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## Design Concept Statement

### Background

Pittwater House is unique, championing a clear model of 'twin schooling' with single sex classes in a co-educational environment. It is a single school with three parts, offering education from the early childhood centre (ECC), through primary (junior) to secondary (senior.)

Pittwater House was founded by Mr Rex Morgan, who became the first principal of the school from 1961. Pittwater House began as a preparatory school for boys and has progressively expanded to include a Grammar School for Boys (1968), The Girls College (1975), Junior Girls College (1977) and an ECC. Current enrolment is approximately 887 students. The school anticipates enrolment increasing to 1091 by 2030.

Neeson Murcutt Architects Pty Ltd was engaged by Pittwater House to undertake works on the campus to manage both current and anticipated future needs, broadly (extract from briefing paper);

- Maximise outdoor space;
- Increase aesthetic appeal of the campus;
- Harmonise the buildings while still maintaining a sense of differentiation and separation between the ECC, the junior school and the senior school;
- Optimise the access to buildings and areas that are accessed by the whole school, such as library;
- Create enough classroom and specialist space to cater for around 1,000 students and associated staff;
- Allow access to all main student areas for students with mobility issues;
- Maximise opportunities for car parking and ensure safe drop off and pick up of students;

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- Increase flexibility of buildings to allow for modern teaching methods such as small group teaching and break out rooms;
  - Allow for larger meetings of students in order to foster school cohesion and spirit.

The campus is located on a large sloping site at 70 South Creek Road, Collaroy. It has a secondary street frontage on Westmoreland Avenue and service access via Parkes Road. This is a school in a suburb, with multiple residential neighbours and relatively limited street address.

The current site is approximately 34,400m<sup>2</sup>. It has grown since the school's inception through the piecemeal acquisition of individual residential properties. Unusually the property abuts a Department of Defence site to the east from which it leases outdoor sports courts.

The key strategy lies in how new elements connect and bind with the existing to create a stronger identity and clearer whole – a single school with three parts, set within a beautiful open site.

The design aims to define a physical environment that supports the core values of Pittwater House. Synthesising inputs from the executive, staff, teachers, parents, and prefects, we have together distilled a shared aspirational brief for the future of Pittwater House. This shared vision aims to:

- reinforce the existing qualities of the school:
  - sense of three distinct schools within a single campus;
  - pastoral care / sense of individual nurturing;
  - authenticity;
  - highly-valued open space, oval and pool;
  - treasured trees and gardens;
- introduce new qualities to the campus:
  - a positive street presence (identity / welcome);
  - a shared physical heart;
  - a sense of 'journey' or 'moving forward' as a student progresses through years at the school;

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- clear and logical circulation (way-finding / orientation);
  - passive surveillance and safety;
  - staff community;
  - recognition and value of history (indigenous, landscape, school);
  - a physically beautiful and modern school.

#### Site and context

The suburb of Collaroy means “big reeds” in a local indigenous language. The suburb began its life as part of Narrabeen. The name was given to the area when in 1881 a steamer named ‘Collaroy’ ran aground on ‘Long Reef’ at the southern point of the suburb. The major historic landowner in Collaroy, James Jenkins, was responsible for constructing thirteen bridges from Collaroy to the water’s edge of North Harbour. This connected the suburb of Collaroy with the city centre for transportation of livestock and produce. The majority of Collaroy’s development occurred since the mid-twentieth century.

The site is located in a residential area. It is bounded by detached dwellings to the east, preventing any significant connection to Parkes Road. The site also neighbours detached dwellings over both Westmoreland Avenue and South Creek Road. The site is located adjacent Defence zoned land, benefitting from the shared use of an outdoor sports court. The school has minimal built form on its street edges which both minimises its visual impact and its sense of identity. Opportunities are available to improve street presence through re-consideration of car-parking, new built form and landscape.

A creek, evident in the 1943 aerial photo on the western edge of the site connecting into Dee Why Park, has since been enclosed in stormwater drainage underground, with subsequent localised ponding and flooding. There is opportunity through landscape works to address these issues.

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The site has a beautiful park-like quality when approached from the north, with mature trees edging Westmoreland Avenue and the sports oval, providing a landscape threshold to residential neighbours. This quality differs greatly from the southern approach which is dominated by the carpark. The oval is a significant open space asset within the site. Other special areas include the 'secret garden' adjacent the Great Hall – an area of tall gums and native understorey – and the reinterpreted creek-bed landscape in the junior playground with its sheltering brushbox.

The site organisation demonstrates a piecemeal approach to development over the years in response to immediate needs. The existing buildings fall into several categories:

- 'temporary' buildings such as demountable classrooms, and remnant cottages;
- recent investments such as the Early Childhood Centre, BER gymnasium and Creative Arts Centre;
- generic and largely robust linear buildings, capable of simple and effective upgrading (predominantly red facebrick);
- the Main Hall, a stand-alone building with weight and presence (red face-brick).

The strategic removal of buildings and portions of buildings has the opportunity to transform this school campus.

Design Principles:

Three Schools – One Campus – Building 'Fingers'

Three schools occupy the campus and together form Pittwater House. The proposal strengthens the core location of each distinct school. They are like the 'fingers' extending from the 'palm' on South Creek Road, up towards Westmoreland Avenue.

Landscape 'Spines'

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The campus is organised by a series of landscape spines – the spaces between the ‘fingers’. This strategic hierarchy of landscape and open play areas builds on what the campus already has, preserving amenity, defining possible locations for new buildings, and speaking to the beauty of the existing site. The central spine incorporates the impressive oval and creates a significant new green space for recreation and gathering. The western spine builds on the Junior school playground, a landscape based around the former creekline, which was previously initiated by the school. The eastern spine connects through the heart of the Senior school.

The simple organisation of ‘building fingers’ and ‘landscape spines’ provides a clear circulation logic, efficient movement and intuitive wayfinding. It allows internal spaces to be connected to landscape, natural light and fresh air – such spaces make us feel good, and help with alertness and learning.

#### A New ‘Face’

The proposal brings clarity to South Creek Road as the primary street address. It locates buildings with shared facilities defining a shared facilities. This includes the new Library and Student Services.

#### View To Green Campus

The proposal strengthens the connection to the oval – the school’s prized green space. The central spine opens views to the oval, its mature tree edging, and the green plateau beyond, from the primary campus entrance on South Creek Road.

The proposal also opens views from the Junior and Senior school fingers to the Main Hall on the edge of the oval, establishing a positive connection to this, the most substantial old building on the site. The Main Hall can be opened more to the heart of the school and made to feel more welcoming.

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## Sunny Spaces

The proposal recognises the value of north-facing sunny spaces – drawing people to them in winter and readily shaded through passive design in summer. Sydney’s temperate climate is well-suited to all weather learning. Strategically placed all-weather spaces for large groups have potential for multiple and frequent use.

## Site Levels

The site falls almost 16m from Westmoreland Avenue to South Creek Road. The difficulty of slope is compounded by significant differences in building floor levels, presenting challenges in connecting buildings and establishing universal access across the campus. The project finds opportunities for cross-campus pedestrian movement along contour lines, and strategic locations for stairs and lifts.

## ARRIVAL + PARKING

Safe and orderly drop-off / pick-up and impacts on local traffic is an issue for every school. At Pittwater House in particular, it needs to be handled thoughtfully and with expertise. Drawing on the model successfully used at Cranbrook Junior School in Sydney’s east, the proposal incorporates a managed dual drop-off / hard paved recreation zone within the eastern ‘landscape’ spine. The entry / exit has been located to greatly improve traffic conditions at the South Creek Road / Parkes Road roundabout.

Linked to this is the legibility and character of the school entry, the daily experience of arrival, and visitor first impressions. The proposal seeks to draw out the school’s strong cultural focus on student experience by reducing the presence of cars at the front door, whilst significantly increasing on-site parking provision.

Vehicles are separated into discrete areas at the site fringes:

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- (A) visitor, ECC and staff parking (South Creek Road east);
  - (B) staff parking (South Creek Road (east));
  - (C) existing staff parking (Westmoreland Avenue);
  - (D) bus parking and bin zone (Westmoreland Avenue);
  - (E) existing maintenance vehicles (Parkes Road).

## Proposed Development Description

### Removal

The strategic removal of buildings and portions of buildings creates the open landscape spines which structure the entire campus and provides all remaining buildings potential visual and physical access to green space. Increased visibility within the campus will promote independent learning, vibrancy, and safety. The carefully considered removal of select ground level spaces creates important cross-site pathways along contours. Buildings identified for demolition include temporary buildings, as well as discrete portions of larger existing buildings.

### Proposed Building Elements

A new cohesive character to the campus is created without remaking every building or façade. The proposal comprises four building components, three landscape spines and curtilage landscaping, and redefined carparks.

#### (1) Addition – Library and Student Services

The new two-storey Library and Student Services Building defines a new face to the campus on South Creek Road. It contains whole-of-school shared facilities – junior and senior library, student services, administration and faculty. The building is designed to provide a clear welcome point.

### Siting

The Library and Student Services Building is set back beyond the established building line to maximise landscape curtilage to the street.

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Aligned with the existing M-Block it provides a new face to the school, whilst maintaining a significant distance from adjacent (east and west), further visually screening with new tree-planting within the landscape spines.

Ground floor levels are set above the PMF. The upper floor level works to connect to the level of M-Block so that together these buildings can share a single lift.

The building provides monitored security between public areas and the private student areas.

#### Layout

The building is organised around a central cruciform with the lift core at the centre. Library and student services are located on both levels: library to the east and student services to the west.

The library is a learning and social hub . Library services are situated over two levels and connected by tiered seating for group learning. The junior library is located on the ground floor in proximity to junior classrooms, the senior library occupies the upper level spanning from north to south, communicating with the central heart of the school and the public street.

Student services are spread across two floors; lower floor services provide public interface and student access, with faculty space and administration located on the upper floor.

The upper level is defined by three main openings;

- south to the street (activity of the Library communicating the life of the school);
- north to the central landscape spine (placing the Library at the heart of the school);
- north to the western landscape spine (passive surveillances of the junior playground from the Faculty).



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Openings to the east are small and discretely located, and openings to the west are screened to provide solar shading and privacy to neighbours.

### Materials

Glazed brick lower level with timber doors / windows and a generous verandah spaces creates a welcoming threshold. White metal upper level façade with anodised aluminium glazing and shade screens provides a vibrant and robust face to the school. Importantly, lighter colours reflect solar heat helping to reduce urban heat load. Selecting materials with low maintenance requirements is an important consideration, limited painting required.

### Roof reflectivity

Council generally does not support light-coloured roofs on the basis of glare. Sustainability and future-proofing is a driving ambition of school whose responsibility is to the next generation. There is a substantial positive impact to urban heat (reduction) and building energy use, through the use of light-coloured roofs (refer to recent Heatwave Guide of Cities published by the International Federation of Red Cross). We have assessed the impact to neighbours from reflectivity of the light-coloured roof to be negligible. 3D modelling using accurate survey data confirms that it is well screened from elevated residential neighbours (to the north) by existing mature trees that line the oval.

## (2) Refurbishment – M-Block (Junior School)

The junior school occupies M-Block, formerly an apartment building. The southern end of the Junior school is refurbished internally to provide:

- a clearly defined junior school entrance;
- improved internal circulation;
- larger classrooms;
- equitable access.

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### (3) Refurbishment – South Wing and West Wing (Senior School)

A new stair and a lift resolves the mis-alignment of levels between South and West Wings to provide equitable access to these buildings. It provides a generosity of circulation with a north-facing balcony overlooking the oval. Predominantly steel frame and perforated mesh, this element is similar in its architectural language to the balcony element of the new Library and Student Services Building.

Removal of one bay in South Wing at ground level allows important east-west covered access across the site between the eastern landscape spine (playground / drop-off) and main central landscape spine.

### (4) Refurbishment – Maintenance Cottage

The uniform shop (currently accommodated in one of the temporary buildings being removed) is to be relocated into the maintenance cottage. A new landscape ramp provides equitable access to this facility.

### Landscape

Landscape spines extend existing landscape and provide an order to the school.

The central spine is made up of a series of paths and planted landscapes that lead from the entry gardens on South Creek Road, through the centre of the school, to the oval. A generous new open green space in the middle of the school will create a new play area for the Junior School, accommodate ceremony and assembly on the broad flat area and terraces.

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The Western spine takes the idea of the creek bed, instigated by the school in a series of thematic gardens, and extends this north, connecting with the oval. This spine will control drainage through planted swales, and build on the narrative of the former creek line, enhancing the identity of the school. This spine also has a number of existing and renewed play areas.

The eastern spine connects through the senior school, from the new multi-purpose hard play space and drop off zone at South Creek Road, weaving through new and existing gardens and courtyards.

### Fencing

Site fencing is considered holistically, broadly speaking falls into the following types:

- 1.2m palisade front fencing (to South Creek Road);
- Palisade pool security fencing;
- Palisade security fencing;
- Side fencing (retain existing – predominantly timber paling);
- Acoustic fencing (to side neighbours on South Creek Road)