

Smalls Road Public School Design Philosophy

The new Public School at Smalls Rd, Ryde is a landmark education project for both the NSW Department of Education and the Ryde community. The project will deliver accommodation for up to 1000 students on the site of the former Ryde High School. As a new school, this project represents a rare opportunity to deliver an integrated, future-focused learning environment for students and the design has been informed by 21st century education principles.

The new building is planned around a central courtyard which forms the heart of the school. The annular planning arrangement offers all spaces within the school an equal and democratic relationship to the campus heart, resulting in a visually and physically connected school community. Breaks in the building create connections from the courtyard to the wider campus beyond and increase access to natural light, ventilation and outdoor learning areas for students.

In addition to general learning spaces, the project includes administration and staff areas, a communal hall, library, special program rooms, special education learning spaces, a canteen and outdoor learning spaces. In order to foster a sense of local community, the planning arrangement offers a separate, after-hours access point to the playing fields, communal hall and library.

The design takes advantage of the strengths and opportunities of the existing campus setting, maximising the retention of existing mature trees, both within the courtyard and across the wider site. The design nestles into the slope of the existing topography, offering level access to the outdoors from the level one Kinder and Special Education learning spaces on the western side. The landscape design explores themes of Australian identity, creating a variety of outdoor settings for learning and play.

Clusters of flexible classrooms provide diverse learning settings for individuals, small groups and whole class activities. The column-free spaces maximise the potential for reconfiguration, offering the flexibility to adapt and change over time. A generous covered play area on the east creates an opportunity for the future expansion of the school.

The architecture takes its cues from traditional examples of the defended terrain such as Chinese Tulou housing where an unadorned exterior protective skin gives way to a surprising and vibrant interior. Responding to the context the external façade comprises rectangular fibre cement panels arranged in a stretcher bond pattern, creating an over-scaled reference to the bricks that define the domestic character of the surrounding suburb. The rich, warm tone of the facade panels have been selected to compliment the variety of tones of brick in the surrounding streetscape. The interior façade takes its cues from the carefully selected plant species inspired by iconic Australian landscape settings distinguishes the courtyard as a vibrant and colourful place for children. A continuous roof physically and symbolically unites the school as a connected whole.

The new school at Smalls Rd, Ryde will offer students a 21st-century learning experience that combines progressive and flexible learning settings that engage with the natural environment.