Peter Lippman and Reiko Shimokura believe that, in addition to inclusive classrooms, schools should utilise unused space in a school building to introduce a variety of settings which complement the classroom.

DESIGNING INCLUSIVE SPACES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

For children with special educational needs, it's clear that inclusive classrooms are an absolute must. But as well as these, we believe schools should also have complementary inclusive settings. Some may call these breakout spaces, but we use the term complementary settings because this then includes other types of learning activities not possible, or difficult to undertake, in a classroom.

These settings are generally located in underutilised space in a school: for example, an area outside and adjacent to classrooms for direct access. As well as providing additional locations within the school building for students to work, our research has found that when the school is planned in this way, teachers and students have demonstrated high levels of engagement.

So what do these spaces look like in practice?

CLASSROOM
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ALCOVES

Generally, contemporary school buildings are either organised with classrooms located along hallways and/or verandas, clustered around a common learning area, without classrooms or as a singular space with few classrooms. When school buildings are planned with hallways or a common learning area, the complementary settings can be designed within alcoves.

Alcoves are similar to the 'stimulus shelter' featured in some classrooms into which students who are upset can retreat for brief periods to rest, regulate and regroup. When located adjacent to each classroom, alcoves provide learners with places where they can settle, work, and re-engage in their learning. When these settings are located in this manner, not only do learners have direct access to these places, but, most importantly, teachers can easily access them and ensure that they are able to determine if and when the child will be able to focus on the task-at-hand. For children with ADHD, who are sensitive to sight and sounds, alcoves can be a great learning space.

WHILE EACH SPACE PROVIDES A DIFFERENT TYPE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCE, EACH INFLUENCES THE LEARNERS, THE LEARNING AND THE THINGS TO BE LEARNED.

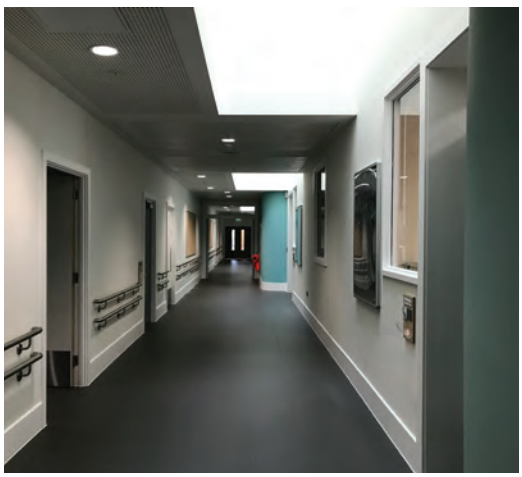
...CLASSROOMS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO OUTDOOR SPACES SO THAT CHILDREN CAN EXPERIENCE SENSES OF SIGHT, SOUND, SMELL AND TOUCH.

GROUP ROOMS

These rooms are small spaces – no larger than 10 m^2 (around 100 ft^2) – used for group work by no more than four students, as well as for one-to-one support. These rooms are generally located within or adjacent to the classrooms. They may be organised as calm rooms, study rooms, sensory rooms or soft play rooms, depending on the needs of the children who occupy the group rooms. Typically, these rooms are shared between classrooms, but where possible we would recommend that each classroom has its own group room to avoid any disagreement about how the rooms are activated. If educators can communicate with one another over how these rooms will be used, these complementary settings can be curated appropriately with activity settings that support both mainstream students and learners with ADHD.

HALLWAYS

Hallways should be understood as therapeutic spaces. When classrooms become overwhelming for learners with ADHD (because of noise and visual distractions), hallways can become places where learners can walk to calm themselves. Hallways should be designed to create a sense of tranquillity, and we'd recommend considering natural finishes, the use of a biophilic colour palette, lights that are dimmable, and access to accentuating natural light.



OUTDOOR COMPLEMENTARY SETTINGS

Outdoor settings can be effective places for children to refresh and retreat. In the 1960s, Dr. A. Jean Ayres found that slow learning and poor behaviour in young children was often caused by inadequate sensory integration within their brain. Therefore, classrooms for younger children should have direct access to outdoor spaces so that children can experience senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch. These settings may include trampolines, which can act as a therapy tool for learners with ADHD, and allows them to connect to the learning environment so that they may refocus. In vertical schools, enclosed terraces, even if small, might be considered to be an outdoor setting.

Supporting places

Complementary settings can provide different types of sensory stimulation to create tranquil places in which students may re-engage in their learning. We'd recommend that all complementary settings should include sofas, stools, cushions, beanbags, and even stuffed animals for small children.

A possible outcome of these properties is that they may also absorb unwanted noise, which makes these settings peaceful. Permanent features of the school building such as alcoves, group rooms, hallways and outdoor settings should not be understood as being separate from but rather in relationship with classrooms.

While each space provides a different type of learning experience, each influences the learners, the learning and the things to be learned. ■

HALLWAYS SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO CREATE A SENSE OF TRANQUILLITY, AND WE'D RECOMMEND CONSIDERING NATURAL FINISHES, THE USE OF A BIOPHILIC COLOUR PALETTE, LIGHTS THAT ARE DIMMABLE AND ACCESS TO DAYLIGHTING.

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