



beeld

Albert Schweitzer School, Rotterdam

The Albert Schweizer School lacked a 'heart'. That's why atelier PRO - in collaboration with Studio LP - designed a new building for this Rotterdam elementary school, with an assembly hall as its central feature. The new L-shaped volume embraces an existing school building from the 1970s, and is positioned so that the assembly hall also serves as the heart of the older building. The classrooms are arranged in clusters surrounding the assembly hall; each cluster has a learning plaza as a heart of its own. The design concept scales from large to small: the assembly hall serves as an identity carrier for the school as a whole, whereas within the clusters the users - in this case the smallest children - take center stage.

A building at the scale of the child

The Albert Schweizer School is located in Rotterdam Overschie, directly adjacent to the Sidelingepark. The elementary school was housed in three buildings from the 1970s, with the pupils deliberately divided according to age group between the three. The existing school, however, did not have a central assembly hall; also, an expected rise in the number of pupils meant there was not enough room in the future. The new volume replaces two outdated buildings, and forms an ensemble with the remaining 'Zongebouw' (Sun Building). Because the design builds

on the existing architecture and educational philosophy, the sense of scale and of belonging have been retained.

The heart beats in the new volume

The new building is the preserve of toddlers, preschoolers and the lower school. It also houses a number of shared facilities like a playroom, a library, a team room and the assembly hall. The assembly hall serves as the heart of the new building - and, due to its location and transparent layout, also for the school as a whole. The hall is extended with a sunken playroom, which makes it possible to create a large, connected space for theatre performances and parent meetings. Located above the playroom is the student library, which is also slightly lower in relation to the surrounding first floor, and as such is ideal for informal meetings.

Comforting clusters around the assembly hall

The classrooms are arranged in clusters which surround the assembly hall. To provide the children with a sense of belonging, each cluster consists of three to four classrooms, centred on a learning plaza and a utility hub. Large windows - which mirror the windows of the Zongebouw - ensure that there is easy contact between the classrooms and the learning plazas. By applying flexible partition walls, the classrooms can be interconnected. Each cluster has its own entrance to the assembly hall and direct access to the schoolyard.

Flexibility for the future

Because educational systems are always evolving we opted for a steel column

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construction; this means that the partition walls between the classrooms can easily be removed, and allows for future adaptations - in line with changing educational concepts and views. Due to their positioning within the building, the utility hubs act as subtle barriers, dividing the space into different "places" - even in a more open layout.

A facade which connects and refines

The scale of the child is also reflected in the facade design; large windows and recessed alcoves provide transparency and refinement. The alcoves serve as an extension to the classrooms and can also be used for outdoor education; in addition, the recessed facade contributes in reducing noise pollution, particularly from the nearby A13 motorway. The design of the alcoves refers to the design of the Zongebouw, transforming the two separate buildings into one single ensemble.

The building within the context

The new building has a clear L-shaped floor plan, in line with the modernist urban planning of post-war neighbourhood Overschie. The ensemble's clever positioning results in the natural organisation of the three school playgrounds: a green nursery playground facing the Baanweg, where children can discover nature; a secluded playground for the middle school in between the two buildings, where the pupils can clamber and climb; and an upper school yard that connects to the Sidelingepark, with space to run, play football and chill. This layout is in keeping with the different school entrances, and ensures that the lines to and from the classrooms are kept short. The scale of the child is guiding on all the different levels of the building, both inside and out.