



Room for everyone

Perth's Atwell College is nurturing an inclusive school community for children of all abilities

In the *Elements of Architecture*, written in 1624, Sir Henry Wotton said: "In architecture, as in all other operative arts, the end must direct the operation. The end is to build well. Well building hath three conditions: commodity, firmness and delight".

Sir Henry would have been proud of Atwell College, Western Australia's first fully inclusive secondary school for both mainstream students and those with disabilities. The school displays those qualities superbly with its contemporary lines, flexible design, light and use of external and internal space and at, a cost of \$37.6-million, it is state-of-the-art.

Officially opened in February this year, to high acclaim, the college has been operating for 12 months. Its vision is to fully develop each student's intellectual, physical, social and emotional capacity by enabling each child to become active world citizens with an informed concern for the Earth's environment and each person's impact upon it.

Speaking to *Education Today* on the first day back of Term 2, the school's principal, Steven Crake, said that the facilities were excellent.

"The arts area is outstanding and the flexibility of the learning communities will enable us to use some really interesting teaching methodologies, and we are exploring that," he said.

Mr Crake has been principal for just over two years, coming on board 12 months before the school opened. He said there was also an active college council, which was heavily involved in its

establishment because there was a real need for the facility to be built, particularly for students with disabilities.

Core beliefs

The core of Atwell College are connection, opportunity, environment and holism and the college fosters these pillars of human development with a strong connection to society and its values, a strong sense of personal self worth and a valuing of each individual demonstrated through respect and concern for all.

The present enrolment of 450 students from Years 7 to 9, including about 34 in Years 7 to 13 in the specialist Kim Beazley Learning Community, study arts, English, health and physical education, languages, mathematics, science, society and environment, and technology and enterprise.

The college's ethos stresses the aspiration to seek excellence. Students are expected to aim high and to achieve their maximum potential.

Community support

Atwell College is a real community project, supported by a strong community push to establish an exceptional new school. Principals from other schools, parents, parent groups from feeder primary schools, the Kim Beazley school community of White Gum Valley, Western Australia's Building Management and the Department of Education and Training all contributed to the project.

According to Western Australia's Education Minister, Dr Liz Constable, the facility is the culmination of the vision of the community and the active support of many groups including the Atwell Community Association.

"The community's influence is obvious and the active support of parents from the very early planning stages continues as the college grows," she said.

The facilities allow a full range of support services to be tailored to the individual needs of students, according to Dr Constable, while modern design and services enable the development of a close community feel, with the focus on the central piazza area, as well as a strong arts influence.

Design concept

Designed by JCY Architects and Urban Designers (JCY) and built by Pindan Construction, Atwell College features a specialist hub building with a therapy pool for special-needs students; life skills rooms with intensive learning spaces; Years 7 to 9 learning communities with inclusive classrooms; a two-storey senior community facility with specialist services including science, art, design and technology and food technology; a performing arts centre that includes music and media; and playing fields for soccer and hockey.

The second stage of the project, which is yet to have an architect appointed and a tender for the work issued, will cater for Years 10 to 12.

JCY Architect, Elisabetta Guj, said her brief



Designed by JCY Architects and Urban Designers and built by Pindan Construction, Atwell College is a showcase facility

children something a bit more interactive so all the learning communities are entirely flexible.”

Spaces in Atwell College are totally interactive which means students don't have to sit in a classroom all day. They can sit in linked communal spaces and some areas even have second level balconies the same size as the classroom, so teachers can set up their lesson outside to take full advantage of a beautiful day.

Equally impressive, the performing arts wall can also be opened so plays and concerts can be performed outside too.

“We loved doing the school,” Ms Guj said. “The design meets the needs of the curriculum and how it changes over time.”

Looking around the site, an impression is gained of a school that has not been built for 2009. It has been built for the future, with an adaptable and flexible design that can cater for a changing curriculum in a rapidly changing world.

for the school's design was to develop a master plan and Stage 1 plan for integration with “100 per cent inclusivity of both mainstream students and special needs students” from the Kim Beazley Learning Community, both within the school and within the individual learning communities featured throughout.

So how do you design a building to foster this level of personal growth, creativity and learning?

“The whole idea was those areas equally had access to all the common facilities such as the library, café and performing arts,” she explained.

“The school has been designed so that all of those elements are situated in the centre of a village if you like, and each learning community, including the Kim Beazley Learning Community, has an equal distance to all facilities so there is no sense of any of the school's communities being in a corner.”

“It's about inclusivity so there is no such thing as a canteen. The café and library are integrated and it actually feels like a funky café in a busy square,” Ms Guj told *Education Today*.

“There is a totally different feeling, to give the

The design brief

- ◆ Flexible internal and external learning communities
- ◆ Integrated learning communities
- ◆ Iconic building forms with strong shapes, graphics and symbols
- ◆ Public art integrated throughout
- ◆ A central courtyard
- ◆ No corridors
- ◆ Linked communal spaces
- ◆ Movable walls that open to pleasant outdoor areas

