

THE OFFICE OF THE  
VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT  
ARCHITECT CHAMPIONS THE  
QUALITY OF THE BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT, WORKING  
ACROSS VICTORIA TO  
IMPROVE SIGNIFICANT  
PROJECTS.

The Victorian Design Review Panel (VDRP) offers independent and expert advice to clients, design teams and key decision makers of significant public or private projects, at key stages of the design and development process.

The Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA) seeks to capture and share common issues of particular project types which are seen through the VDRP, as part of their design advisory role. The Design Review: Lessons Learned series offers a short summary of issues for project teams and clients to consider as they brief and develop designs for these complex projects.

The VDRP was established by the Office of the Victorian Government Architect to provide constructive advice to clients and statutory decision makers to improve the design quality of development proposals in the interests of the Victorian public.

The Design Review process draws experience from the OVGA team and built environment industry professionals from the fields of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture and planning, as well as specialists in sustainability, accessibility, health, place making and masterplanning. The structured peer review process has been proven to assist projects realise their full potential, giving confidence to key decision makers to choose good design.

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### MASTERPLANNING AND SITE PLANNING

- Consider the school's place within the neighbourhood. Analyse desire lines and patterns of movement to and through the school. Connect to nearby community facilities and realise possible linkages.
- Exploit the full extent of land when planning the site. Every part of a school's grounds should be highly considered. Avoid creating 'left over bits'.
- Determine a clear hierarchy of open space and define a 'heart' for the school. It is important to have a variety of outdoor spaces scaled from larger gathering spaces, to medium play spaces to smaller, intimate areas of refuge.
- Identify the natural assets of the site. Consider how these assets can inform the design response but also become part of the learning experience. Collaborate with a landscape architect early in site planning phase to optimise all site opportunities.
- Develop a clear address and main entry. A school entry should be conspicuous and announce itself to the neighbourhood. The school's address is more than just a 'drop off point'.
- Encourage active transport through the design. Ensure the school is integrated into the area's broader cycling and walking path networks.
- Consider how the public, parents and pupils access the school. Determine how these areas will be articulated through the built form. Gathering spaces at pick-up times are important social places for parents.
- Map expected congestion created by school pick up/drop off by car. Position parent car pick up/drop off safely, separate from the main pedestrian entry and consider how it can be managed through design. Encouraging active transport will help reduce potential congestion.
- Engage in a collaborative and integrated neighbourhood approach to planning. Client (eg government agency) and the local council to work collaboratively to ensure strategic, neighbourhood-wide thinking is integrated into the design.

## ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC PRESENTATION

- Schools are important public buildings. They have status in a neighbourhood and should contribute to the urban structure and identity of a place.
- The architecture should signal a school's civic qualities and its value within the community. A school's status as a place of education should be raised rather than downplayed. Buildings should define a strong civic presence while at the same time project a sense of safety and friendliness.
- A school should be a point of difference within its context. Consider how this can be best achieved through the use of height, materials and architectural expression.
- Give strong consideration to the presentation of buildings and landscape to each boundary and street. These edges will be the 'face' of the school to the community.

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## LANDSCAPE

- Define the functional role of each outdoor space. This will influence the size, level of enclosure and relationship of outdoor spaces with internal spaces.
- Establish a clear planting structure. Ensure that the main structure planting is introduced as early as possible to provide identity, enclosure and shade to outdoor spaces. Smaller gardens can be implemented by the school.
- Develop 'spatial experiences' within the landscape. In the way that classrooms are designed and planned for learning, similar thinking should be brought to landscape design.
- Consider the visual outlook from classrooms. Where possible enable visual access to nature and exploit existing features such as mature trees.
- Design spaces to be socially inclusive. Consider how spaces are used and can be appropriated by different age groups.
- Elevate the value of landscape for amenity and learning. Avoid landscape becoming a 'last minute addition' to fill gaps between buildings. Removing landscape from a project budget is a false economy.

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## RELOCATABLE CLASSROOMS

- Give relocatable classrooms the same status as permanent classrooms. They should read as an integrated part of the school, connected to the open space and circulation networks. Landscape can be used to integrate relocatables and give status to 'temporary' parts of the school.
- Carefully consider where relocatable classrooms are positioned in the masterplan. Consider how they can be clustered to enable similar learning environments to permanent classrooms. Avoid presenting temporary buildings along a street frontage or to the back of permanent buildings.

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## FACILITY SHARING

- Engage with the local council to explore community facility sharing opportunities. This could include sports facilities, halls, libraries and art facilities. Consider how the design of a school can maximise opportunities for community use of buildings, car parks and open space after hours.

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## BUDGET

- An upfront investment in quality design will save money during the life of the school. A reduction in quality to save money in the capital budget is a false economy.
- Modular and integrated building formats offer a budget conscious solution. Differentiation can be achieved through clever use of materials, colour and site planning.



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