

CASE STUDY

Research Primary School, Research

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Research Primary School was completed in 2020, by Kennedy Nolan Architects, with a project value of \$5.7m. The scope consisted of the refurbishment of a classroom block for a new Administration and Art Centre; and a new building containing Learning Areas and amenities. Extensive landscape works were designed to resolve access and stormwater issues and the protection of significant trees. The school's declining enrolments, poor street address and need for refurbishment, informed a brief to deliver a new entrance and create a civic presence in the community.

KEY INITIATIVES ADOPTED TO PROTECT THE DESIGN QUALITY

- » A design and landscape led strategy, with Simon Ellis Landscape Architect, established legible and DDA compliant paths into, and around, the campus – a challenging task on steeply sloping ground.
- » Rather than relying on fencing, the building was sited to form defined external areas – a contained playing and learning space with direct access to teaching spaces and most critically a central quadrangle with a broad verandah to give the school something it had never had – a Centre.
- » Using design to stitch the school together physically and psychologically, creating an urban identity, wayfinding and a sense of address, to deliver a unified campus.
- » Elevating the relationship between built form and the landscape, with permeable edges providing easy and direct access to an active play area to the north and the south verandah facing a new quadrangle gathering space. The building parts were pulled apart, with connections provided by generous boardwalks. This arrangement positively re-balanced the relationship between built form and landscape whilst providing protection and comfort.
- » The building was clad in durable, fire-resistant timber – a material which resonates with the bush aesthetic of the area, is comfortably non-institutional, low maintenance and sustainable.
- » The interior balances a muted background palette drawn from eucalypts, which are ubiquitous in Research, tempered by intense and energising colours.
- » Large trees were preserved, compliant DDA paths were established in sweeping arcs which incorporate extensive planting and rock placement.

Project: Research Primary School
Architects: Kennedy Nolan
Landscape Architect: Simon Ellis
Photography: Emily Bartlett



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CONSTRAINTS

- » Dilapidated facilities and challenging site conditions that impacted meeting the required entitlement building areas.
- » Difficulty in defining the scope of landscape work and site work upgrade required.
- » Within a limited budget, there was a requirement for universal access across all site facilities that previously had very limited access and the complexities of dealing with infrastructure that had been constructed in the 1950s, 60s and 80s, of which there was little to no information.
- » A disproportionate perception of risk across the site impacting design outcomes for students, staff and the community.
- » Limited budget, tight design parameters and challenging administrative process.
- » Poor understanding of the appropriateness of timber cladding for the building, despite its sustainability and proven durability.
- » The need for a design champion for the project and an understanding that risk can be managed through good design.

WHAT WORKED WELL

- » **Selection of architects through an Expression of Interest (EOI) from three bidders and interview process.**
- » **Aspirational brief from the architect supporting best practice in education and sustainability.**
- » **Allowing the architect to select the sub-consultants, based on previous experience and no Project Manager.**
- » **A strong design concept that was integrated with the landscape, so that regardless of value management and design restrictions, it was successful on an urban scale.**
- » **Comprehensive documentation to minimise variations to the contract price and appropriate design and project contingencies.**
- » **The architect established a good working relationship with the school, builder, landscape architect and consultants to deliver on time and on budget.**
- » **The architect advocating that the school could rely entirely on electricity and did not need natural gas.**
- » **A design team, builder (Newpol) and School Principal who followed the project through to completion.**
- » **Connecting with the community of Research and reflecting the specific qualities of the local environment.**
- » **Greater quality control on material selection and avoiding substitution – which is an issue with other forms of procurement such as Design and Construct.**
- » **The Principal identified that “the school felt right for the Research kids and presented an architecture which reflected the values and aesthetics of the people who lived there”.**

