



Steffen Welsch Architects wins \$2 million CEFPI design award for work with FROEBEL Australia

01.06.2015

Members

steffen welsch
architects

Steffen Welsch Architects teamed up with not-for-profit Froebel Australia to build Froebel's first early learning centre and kindergarten in Melbourne, and in the process won a \$2 million award from the Council of Education Facility Planner International (CEFPI). The Froebel Early Learning Centre in North Fitzroy shows the successful transformation of a former two-storey administration building within a constrained site into a vibrant, spatially-complex place with excellent facilities for little children. The architecture provides a creative approach to interior spaces, combining the functional requirements of a childcare centre with new pedagogies and engaging design.

The placement of the facility on the campus and engagement with the adjacent Deutsche Schule Melbourne, a not-for-profit bi-lingual primary school, was initiated by the architect in conjunction with volunteers from the school and the operator, Froebel Australia. Sharing the same site as partners Deutsche Schule Melbourne, the German English bilingual school in North Fitzroy, inner Melbourne, the new Froebel centre offers childcare to 66 children from six weeks to five years.

Steffen Welsch's brief was to repurpose former school buildings into an engaging and unique learning environment for young children and their educators and to create a communal hub for the German-Australian community.

The design approach centres on "rooms within rooms", creating a diverse variety of intimate nooks and multi-purpose environments for play, reading and art. The centre includes a play pod and even a racing track!

Alongside the whimsical, the design provides a superior solution for the hard-working practicalities of running a busy centre. The centre features a teaching kitchen for food education, ample storage, and durable materials. Improved thermal performance is achieved through appropriate internal planning, retrofitting insulation and new double glazed doors and windows.

Sustainability is carried through to the outdoor environment. The garden, designed by Christina Silk from Silk Consulting Landscape Architects and Alexandra Gaunt from Lightbox 3D, features a kitchen garden, a shared entry with the Deutsche Schule to encourage meeting and mingling, and a giant slide whizzing from first floor straight into the playground.

Purpose-built areas provide educator training facilities for the *Stiftung Haus der kleinen Forscher* 'Little Scientists' program Froebel is bringing to Melbourne.

Froebel Australia's vision of a child-centred and play-based learning environment in unity with nature has been successfully interpreted in this project. The varieties of spaces provided create a colourful, warm and light filled atmosphere and are complemented by a natural and playful outdoor space. Congratulations to Steffen Welsch Architects on their inspiring, witty and child-focused design and thoughtfully detailed project.

[< Back to list](#)