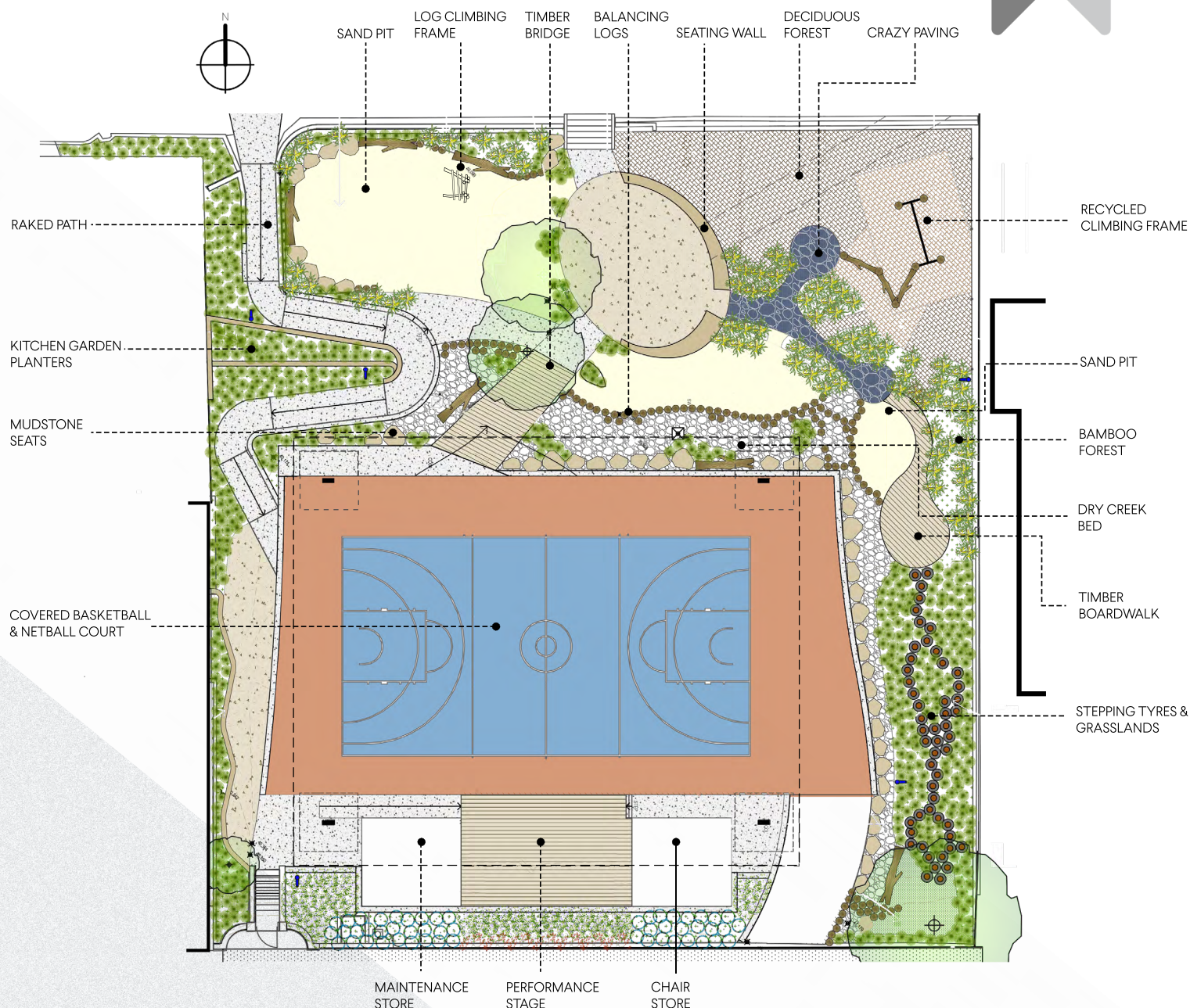
The existing site was formerly used by junior students as a play area. The space included:

- A basketball court running north south
- Bat Tennis and four square line marking
- Perimeter bench seating
- Playground equipment with sand play and mulch under
- Shade Sails
- Deciduous trees

This part of the site had not been upgraded since the 1960's and was ripe for re-imagining.



GLC St John's - Nearmaps Image



SITE PLAN

Reorienting and reducing the number of courts freed up land for a greater variety of outdoor learning opportunities, while maintaining active play space.

A raised timber stage was located to the southern most edge of the covered courts, with maintenance and chair storage sheds to each side. This structure framed a proscenium arch to the covered performance space, also providing power and audio capacity. The elegant skillion roof provides perfect acoustics to project from the stage to the sheltered gathering space.

Landscaping wraps around the structure to the east, north and west providing distinct zones. Kitchen garden beds, sand pits, dry creek beds, balancing logs and tyres, timber board walk and bridges climbing frames, bamboo and deciduous forests and mud stone seating give students a variety of opportunity for structured, experiential, active and passive play.

EDUCATIONAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

EDUCATIONAL VISION

The educators came together to provide a comprehensive brief to the Architect identifying a variety of learning settings that should be enabled within the design solution:

The design response allows students to experience the outdoor learning environment in a variety of ways. It also provides a sheltered space for the broader community to gather, engage in activities and celebrate their faith.

LEARNING SETTINGS



ACTIVE
LEARNING



EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING



SUSTAINABILITY
ACTIVITIES



PERFORMANCE
SPACE

The educational and physical environment design associated with each learning setting is described in detail on the following pages.



ACTIVE LEARNING SETTING

GLC St John's is located on a small site with limited outdoor active play space. With no available land for a purpose built Physical Education facility, the school required a space for formal active education instruction, but did not want to reduce the existing play space.

The active learning area needed to provide:

- Shelter from the summer sun
- Cover from the rain in winter
- Covered Basketball and Netball Courts
- Hoops and backboards for Basketball and Netball
- Line Marking for a number of different formal games
- Adequate clearances for junior ball games
- Robust construction to support outdoor activity.



PEDAGOGY:

"Our ongoing development of the pedagogy of Contemporary learning (inquiry) will enable and facilitate our progress toward improved teaching and learning strategies and use of spaces"

Educational Brief
St John's Primary
School

DESIGN RESPONSE

An enclosed active play space would not have provided the flexibility required for this tight site. When space is limited, access to outdoor areas must be provided both during and outside the structured class timetable. A sophisticated design response was developed through a simple design solution.

The covered Basketball and Netball Courts provide educators with a purpose built facility for formal Physical Education classes. The plexi-paved surface is line marked for Basketball and Netball with rotating hoops at each end to allow for both sports to be accommodated.

The skillion roof is pitched high to prevent interference during ball sports and the run off space falls under the canopy to provide covered seating for spectators.

Informal active learning continues to take place outside of timetabled lessons. The space is extremely popular during recess and lunchtime for impromptu hoop shooting and is used after school for team basketball and netball practice sessions. This new facility provides a flexible and affordable design response to the brief.



EDUCATIONAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

SAND PIT/CONSTRUCTION/ MAKER SPACES:

"An area where students can play, prototype and experiment with easy access to materials and workspace that allows for trial and error"

Educational Brief
St John's Primary
School



GLC St John's - Balancing Logs

02

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The outdoor space needed to be well considered to provide the students with experiential learning opportunities in a variety of settings.

These included:

- Sand and mud play
- Climbing
- Balancing
- Chasing
- Investigation
- Construction
- Cubby House making
- Passive play
- Seating
- Hide and Seek
- Quiet Spaces

DESIGN RESPONSE



The design response considered the value of all available space carefully; landscaping the areas surrounding the court to create distinct linking zones for experiential learning.

A large sandpit area creates space for digging and construction. Climbing and balancing opportunities to enhance perpetual motor skills are provided through the rustic timber climbing frames. The perimeter mud-stone seating areas allow quiet spaces for students to feel connected to the action in a more passive setting.

A bamboo forest forms the edge between the more active areas and the perimeter fencing. Recycled stepping tyres and a timber boardwalk extend from the forest to the southern edge of the site. This gives the students a setting for hide and seek and is a popular place for chasing games.

Perceptual motor development is supported through the inclusion of balancing logs and stepping stones that are arranged along the edge of the dry river bed.

In the winter months these beds fill with storm water and flow under a timber bridge that links across to the courts. The water pools to a natural infiltration system, reducing the sites reliance on services infrastructure and environmental impact.

A grove of deciduous trees frame the monkey bars. The falling leaves demonstrate ecology as the seasons unfold; the biophilic design itself being a tool for learning.



GLC St John's - Sand Pit

EDUCATIONAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN



GLC St John's - Tiered Planter Beds, Kitchen Garden

KITCHEN GARDEN:

"Our Kitchen Garden Program has expanded into this wonderful new home.- the tiered planter beds work wonderfully for our vegetable garden."

Mrs Troeth,
Kitchen Garden
Co-ordinator

03

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

A strong focus on the environment and sustainability at the school provided impetus for the project to embrace a biophilic design solution.

Biophilic Design:

- Use of natural materials
- Indigenous planting
- Seasonal planting
- Sustainable planting
- Edible planting
- Organic forms
- Access to fresh air
- Shade from the elements

DESIGN RESPONSE



A biophilic design response was critical to the success of this project. The school's pedagogy and commitment to sustainability were a central consideration in the development of the design solution.

Pathways and ramps wind throughout the scheme organically revealing the environmental learning setting. Retaining walls form planter beds along the winding ramps and pathways. Seasonal vegetables and herbs are planted by the students of the St John's Primary Kitchen Garden Club.

Timber logs and mudstones create natural seats, and play frames. Planting is a mixture of indigenous, drought hardy and deciduous, demonstrating the effect of the seasons and the variety of plant species common to the area.

Rainfall from the roof is diverted to the dry river bed and distributed to the infiltration system. Materials are selected from a natural palette of timber, sand, gravel, vegetation and mulch.

This project is an identifiably Australian response providing shade from the scorching heat in summer and shelter from the winter rain.



GLC St John's - Outdoor Learning Environment

EDUCATIONAL & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

CELEBRATION:

"We had 340 people attend The St John's 60th Year Celebration Service. It was a wonderful celebration. There was a lot of positive feedback about the new facilities."

Jill Lange-Mohr,
Head of College,
Geelong Lutheran
College



PERFORMANCE

04

With a student population of 400 and no indoor space to accommodate assembly, choir, performance and liturgical gatherings, the community at St John's saw this project as an opportunity to create a new outdoor performing arts facility.

Activities to be accommodated in the performance space included:

- Whole school assembly
- Parents and friends events
- Religious Celebrations
- St John's Choir
- School performances
- Drama and Dance
- Music
- Audio-visual and acoustic considerations
- Audience seating
- Maintenance and chair storage



The school population had outgrown the ageing Hall at St John's Primary School. The available land and budget however did not stretch to a new purpose built Performing Arts Centre to address the schools needs. A clever and cost effective solution to this problem was incorporated into the design of the new Outdoor Learning Environment.

The designers saw the opportunity to make the covered court a multi-purpose space, by locating a free standing structure to the southern edge of the courts.

Maintenance and Chair stores frame the new elevated stage, creating a proscenium arch to a new outdoor performance space. The backdrop to the stage is a painted green fence, edged with vegetation, providing a natural set backdrop to the stage. Power and Data outlets are provided to the cheeks of the structure for mobile amplification to be connected to the space. Stage lighting, equipment and props are also stored within the structure. The timber stage flooring is well suited to drama, dance and music applications.

The design took into consideration concerns raised by neighbours with regard to noise and amenity. The roof falls towards the southern property boundary to allow noise to be projected away and to reduce the visual bulk of the structure from the street.

The large area of covered court provides sheltered space for seated or standing audiences. The storage spaces to the sides of the stage allow outdoor chairs for performances to be stored discreetly adjacent to the space, when not in use. The brief was met with an affordable outdoors space.

This well considered design response to an active learning space brief has resulted in the whole school now being able to congregate for assembly, performance and celebration.



GLC St John's - Stage and Covered Gathering Space

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

Minx Architecture specialise in the design and delivery of educational projects throughout Victoria, Australia. We have been designing school projects for over 20 years and have been involved with the Australasian Chapter of Learning Environments for a similar period of time.

During that time we have come to realise that learning can take place in any setting. We have come to understand that a “sparkly” new building will not necessarily deliver “sparkly” academic outcomes. The true value that education space designers can add to educational outcomes is realised through a collaborative process. This project is a perfect example of how collaboration can result in a cost effective, purposeful, beautiful design solution that meets the brief and brings additional unanticipated teaching and learning opportunities to the school and broader community.

The success of this project can be attributed to the deep understanding of pedagogy and how spaces might best be framed to support their direction.

Although on the surface this project may appear to be nothing more than an covered court, in reality it is an extremely well resolved response to a carefully considered brief.

The project was delivered on time, during a global pandemic presenting significant supply chain challenges. It was delivered within budget, in a volatile and uncertain construction market. The finished quality of the built form and landscaping elements is exemplary.

The St John's Lutheran Primary School community now have a new facility that provides a purpose-built solution to their previous pedagogical challenges.

This project demonstrates how a sophisticated design response can provide a school with a variety of high quality learning environments within a modest budget.

This is one of our favourite projects because it does just what we hope to do - deliver quality, affordable education spaces, through a collaborative process.

That's why we have entered the LEA awards for the first time this year with the St John's Primary School Outdoor Learning Environment Project.

THE OUTCOME:

“We are thrilled with
the final result!”

Sue Ellis Principal St John's Primary School

