



# The importance of play and social space in our schools

**Graham Legerton** describes the consultative process behind the development of an extensive outdoor social space at Brisbane Grammar School

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**W**ith the increasing density of Australian cities and rise in apartment living, play and social space in schools has never been so important.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data notes that building approvals for units increased by almost 40 per cent in Australia in 2013. This trend is consistent across our major cities, including greater Brisbane, one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The Queensland government forecasts suggest the Brisbane city population will grow to over three million by 2031.

Existing in-between areas in schools afford

great opportunities to maximise space for outdoor learning and play, and transform the student experience. The recently constructed Brisbane Grammar School Social Space is the school's solution to a much needed outdoor area for Middle School Year 5 and 6 students to let off steam, exercise and participate in team sports and activities, while also affording contemplation, debate and relaxation.

The scheme was conceived in September 2013 and completed in July 2014. The overall area of the facility inclusive of the cricket net zone and play space is 1876 sq m. This was delivered for a construction value of \$1.9 million and includes the provision of a second

major staircase to facilitate student flows to and from the space.

The redevelopment project presented opportunities to provide for an array of student activities by transforming a drab area that had little to offer into a vibrant outdoor space with facilities for cricket and handball, sports storage, specialised play equipment, seating, shade, art displays, herb gardens, worm farms, lunch areas, outdoor classrooms, events and performance space, additional greenery and greater accessibility.

ThomsonAdsett embarked on a collaborative and consultative sketching process with the school's Headmaster Anthony Micallef, Head





of Middle School Jacqui Zervos, Head of Year 5 and 6 Rebecca Campbell and other stakeholders. All ideas were tabled and distilled into a series of zoning and functionality diagrams.

A number of design challenges were to be overcome. The presence of an informal parking area, part of a javelin run-up and trees had to be accounted for. Tree roots created potential trip hazards that needed to be eradicated, and the removal of cars from the zone was necessary to create a safe environment; overall connectivity needed to be improved while integrating the space to the adjacent oval and cricket facilities.

The creation of a rebound wall assists zoning of the space while providing a backdrop for always popular handball and a setting for sports team briefings. Specialised play equipment supports the development of gross motor skills with the equipment arrays challenging students to test and develop their confidence and agility. Seating for lunches also offers space for

reading, discussion and debate, with the seating formation creating an informal performance and central stage area.

Students can create their own games utilising a combination of different elements to simulate circuits, with screens and sails providing shade and further defining spatial zones. The space is seamlessly connected with the adjacent oval and cricket facilities, providing room for the essential cricket run-ups, while the large covered cricket net zone can be used for large-scale events. State of the art retractable cricket netting means the area can be easily and efficiently re-purposed as required.

The finishes are robust with extensive soft-fall integrated in and around the equipment circuit. Colour is playful without becoming overly complicated or detracting from the ambience.

The social space is now a hive of activity during the school day and students continue to shape it into the heart of Year 5 and 6

school life. We think that this is an example of how collaborative design, listening, vision and rigorous testing of ideas can effectively realise such critical spaces for students whilst maximising value for money. A diversity of functions can co-exist without unnecessarily overcomplicating the final design.

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