

23 JUNE 2022

MEDIA RELEASE

Ringwood learning hub wins regional design award

Yanna Mudjirr, Ringwood Secondary College's Senior School Building linking young adults with community, has just taken out the 2022 Learning Environments Australasia Award for Best New Individual Facility Under \$8M.



COVER IMAGES

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The light-filled space creates clear sightlines throughout

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Students are drawn to the mezzanine overlooking the central void

It's a challenge familiar to schools right across the country. How best to transition from a traditional campus of disconnected, inflexible, internalised spaces into an adaptable, coherent, learner-centred environment that prioritises student agency and strengthens community connections?

Since 2015 Ringwood Secondary College, a single-campus school of more than 1600 students in Melbourne's outer east, has been working closely with ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects to masterplan and deliver transformative facilities, in stages over time. The gradual pace allows time for new approaches to learning and connecting with the local community to be tested, embraced and sustained.

"A key challenge of the project," explained Principal Michael Phillips before his recent retirement, "is replacing a mish-mash of buildings and relocatable stock with no overall coherence". Stage 1 established a new architectural language for the College by introducing a purpose-built Junior School Building. Stage 2 augmented that with a contemporary split-level learning hub for senior students. The project also won the 2021 LEA Vic Chapter People's Choice Award.

"Students chose an Indigenous name for the building, which was endorsed by the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation," he says. "Yanna Mudjirr means stepping stones. This reflects a core purpose of learning in the building, and relates especially well to transitions and pathways for students."

At ground level, the Senior School Building features learning spaces separated by sliding glass walls, which can be reconfigured for collaboration or spill out into a versatile central space featuring a kitchenette, study nooks and tiered seating. A gallery on the upper level overlooks the central Study Centre and includes a casual break-out area, Media and ICT rooms. A bridge on the upper level connects through to Ringwood Training Centre and allows for sharing of facilities.

"The site was extremely tight. Despite that, the design features generous volumes, uplifting spaces, high ESD-values, a sense of openness and transparency, clear sightlines, and lots of natural light and ventilation."

**Wayne Stephens, Partner
ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects**

ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects Education Partner Wayne Stephens says the new facility "introduces a young-adult environment that maximises choice for senior students." "The site was extremely tight because it's surrounded by buildings and services," he says. "Despite that, the design features generous volumes, uplifting spaces, high ESD-values, a sense of openness and transparency, clear sightlines and lots of natural light and ventilation. Our builders Lloyd Group did an exceptional job with construction."

"We're thrilled to win this award because the LEA Awards are about more than aesthetics and architecture. They're about how spaces are designed and used, and the impact they actually have on school communities. That's so important to us."

Project Architect Karin Allen says the interconnected learning spaces with glazed acoustic panels can open up for co-teaching, out for external learning in

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The bridge helps create an easy flow between school and training facility

shaded outdoor settings, or inwards into the light-filled central core of adaptable shared spaces. "These can be easily configured for large and small groups, formal and informal learning, collaboration, self-directed learning, presentations and events," she says. "This means there's flexibility for both explicit instruction and collaborative learning. Detailing like green screens in the media space and a custom ICT fit-out deliver outstanding specialist areas."

A standout of Yanna Mudjirr is an informal, skylit study space overlooking the central void. Decorative screening, natural light, flexible bench seating and endless power points make it a popular place for students to connect or engage in self-directed learning.

Another highlight are the specialist ICT spaces and facilities, created to an exacting brief. These form a new community hub used outside school hours by Ringwood Training. Previously, senior students accessed Ringwood Training's vocational education facilities via a circuitous route. The new design introduces an upper-level bridge that links both facilities and literally elevates this important community partnership in the minds of learners and educators. The easy two-way flow of students between both facilities enables after-hours use of state-of-the-art ICT facilities by the Ringwood community and allows senior students to move seamlessly between VET and VCE learning.

"ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects creates learning places where our teachers and students increasingly feel part of a community of learners," says Michael. "Learning transitions from junior to senior school are no longer a theoretical construct. Teachers and students now operate beyond the static, outdated one-space and one-teacher model. We continue to go deeper, open the classroom doors, and look forward to future possibilities enhanced by a fit-for-purpose built environment."

High resolution images (please credit photographer Rhiannon Slatter):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4j4wg8y9gq63dvl/AAAYQeDVsv-plPleFMbWXDfQa?dl=0>

