2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

OVERALL WINNER 2026:

Caulfield Grammar School Senior School Teaching and Learning Building
217 Glen Eira Road, St Kilda East, Victoria, Australia

Architect: **DesignInc + 3XN**

Photographer: Dianna Snape

Summary Citation

The Senior School Teaching and Learning Building at Caulfield Grammar School, designed by DesignInc and 3XN, demonstrates the value of a rigorous and collaborative approach to educational design.

The jury recognised the extensive engagement process, which brought together school leadership, teachers, students and the broader school community to establish a shared educational vision. The concept of 'tidal learning' informed the planning of interconnected learning neighbourhoods, shared commons and spaces supporting formal teaching, independent study and collaboration.

Particular consideration was given to student agency, wellbeing and the balance between connection and concentration. The jury commended the discipline of the briefing process and the clear relationship between educational objectives and spatial outcomes, demonstrating how a considered design process can respond to evolving educational needs.

Full Citation

The Senior School Teaching and Learning Building at Caulfield Grammar School, designed by DesignInc and 3XN, demonstrates the value of a rigorous and collaborative approach to educational design. The jury particularly recognised the care taken to establish a clear educational vision and translate it into a learning environment responsive to the needs of senior students. The project's significance lies in the relationship between its briefing process, design decisions and implications for everyday use.

An extensive engagement process brought together school leadership, teachers, students, parents and operational staff to consider how senior students learn, how their needs change throughout the day, and how the school might better prepare them for life beyond the classroom. This consultation was more than an exercise in gathering requirements. It provided an opportunity to question established assumptions about teaching spaces and develop a shared understanding of the experiences and capabilities the building should support.

The concept of 'tidal learning' became a central organising idea. Recognising that students move between structured teaching, independent study, collaboration and informal exchange, the design

team explored how the building could accommodate these different modes without treating them as isolated activities. For the jury, the strength of this approach was the clear connection between an educational proposition and the spatial relationships developed in response.

Rather than relying solely on conventional classrooms and corridors, the plan brings together interconnected learning neighbourhoods, shared commons and settings for individual and group work. Formal teaching areas sit alongside spaces for discussion, reflection and informal study. Circulation is considered as part of the learning environment, creating opportunities for interaction and allowing students to move between activities with increasing independence. These decisions reflect an understanding that choice and agency are developed through the everyday organisation of school life.

The process also addressed the balance between connection and concentration. Transparency and openness are moderated by spaces that offer greater privacy and focus, while attention to acoustics, scale and the relationships between activities acknowledges the practical demands of teaching and learning. This is an important distinction: the project does not equate flexibility with educational success, but seeks to provide an appropriate range of settings for different purposes.

Wellbeing was similarly considered as part of the educational brief rather than as a separate provision. Spaces for social connection, informal support and quiet retreat are distributed through the building, recognising the relationship between belonging, personal development and learning. Access to natural light and connections to landscape contribute to environments intended to support students throughout the school day.

The jury recognised this project for the discipline of its briefing, the sustained dialogue between educators and designers, and the consistency with which its educational objectives informed the resulting spaces. It offers a useful example of how a clearly articulated learning philosophy can guide decisions from early consultation through to occupation, and how the success of an educational building can be assessed against the needs and experiences of those who use it.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

CATEGORY WINNER: NEW CAMPUS WITH NEW EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES (Category 2)

Applies to construction of a new school or educational institution on a new campus.

Kerribanna Primary School
29 Jennings Boulevard, Leneva, Victoria, Australia

Architect: **Y2 Architecture**

Photographer: Leon Schoots

Summary Citation

Kerribana Primary School and Kindergarten is a Supported Inclusion School on Dhudhuroa Country that demonstrates how deep community engagement and specialist expertise can shape an inclusive, future focused learning environment before its community exists. A multidisciplinary Design Reference Group established a research grounded educational vision with clear pedagogical pillars, directly translated into two interconnected learning pavilions, flexible neighbourhoods and diverse indoor–outdoor learning settings that support personalised, collaborative and project based learning.

The jury noted Universal Design principles embed inclusion across the campus, from circulation and classroom planning to integrated accessibility features such as hoists and the library ramp, which becomes an inclusive learning journey rather than a mere compliance element. Close collaboration with Dhudhuroa Elders has woven Indigenous stories, language and artwork into the buildings and landscape, supporting ongoing cultural learning and affirming identity. Combined with passive environmental strategies that create healthy, climate responsive spaces, Kerribana is nurturing diverse learners and strengthening community connections.

Full citation

Kerribana Primary School and Kindergarten exemplifies how deep community engagement and design intelligence drawing from the expertise of specialists can create an inclusive learning environment before its community even exists. Conceived as a Supported Inclusion School on Dhudhuroa Country in Leneva near Wodonga, Kerribana was designed in the absence of a principal, staff or students, demanding a visionary and research-grounded approach to future educational needs.

A multidisciplinary Design Reference Group – including educators, inclusion specialists, early childhood representatives, regional education staff and Koorie education leaders – established a robust educational vision, underpinned by contemporary research and local knowledge. This

collaborative process defined clear pedagogical pillars of personalised, self-directed and experiential learning, alongside wellbeing and community connection, and translated them into a spatio-pedagogical framework that informed the design.

Organised around two learning pavilions linked by a central amphitheatre, the school supports 550 primary students, including up to 50 supported inclusion students, with a co-located kindergarten. Flexible learning neighbourhoods of around 80 students balance a sense of home and belonging with diverse settings for independent, collaborative and project-based learning. Specialist spaces, quiet retreats, outdoor learning zones and strong visual connectivity enable staff to adapt teaching approaches while maintaining care and oversight.

The jury noted that inclusion is embedded across the campus rather than confined to specialist areas, supported by a range of different learning settings, which further reinforces the principles of inclusive design. Circulation, classroom planning, acoustic and sensory conditions are shaped by Universal Design principles, and the careful integration of accessibility infrastructure such as hoists and ramps. The library ramp, weaving through shelving, reading nooks and gathering spaces, transforms an access requirement into an inclusive learning journey for all students.

Meaningful collaboration with Dhudhuroa Elders has grounded the project in Country. Indigenous stories, language and artwork, including digitally translated Aunties' artworks, are woven into buildings and landscape, supporting ongoing cultural learning and affirming identity.

Passive environmental strategies – orientation, daylighting, natural ventilation and covered outdoor spaces – create healthy, climate-responsive settings.

Already embraced by students, staff and families, Kerribana nurtures diverse learners and strengthens community connections.

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ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Victoria / Tasmania

CATEGORY WINNER: NEW BUILDING/S OR FACILITIES - LARGE (Category 3)

A new building or new buildings in an existing school or campus, value over $15 million.

Caulfield Grammar School Senior School Teaching and Learning Building
217 Glen Eira Road, St Kilda East, Victoria, Australia

Architect: **DesignInc + 3XN**

Photographer: Dianna Snape

Summary Citation

The Senior School Teaching and Learning Building sets out to redefine the senior school experience through a highly connected learning ecosystem that centres student outcomes, wellbeing and agency. Developed through a collaborative planning process, the building supports a rich range of learning modes, enabling students to move seamlessly between instruction, collaboration, independent inquiry and reflection. The jury particularly commends the project's success in fostering greater student ownership, stronger peer connections and a culture where learning is visible, shared and actively embraced. By integrating pastoral care, wellbeing and learning within a single environment, the building creates a strong sense of belonging while supporting academic success. The result is an innovative and future-ready learning environment that is already demonstrating measurable positive impacts on student engagement, wellbeing and learning success.

Full citation

The Senior School Teaching and Learning Building represents a thoughtful and highly resolved response to the evolving demands of senior secondary education. Distinguished by the clarity of its educational vision and the rigour of its planning process, the project by DesignInc and 3XN demonstrates how architecture can actively support learning, wellbeing and community formation. The design establishes a rich and interconnected learning environment in which space itself becomes a catalyst for engagement, independence and academic growth.

The strength of the project lies in the discipline with which educational objectives informed architectural outcomes. Extensive consultation with school leadership, teachers, students, parents and operational staff established a shared understanding of contemporary senior learning and the capabilities students require beyond school. This process generated an educational framework that guided every aspect of the design, resulting in an environment where spatial organisation, functionality and learning aspirations are closely aligned.

Particularly commendable is the project's departure from the traditional model of senior school accommodation. Rather than organising learning around a collection of discrete classrooms, the building is conceived as a connected landscape of diverse and complementary settings. Formal

teaching spaces are integrated with areas for independent study, collaborative inquiry, peer learning and informal interaction, creating a graduated spectrum of learning environments. This spatial diversity supports learner agency while reflecting the increasingly fluid and self-directed nature of contemporary senior education.

For the jury, the architectural realisation of the school's concept of "tidal learning" was especially persuasive. The building is organised as a sequence of interconnected learning neighbourhoods in which students move naturally between modes of learning, collaboration and reflection. Generous commons, transparent learning environments and carefully considered circulation spaces blur the distinction between classroom and shared space, creating an environment where learning is visible and participation is encouraged. The resulting sense of openness fosters connection across year levels and disciplines while cultivating a culture of curiosity, exchange and collective learning.

The jury was impressed by the sophistication with which the project balances openness and focus. Visual connectivity and transparency are carefully moderated to maintain both engagement and concentration, while the scale and character of spaces support a variety of learning experiences throughout the day. The building demonstrates particular attention to the quality of interior environments, with abundant natural light, strong visual connections to landscape, effective acoustic control and a considered material palette contributing to spaces that are both calm and stimulating.

The jury noted the integration of wellbeing as a spatial and architectural proposition. Social, pastoral and reflective spaces are embedded throughout the building rather than separated from the learning environment, acknowledging the close relationship between wellbeing and academic achievement. Opportunities for informal gathering, quiet retreat and peer support are woven into the daily experience of the school, creating an environment that supports both the educational and personal development of students.

An important measure of the project's success is its impact on those who use it. Students have embraced the variety and flexibility of its learning settings, demonstrating increased ownership of their learning and a greater capacity to navigate independent and collaborative modes of study. The sustained occupation of study areas, collaborative hubs and breakout spaces throughout the day provides tangible evidence of a building that is not merely occupied but actively enabling learning. The Senior School Teaching and Learning Building offers a sophisticated model for contemporary secondary education, distinguished by the integration of educational vision, architectural quality and student experience.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

COMMENDATION: NEW BUILDING/S OR FACILITIES – LARGE (Category 3)

A new building or new buildings in an existing school or campus, value over $15 million.

CREST Education Senior Learning Centre
500 Soldiers Road, Clyde North, Victoria, Australia

Architect: **Smith + Tracey Architects**

Photographer - Tope Adesina Photography

Summary Citation

The CREST Education Senior Learning Centre offers a considered reinterpretation of the senior school environment, integrating learning, wellbeing, social interaction and staff presence within a single connected architectural framework. Through thorough planning, diverse learning settings and the democratisation of space, the project fosters independence, collaboration and authentic relationships between students and teachers. The building's social heart, anchored by a generous double-height gathering space, successfully brings together learning, social and community life. The integration of wellbeing facilities reflects a contemporary understanding of student support, balancing visibility and accessibility. Thoughtful planning, durable materials and strong environmental initiatives further enhance the project's contribution, establishing a compelling model for future-focused senior education.

Full citation

The CREST Education Senior Learning Centre by Smith + Tracey Architects presents a thoughtful architectural response to the changing nature of senior secondary education. Through the integration of learning, wellbeing, social interaction and staff presence, the project establishes a model for Years 11 and 12 learning that moves beyond traditional school planning paradigms. The design creates a continuous and interconnected learning landscape that supports student independence, choice and collaboration.

The jury was impressed by how the spatial planning expressed the school's social and educational ambitions. The building is organised as a series of highly connected environments that encourage movement between different modes of learning and interaction throughout the day. Formal learning settings, collaborative workspaces, social areas, wellbeing functions and staff workplaces are deliberately enmeshed. This spatial proximity supports a culture of accessibility and shared ownership, establishing relationships between students and staff that resemble contemporary university and professional settings.

The jury noted the project's commitment to the democratisation of space. Transparent boundaries, carefully managed sightlines and the strategic reduction of physical barriers create an environment characterised by openness and trust. Staff are embedded throughout the learning landscape rather

than isolated within dedicated offices, ensuring teaching, mentoring and pastoral support remain visible and readily accessible. The resulting architecture reinforces the educational philosophy that learning occurs through a continuum of formal and informal interactions rather than exclusively within the classroom.

A notable achievement is the reinterpretation of traditional educational typologies. The Senior Lounge and Discovery Centre move beyond the conventional library model to become a diverse learning ecosystem capable of supporting individual study, tutorial sessions, collaborative inquiry and peer-to-peer engagement. Rather than relying on enclosed rooms, the space is articulated through a series of carefully scaled zones defined by furniture, changes in level and spatial form. The architectural restraint with which these spaces are resolved ensures flexibility without sacrificing legibility or comfort.

The building's social heart is equally compelling. Anchored by a generous double-height volume that combines dining, performance, gathering and learning functions, this central space acts as a connective spine. The volume establishes a strong sense of collective identity while accommodating a wide spectrum of daily activities. Its openness, visibility and ability to support overlap between different user groups contribute significantly to the vitality of the building.

Particularly commendable is the placement of the Wellbeing Centre within this central precinct. Rather than locating wellbeing support at the periphery, the design positions it as an integral part of student life. The adjacency of a landscaped courtyard provides opportunities for privacy and reflection, while maintaining accessibility and visibility.

The project is further strengthened by its disciplined approach to economy, durability and environmental performance. The planning framework delivers efficiency and flexibility, while a restrained palette of exposed concrete, fibre cement linings, polished concrete floors and targeted acoustic treatments provides durability. Water-sensitive urban design initiatives, including rain gardens, wetlands and indigenous planting, contribute to both sustainability outcomes and the educational character of the campus.

The CREST Education Senior Learning Centre is distinguished by the coherence with which architectural, educational and social objectives have been brought together. Through careful planning, spatial generosity and a deep understanding of contemporary senior learning, the project creates an environment that is simultaneously collegiate, supportive and future-focused.

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ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Victoria / Tasmania

COMMENDATION: NEW BUILDING/S OR FACILITIES – LARGE (Category 3)

A new building or new buildings in an existing school or campus, value over $15 million.

Mary Aquin Centre, Santa Maria College
50 Separation St, Northcote, Victoria, Australia

Architect: **Williams Ross Architects**

Photographer - Peter Clarke

Summary Citation

The Mary Aquin Centre by Williams Ross Architects is the result of a careful engagement process, delivering a considered response to Santa Maria College's pedagogy, history, traditions and site. Responding to an identified gap in the College's established 'Village Model', the building provides students in Years 9 and 10 with dedicated year-level home bases that foster belonging and social cohesion. Flexible learning spaces, multipurpose classrooms and informal study areas support a range of teaching practices, while stronger connections between inside and outside extend opportunities for learning beyond the classroom.
Working with First Nations representative Mim Watkinson and Ziebell Landscape Architecture, the architects have incorporated a yarning circle and landscape spaces that encourage gathering and connection.
The project's strength lies in the careful translation of the College's particular needs and aspirations into built form, balancing practical requirements with pedagogy, identity and poetry, and tradition with innovation.

Full citation

The result of a careful engagement process, the Mary Aquin Centre for students in Years 9 and 10 by Williams Ross Architects delivers a specific and adroit response to Santa Maria's pedagogy, history, traditions and site. The architects have cleverly balanced the practical requirements of the building with pedagogy, identity and poetry to deliver a project that has resonated with the College and will surely support it for years to come.

Engagement with staff, students, parents, the College Board and the Sisters of the Good Samaritan revealed an important gap in the College's established 'Village Model'. While this approach aimed to provide students with dedicated year-level home bases that would foster belonging and social cohesion, students in Years 9 and 10 lacked such spaces and were subsequently required to move across the campus throughout the day. As part of the response, the architects identified opportunities for flexible learning spaces, informal study areas and stronger connections between inside and outside.

The building responds to these needs in considered ways. Adjacent classrooms can be opened up to accommodate team teaching and larger gatherings, while whiteboards and pinboards around classrooms allow teaching and learning to occur in different configurations. Dedicated classrooms are deliberately multipurpose, providing for a range of activities, with operable walls, durable finishes, project benches and direct access to outdoor learning areas. Post-occupancy evaluation suggests that these spaces are already influencing teaching practices.

The relationship between the building and its landscape has been given equal attention. Working with First Nations representative Mim Watkinson and Ziebell Landscape Architecture, the architects have incorporated a yarning circle as a place for gathering, connection and learning. Together with the forecourt and other outdoor spaces, the landscape provides opportunities for informal learning and year-level activities beyond the classroom.

The strength of the Mary Aquin Centre lies in the care with which the architects have translated the College's particular needs and aspirations into built form. There is a clarity to the planning, balanced by moments of generosity and joy. The result is a building that feels at home at Santa Maria College, balancing tradition and innovation, offering new possibilities for teaching, learning and student life.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

COMMENDATION: NEW BUILDING/S OR FACILITIES - SMALL (Category 4)

A new building or new buildings in an existing school or campus value less than $15 million.

Mount Pleasant Road Primary School Junior Learning & Creativity Hub
105-107 Mt Pleasant Road, Nunawading, Victoria Australia

Architect: **Kneeler Design Architects**

Photographer: Gallant Lee

Summary Citation

This project, Mount Pleasant Road Primary School Junior Learning and Creativity Hub, designed by Kneeler Architects is to be commended for delivering educational spaces that reflect current pedagogical requirements and student population needs. The learning precincts provide a range of spaces that allow for different teaching strategies and learning needs, and consideration of connecting outdoor spaces with indoor learning areas is evident and thoughtfully designed.

Full citation

The Mount Pleasant Road Primary School Junior Learning and Creativity Hub receives a Commendation for successfully meeting desired pedagogical and student population needs. Designed by Kneeler Architects, the project is recognised for its versatile learning precincts that accommodate current and future student population needs and diverse teaching strategies. The design allows for wider community engagement and is thoughtful in its integration of indoor and outdoor learning environments.

The design was developed through collaboration with key stakeholders allowing for the Masterplan to be updated to suit current and future educational needs of students and the growing student population.

There is detailed evidence of the planning process allowing for community, teacher and student voice. Evidence including photographs of students in workshops and teachers on site tours shows authentic involvement in the planning process. This entry is to be commended for its comprehensive planning incorporating the educational brief and including examples of student work from workshops and examples of teachers' notes. Teacher and student voice are clearly and evidently central to the design.

The design is to be commended for its responsiveness to changes in educational programs and the philosophy of the school. A range of different sized rooms and spaces provide flexibility and varied functionality. Designing small nooks and enclosed spaces, allow students to have choice and agency

in their learning and allow teachers to utilise a diverse range of teaching strategies. Connection to the outdoor spaces and courtyard have been achieved by the inclusion of large amounts of glazing, maximising natural light and connection with the outdoors. It is evident that the outdoor learning environments in this design are as important as the indoor spaces, and by keeping the Willow Peppermint Tree and making it a focal point in the outdoor environment provides a strong connection piece in this project.

The team are to be commended for creating a range of learning environments and zones that simultaneously support teacher instruction, curriculum delivery and the wellbeing of the students. Distinct internal spaces for learning, each serving different purposes, have been seamlessly integrated with the outdoor learning environment mirrored in circular zones allowing the many areas to come together as a cohesive whole. The design positively supports the philosophy of the school, teaching pedagogy and learning needs of the students.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

COMMENDATION: NEW BUILDING/S OR FACILITIES - SMALL (Category 4)

A new building or new buildings in an existing school or campus value less than $15 million.

Marian Learning Centre, Lavalla Catholic College, St Paul's Campus
186-204 Grey Street, Traralgon, Victoria Australia

Architect: **Y2 Architecture**

Photographer: Leon Schoots

Summary Citation

The Marian Learning Centre is commended for its rigorous, collaborative planning process and clear alignment between pedagogy, brief and built form. The project creates a purposeful campus heart, combining library, learning, social and wellbeing settings with flexibility and generosity. While some post-occupancy feedback identifies opportunities for refinement, the building demonstrates a mature, community-focused response to contemporary learning.

Full citation

The Marian Learning Centre at Lavalla Catholic College is commended for the strength of its planning process and the considered relationship between the educational brief, the College's aspirations and the resulting architectural response. Developed as the campus' academic and social heart, the project demonstrates clear evidence of consultation, testing and refinement, with engagement from school leadership, staff, students, families and educational consultant Mary McPherson. Juror feedback particularly recognised the value of this planning evidence and the way educational pedagogy shaped the design from the outset.

The jury noted that the building successfully responds to the design outcome criteria by creating a purposeful, contemporary learning environment that supports a range of teaching and learning modes. The library is positioned as a central learning hub rather than a conventional repository, connecting classrooms, research spaces, informal study settings and social areas. The project provides multiple teaching points, flexible studios, breakout zones, prototyping spaces and gathering areas, enabling direct instruction, collaboration, inquiry and student choice. These qualities give the building a strong educational value and establish a visible centre for learning within the campus.

In relation to flexibility, the Centre offers generous, adaptable spaces capable of supporting small-group work, larger gatherings, staff professional development, parent events and informal student use. Jurors observed that the design demonstrates functional flexibility through reconfigurable settings and a range of spatial scales. The building also enables staff to experiment beyond

traditional classroom arrangements, encouraging team teaching, interdisciplinary activity and more responsive support for diverse learners.

The jury also acknowledged the project's innovation in creating a mature and welcoming learning environment that expresses the College's Marist identity and promotes belonging. Its use of natural light, material warmth, strong sightlines, large volumes and varied settings contributes to a respectful atmosphere more closely aligned with tertiary and workplace environments than conventional junior secondary schooling. The post-occupancy evaluation provided useful evidence of impact.

The project's design is a thoughtful and substantial contribution to Lavalla Catholic College. It reflects a strong collaborative planning foundation, delivers an educationally purposeful design outcome, and provides flexible settings that support evolving pedagogy, wellbeing and community life. The jury commends the project for its ambition, generosity and clear commitment to creating a future-focused learning environment, while recognising that the post-occupancy feedback offers valuable guidance for ongoing use.

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ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Victoria / Tasmania

CATEGORY WINNER: MODERNISATION – LARGE (Category 5)

Renovation/modernisation projects valued over $5 Million.

Monash Innovation Labs
23 College Walk, Clayton, Victoria Australia

Architect: **Brand Architects**

Photographer: Sally Dere – Blue Tree Studios

Summary Citation

Monash Innovation Labs is a transformative learning precinct that successfully brings together education, research, entrepreneurship and industry within a single integrated environment. Through the adaptive reuse of existing campus buildings, the project creates a highly flexible ecosystem that supports project-based learning, advanced manufacturing, innovation and collaboration. The jury particularly commends the way learning is made visible and interconnected, fostering meaningful engagement between students, researchers and industry partners. By embedding industry within the educational experience and creating clear pathways from learning to innovation and enterprise, the precinct prepares students for contemporary practice in authentic and impactful ways. The result is a future-focused, sustainable and highly adaptable learning environment.

Full citation

Monash Innovation Labs demonstrates a sophisticated approach to the renewal of university infrastructure, revealing the latent potential of existing campus fabric to support new forms of learning, research and industry engagement. Rather than relying on expansion through new construction, the project by Brand Architects strategically repurposes and reconnects underutilised buildings and spaces to establish a coherent innovation precinct. Through a carefully calibrated program of adaptive reuse, insertion and spatial reorganisation, it transforms a fragmented part of the campus into a highly visible and connected environment for discovery, collaboration and enterprise.

Central to the project's success is the clarity with which its architectural and educational ambitions are aligned. Extensive consultation across the university and industry sectors informed a framework that positions project-based learning, advanced manufacturing, entrepreneurship and interdisciplinary exchange at the heart of the student experience. The resulting architecture is neither specialised nor prescriptive; instead, it provides a resilient spatial framework capable of accommodating evolving pedagogies, technologies and patterns of occupation.

The jury was particularly impressed by the way the project dissolves conventional distinctions between teaching, research and practice. Laboratories, fabrication facilities, workshops, start-up

incubators, teaching environments and collaborative workspaces are organised as an interconnected sequence of spaces that support the full innovation lifecycle. Circulation is conceived as more than movement between destinations, functioning as a mechanism for encounter, exchange and visibility. Transparent boundaries, visual connections and carefully managed adjacencies expose the processes of making, testing and learning, creating an environment in which knowledge production becomes a shared and collective enterprise.

Particularly commendable is the transformation of a previously underperforming breezeway into the social and intellectual spine of the precinct. Through a relatively modest architectural intervention, what was once residual circulation space has been reimagined as a generous and active public realm. The space accommodates informal learning, mentoring, exhibitions, industry events and everyday interaction, becoming both connective tissue and civic heart. Its success lies not only in its activation but in its ability to establish meaningful relationships between the precinct's diverse components, including CoLab, Makerspace and The Generator, creating a unified identity from previously disparate elements.

The jury noted that the project demonstrated a mature understanding of adaptive reuse as both an environmental and architectural strategy. Existing structures have been retained and reconfigured with precision, preserving while extending the useful life of significant university assets. New interventions are integrated with restraint, allowing the existing fabric to remain legible while providing the flexibility required for contemporary occupation. The resulting architecture balances permanence and adaptability, ensuring spaces can evolve in response to changing academic priorities, emerging technologies and future industry partnerships.

Monash Innovation Labs offers a persuasive model for the future development of higher education environments. Through the intelligent transformation of existing buildings and the creation of a connected, highly porous innovation precinct, the project unites education, research, entrepreneurship and industry engagement within a single architectural framework. Here, spatial, educational and institutional objectives have been brought into alignment, creating an environment capable of supporting innovation, collaboration and learning for years to come.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

COMMENDATION: MODERNISATION – LARGE (Category 5)

Renovation/modernisation projects valued over $5 Million.

The Verrocchi Centre - Ruyton Girls' School Performing Arts and Learning Resources Centre
12 Selbourne Rd, Kew, Victoria Australia

Architect: **Sally Draper Architects (now Draper Noxon) and Hayball in Association**

Photographer: Trevor Mein

Summary Citation

The Verrocchi Centre successfully brings together heritage adaptation, contemporary learning environments and a major new build Performing Arts Centre within a cohesive and highly connected campus precinct. At its heart, the transformed Learning Resource Centre provides a rich ecosystem of spaces that support independent learning, collaboration, creativity and community connection. Through the sensitive integration of heritage-listed Derham House, strong connections to landscape, inclusive design strategies and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, the project creates an environment that is welcoming, sustainable and enduring. The jury commends the project's ability to unite learning, performance and community within a single architectural vision that enriches student experience and strengthens the cultural life of the school.

Full citation

The Verrocchi Centre by Draper Noxon and Hayball is a highly accomplished educational project that successfully combines the modernisation of significant existing buildings with the delivery of a new contemporary Performing Arts Centre. Through the transformation of the Learning Resource Centre and the integration of heritage-listed Derham House, the project creates a connected learning, cultural and community precinct that strengthens the heart of campus life.

The jury was impressed by the sensitive integration of heritage and contemporary architecture. Derham House has been carefully restored and adapted, with improved accessibility and the reinstatement of the original entry celebrating the character and history of the building. Rather than existing as a separate heritage element, it has been seamlessly woven into the daily life of the centre, enriching the educational experience and strengthening connections across the campus.

The Learning Resource Centre represents a compelling reinterpretation of the contemporary school library. Beautifully crafted and highly adaptable, it provides a diverse ecosystem of spaces that support independent learning, collaboration, creativity and social connection. A rich variety of studio

environments, informal gathering spaces and quiet study areas allows students to engage with the building in different ways throughout the day, fostering intellectual curiosity, self-expression and a strong sense of belonging.

The jury noted the project's commitment to community, inclusion and wellbeing. New points of access support extended use beyond school hours, while flexible spaces accommodate visiting speakers, meetings and community events. Purpose-designed environments support learners of all ages, while careful consideration of acoustics, lighting and sensory comfort creates an inclusive setting that responds thoughtfully to neurodiversity.

A notable achievement is the way the project resolves a highly complex program and site. The new Performing Arts Centre, Learning Resource Centre and retained buildings are unified through a clear circulation strategy centred on a light-filled open stair that improves wayfinding and strengthens connections across the precinct. Strong visual relationships to courtyards, gardens and mature trees further enrich the experience of movement, learning and gathering.

The Verrocchi Centre is distinguished by the coherence with which heritage, learning, performance and community have been brought together within a single architectural vision. Through thoughtful adaptation, spatial generosity and a deep understanding of contemporary educational environments, the project creates a vibrant and enduring centre that enriches student experience, supports contemporary learning and strengthens the cultural life of the school community.

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ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Victoria / Tasmania

COMMENDATION: SMALL PROJECTS VALUE UNDER $2 MILLION (Category 7)

Melbourne Montessori College, Caulfield Campus Cycle 1
6 Roselea Street, Caulfield South, Victoria Australia

Architect: **Kneeler Design Architects**

Photographer: Gallant Lee

Summary Citation

This project is an illustration of architecture responding directly to educational philosophy, translating Montessori principles into a considered learning environment. The curated furniture, connections between indoor and outdoor environments, calm and uncluttered settings, and the use of natural materials result in spaces that support the exploratory and collaborative elements of the Montessori approach. The jury particularly commends the restraint of the design, which avoids unnecessary intervention and instead prioritises calm environments where learning materials, student choice and meaningful activity take centre stage. Through subtle yet transformative improvements, the project delivers a cohesive learning environment that authentically reflects and advances the vision of Montessori education.

Full citation

This project by Kneeler Design Architects demonstrates the considerable potential of refurbishment as an architectural and educational strategy. Working within the constraints of an existing building, limited budgets and ongoing school operations, the design achieves a transformation that is both measured and profound. Rather than seeking novelty, the project focuses on clarifying and strengthening the relationship between space, pedagogy and community, resulting in learning environments that are deeply aligned with the school's Montessori philosophy.

The jury was particularly impressed by the collaborative and iterative design process that underpinned the project. Through sustained engagement between school leadership and the design team, the refurbishment emerged from a careful understanding of the school's educational practices, values and culture. This approach avoided the imposition of generic contemporary learning models and instead sought to enhance the qualities that already distinguished the Montessori experience. The resulting architecture feels authentic to the community it serves, translating educational principles into a series of thoughtful spatial interventions.

The refurbishment of the five Early Years learning environments exemplifies the power of restrained and purposeful design. Existing barriers, redundant partitions and intrusive elements have been

removed to restore openness, coherence and visual continuity across the learning environment. New joinery, storage and spatial definitions are carefully integrated to support flexibility, order and student independence without overwhelming the clarity of the original spaces. The resulting classrooms are calm, light-filled and highly legible, providing an environment in which Montessori materials, self-directed activity and the rhythms of daily learning naturally become the focus.

The jury noted the project's successful treatment of the relationship between indoor and outdoor learning. Large openings dissolve traditional boundaries between classroom and landscape, allowing learning activities to extend seamlessly beyond the building envelope. Accessible decks and carefully considered outdoor environments create a continuous learning setting in which movement, exploration and engagement with nature form part of the everyday educational experience. These interventions significantly enhance both the functionality and spatial generosity of the learning environments while reinforcing principles that sit at the heart of Montessori education.

The new entry annexe is a modest yet effective architectural insertion. Beyond reclaiming valuable teaching space, it establishes a clear threshold between home and school while supporting routines that foster independence, responsibility and belonging. Its scale, materiality and form are carefully calibrated to complement the existing campus, providing a contemporary intervention that remains respectful of its context. The jury particularly appreciated the restraint with which the addition contributes to campus identity without seeking visual dominance.

The project also demonstrates a thoughtful commitment to sustainability through the retention and adaptation of existing building fabric. Rather than replacing what already existed, the design team has extended the life and usefulness of the building through targeted interventions that improve performance, functionality and amenity. This approach not only reduces waste and conserves embodied resources but also preserves the continuity and familiarity valued by the school community. The incorporation of natural materials and handcrafted elements further enriches the learning environment, creating subtle connections to the school's history and ethos.

What distinguishes this project is the confidence with which it embraces understatement. The refurbished environments are brighter, more functional and better connected, yet the interventions are so carefully integrated that they appear inevitable rather than imposed. The architecture provides a supportive framework for learning without competing for attention, demonstrating a clear understanding that educational environments are most successful when they empower the activities, relationships and experiences they are designed to support. It is an accomplished example of architecture in service of pedagogy and a compelling demonstration of how modest, carefully targeted refurbishment can deliver enduring educational value.

2026 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AUSTRALASIA VICTORIA & TASMANIA CHAPTER AWARDS

ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Enhancing the Educational Experience
Victoria / Tasmania

COMMENDATION: LANDSCAPE/OUTDOOR LEARNING AREA (Category 8)

Designed to showcase outdoor learning environments or landscapes targeted at improving educational outcomes.

Aurora School - Outdoor Playspace Interventions
96 Holland Road, Blackburn South, Victoria Australia

Landscape Architect: **Playce with WHDA**

Photographer: Land Media

Summary Citation

Aurora School Outdoor Playspace Interventions demonstrates the power of inclusive, play-based design to support the learning, wellbeing and independence of students with complex needs. Developed through a collaborative process with educators and specialists, the project translates a clear educational vision into a highly accessible and engaging outdoor environment. The playspace provides layered opportunities for risk-based play, sensory exploration, social connection and choice, enabling students of varying abilities to participate meaningfully in learning through play. The jury particularly valued the thoughtful accessibility features and the way the project creates a central zone that connects indoor and outdoor learning while supporting both group and independent experiences. As a bespoke and highly successful response to its context, the project exemplifies how inclusive design can place play at the centre of educational practice.

Full Citation

"In play, children learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, follow rules, regulate their emotions, and get along with others as equals." Peter Gray.

The Aurora School Outdoor Play space interventions recognises that play is not an adjunct to learning but the primary and natural way students learn and develop, socially and emotionally. It is an exemplary response to what an outdoor learning environment should be, responding also to unique requirements of students with deaf-blindness and other diverse learning needs.

The jury commends the collaboration that brought together educators, specialists and designers to envision the project. The school felt integral to the design and the process. Notably, the jury felt that this project especially celebrated childhood and joy.

The layered organisation of the learning spaces successfully translated the educational intent to the built environment. Centrally positioning the spaces in the school further celebrates inclusive play, strengthening the relationship between indoor and outdoor learning. This went beyond merely extending indoor learning to the outdoors or supplementing the indoor classroom. The project delivered on the school's fundamental goal to *create a truly accessible playspace where every child could experience a sense of belonging and agency, where children have opportunities to feel 'bigger' than the world around them—to climb, explore, take safe risks, and experience the confidence and joy that come from seeing the world from a different perspective*.

The project creates spaces that are open for larger gathering above and more intimate and varied on the ground level, this in turns provides flexibility for children to engage in meaningful communication, supporting social interaction and the development of speech and listening. The accessible change in levels creates new perspectives and provides spaces and play elements, enjoyed as an individual or in a group with peers, while remaining inclusive for children with complex needs. The ramped access, cantilever sandpit elements and raised watercourse features provide examples of inclusive design elements.

The project is innovative. The structure and play space are not an off-the-shelf solution but a carefully curated environment that visibly communicates the school's commitment to inclusive, play-based learning.

The project delivers both outstanding value through the bespoke design response that reinforces the school's educational philosophy and meaningful opportunities for every child to learn through play. Congratulations to the school and design team.