



Extreme school makeover

Hartwell Primary School's vision – to create a learning community of lifelong learners

When Hartwell Primary School No. 4055 enrolled its first students in 1922, Camberwell, 14 km east of Melbourne's CBD, was semi-rural. Today it is one of the city's most desirable places to live, a suburb with the lot; tree-lined streets, old homes on generous blocks, trains, trams... and several of Melbourne's high profile independent and Catholic schools.

Though the 'education competition' is out there – *My School* lists 20 primary, secondary and P-12 schools within a three km radius of the school – enrolment at Hartwell Primary increased from 350 in 2004 to 570 at the end of 2011.

Kristine Moore, principal since mid 2001 and "a strong believer in the state education system" credits her school's popularity to "a sense of community, excellent teachers and involved parents."

"The number of our children that go on to state secondary schools, around 58 per cent the last time we counted, confirms that many of our families are committed to state education," she says. "We are very fortunate to have parents that can bring all kinds of management and financial skills to the school."

The 1922 building on Milverton Street, a worthy, nine-classroom red brick example of 1920s educational architecture, was built on the south side of a tight, sloping 1.2 ha site to accommodate up to 250 children. More facilities were added over the years:



Kristine Moore, principal

four classrooms in the courtyard behind the building; a library and craft room in 1970; a multipurpose hall in 2001; and whenever the school ran short of classroom space, another relocatable was delivered.

While the school grew around it, the core building remained unchanged. The classrooms were small and orientated to the blackboard; there was little natural light and

inadequate artificial lighting; too many stairs; no staff collaboration or work area; and the administration area and foyer were cramped.

"Our vision was to modernise Hartwell for 21st century learning," Moore says.

A once in a lifetime opportunity to build a virtually new school with the capacity to allow flexible and innovative teaching practices came in 2007 when the Victorian Department of



Before... crowded and tired



After... new learning communities and more space

Education approved a \$6 million grant. The grant was to pay for rebuilding existing permanent structures, add new learning communities and undertake ancillary landscaping works.

When Hartwell received \$3 million under the BER stimulus plan, suddenly there was more than enough in the budget to demolish the 1970s library and craft room and to build a two-story learning community in its place.

Baldasso Cortese, a Melbourne-based architectural practise with several schools on its list of recent projects, was awarded the contract for the redevelopment in December 2007. Architect Hal Cutting says: "The school's strategic plan was to create adaptable spaces for learning communities to allow students to become individual independent learners in a supportive and cohesive environment.

"The aim was to improve student engagement and connectedness to school, improve student understanding of, and ability to use, new communication technologies and instil a culture of lifelong learning.

"In our practise we have learned that communicating with a school and with the wider school community is essential when we undertake a project.

"Hartwell had a four-year professional development program in place, which had prepared their teachers' transition into the new spaces."

"We involved the staff in every aspect of the process from the outset," principal Moore says. "Lots of research and discussion went into planning the learning communities, how they would be used and the equipment that would be needed.

"This was our chance to get everything right, and we took it"

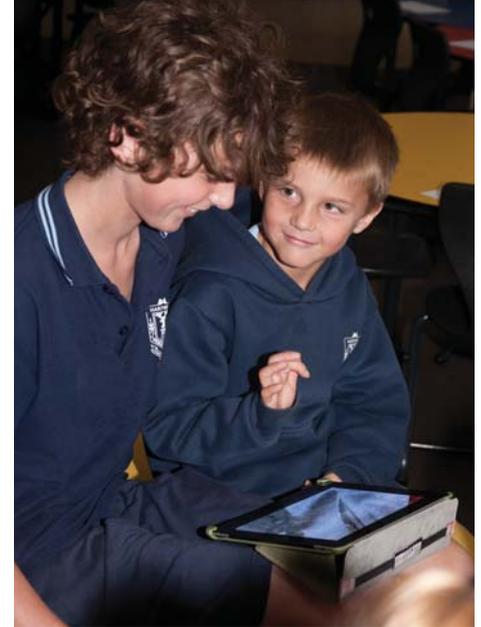
Cutting adds: "We held numerous workshop sessions with the senior management group, organised visits to other schools, made presentations to the school community and involved the students in a major graphics project."

Preparing the master plan took four months of research, discussions and meetings to make sure that each of the school's key objectives would be met:

- A cohesive learning environment throughout the school and eliminate temporary classrooms
- A design which encourages team teaching opportunities
- Agile learning spaces which cater for children of all ability levels and age groups
- Outdoor learning areas accessible from internal learning areas
- Learning spaces which accommodate activities to assist children with different learning styles – especially those who prefer kinaesthetic and tactile activities



A new learning community, in the background the 1922 school



Buddies... the school pairs preps with Year 6 students



58 per cent of students go on to state secondary school

- Accommodate ICT tools including data projectors, interactive whiteboards, overhead projectors, display screens and computers, and the necessary cabling in learning areas to support curriculum delivery
- Provide disabled access to the whole school, internally and externally
- Redistribute boys and girls toilets
- Create staff work areas close to students.

With economically sustainable development in mind the school now has a water capture and recycling system with an under floor bladder, T5 fluorescent lights; movement sensors; solar panels; and automatic high-level windows operating as heat chimneys.

The construction contract was awarded to SJ Higgins Pty Ltd, a Victorian builder with a track record of successful education projects (www.sjhiggins.com.au). Baldasso Cortese had worked with this company on several projects

and was confident of their ability to rebuild Hartwell without causing unmanageable disruption.

The first step in the staged development plan was to instal relocatable classrooms on the outdoor play area on the north east of the site to accommodate classes while demolition, site clearing, building and fit out continued progressively. As each stage was completed, classes were moved in, freeing up the relocatables for the next groups.

"This was one of the more complex school projects that the practise has tackled. Only contractors with experience of working on school sites and who were willing to organise their work around the school week were considered," Cutting says.

"The builders worked every Saturday and did much of the demolition and dusty, noisy work outside school hours.

"The school was equally flexible about accommodating construction requirements over the four and half years from commencement until the project was finished at the end of Term 4 last year."

From a design perspective, Hartwell Primary was a challenge. There was a significant slope from south to north; the maximum area of outdoor sports and play space had to be squeezed out of the 1.2 ha; and there were nine different levels within the building that needed to be connected for efficient flow of students and staff. At the same time, the design brief called for an outcome that would bring old and new buildings together in a coherent whole that would avoid the 'tacked-on' look that schools which have been repeatedly added to often suffer from.

Baldasso Cortese's design solution was to separate the old from the new by recessed links so that the buildings, while completely different, sit together comfortably. The new two-story learning communities open on the ground floors to outdoor learning areas and on the upper level to generous balconies.

White on the second level and charcoal on the lower, and fresh blue, red and green panels and blinds on the balconies help to hold everything together, while the colour of the original brick building has been repeated on the BER learning community building.

As one would expect, the interiors are flexible, colourful, practical and demonstrate the school's teaching staff's involvement in the planning process... the wet areas are where they need to be and easily moved panels can be open or closed depending on the present need for the space.

In the corridors and staircases, Melbourne graphic design firm Tin&Ed has turned children's lust for drawing on walls into hard wearing vinyl wallpaper that features a wonderful display of creatures one might find in the deep sea, the Jurassic period, things that fly and what can be found in outer space.

Principal Moore says: "The children love the walls and take great pride in pointing out their particular piece of art." **ET**