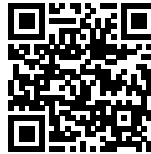




BELVUE SCHOOL: INCLUSIVE METHODS IN THE WOODLANDS

Posted on June 13, 2018 by editorship



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Belvue School is a secondary school for boys and girls with moderate to severe learning difficulties and a range of other additional needs. The school site sits adjacent to an under-utilised woodland, which the school manages as an educational nature reserve.



In 2014 the school had already raised enough money to install two shipping containers to act as storage and support spaces for the woodland but approached Studio Weave to enquire whether it

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would be possible to achieve some more flexible, larger extracurricular spaces with a similar budget. Studio Weave worked with the school to develop the design of two new woodland rooms that sit separately from the main school building and provide 150sqm of unique facilities, with a more domestic quality and intimate scale.



Our approach to this project was about more than just designing a new building for the school; it was about creating a narrative for the woodland that would open up imaginative ways of engaging with

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this newly acquired natural asset. We identified that the boundary between the playground and woods marks the border between familiar school territory and the magical, mysterious world beyond. At this very important threshold the woodland rooms act as a 'gatehouse' and symbolise the entrance to another world/secret garden. The design process included story writing workshops with the students to develop a collective narrative for the woodland and identify how this 'gatehouse' could interact with it. The classrooms were required to provide three types of much-needed learning spaces. The 'Cosy Lounge' is used for teaching and engaging with the woodland, offering a connection to wildlife that many students don't otherwise have, as well as being a private sensory space in which to calm down. The 'Sociable Kitchen' includes a café, with food preparation area and dining for small groups. The 'Messy Barn' allows outdoor learning, whatever the weather. These functions enable students to learn essential life skills in their transition to becoming well-rounded citizens in an inclusive society. Through encouraging and inspiring students to adopt extra responsibilities and be more autonomous, the school nurtures their social, emotional and personal development, leading them towards employment opportunities.

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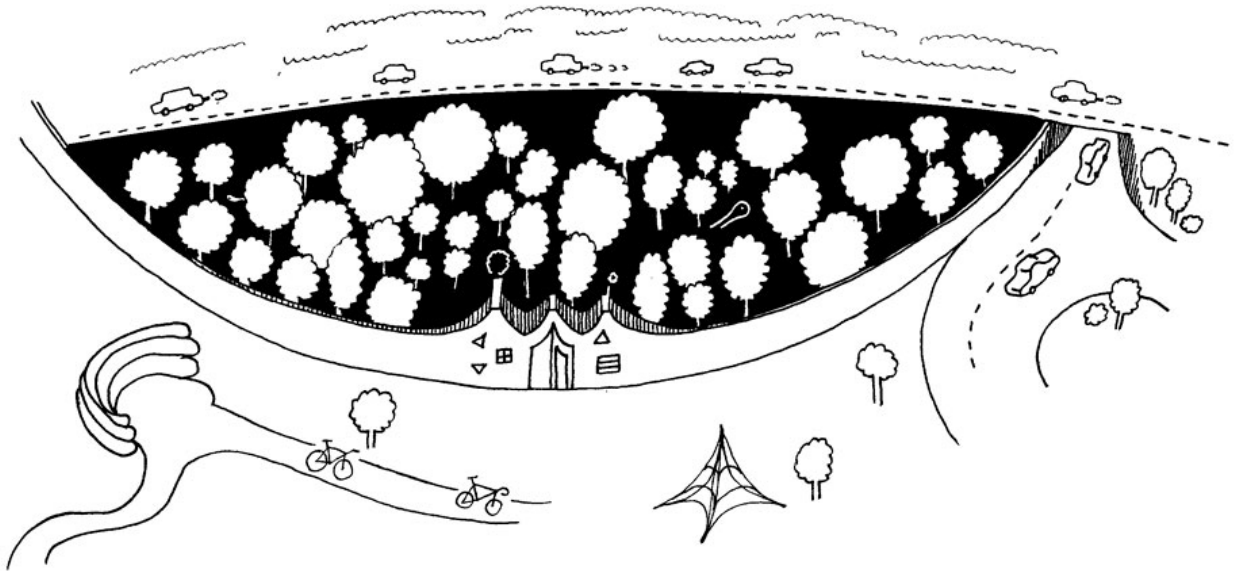


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Concept Sketch

The concave ceiling allowed us to create a lower head height as you enter the space, creating an intimate domestic scale that opens up as you move towards the centre of the room. The curved soffit also enables light from the clerestory windows to spill across its entire surface, filling the space with natural light. The stack effect created by this form allows for the spaces to be entirely naturally ventilated. In parallel to the design and delivery of the woodland classrooms building, Studio Weave worked with a forest management specialist on developing a woodland strategy to ensure good maintenance and sensitive upkeep of the woods. The woodland strategy seeks to bring benefits to the wider community, by improving biodiversity in the area and addressing the effects of the busy A-road that runs along the back of the woodlands.

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