

Vestre

on Schools & Campuses



vestre

Vestre Journal
Schools & Campuses



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Vestre Journal is our way of sharing knowledge, experiences, and perspectives from our decades of creating social meeting places. And we know that we are better together, which is why we've invited experts to contribute their thoughts and wisdom as well. We hope you enjoy this issue on schools and campuses.



Creating Inclusive Learning Environments



with Thoughtful Furniture

At Vestre, we believe everyone should have access to good design, not just a small group of people who have the resources to pay for it. That's why we really enjoy furnishing public spaces such as schoolyards. Scandinavian countries support community use of school facilities outside of regular hours, echoing the principle of "*allemannsretten*", or the "right to roam".

Having furnished thousands of schools across the globe, we've gained some insights into how to create better learning environments for students. We would like to share some of the lessons we've learned along the way. We hope you will find them useful.

Bringing communities together

Schoolyards are vital social hubs and one of the most important social meeting places there are. We believe they can make the biggest difference—not just for the children but for entire communities. In Norway and Scandinavia, schools often double as community hubs where people of all ages gather during and after school hours. It's kind of like the neighborhood park.

In areas with considerable socio-economic variation, outdoor areas, especially school grounds, are vital for bringing communities together. They offer safe spots for students and locals to gather, express themselves, and build connections. Well-designed and inclusive furniture is key to making these spaces welcoming, functional, and nurturing.

Vestre offers a wide range of furniture solutions tailored to educational settings, catering to various age groups and activities, from learning and play to socializing – or just being.

Tailored solutions and learning-enhancing colors

Younger students love fun furniture they can climb or play on, like round or curved shapes. It lets them explore, push their boundaries, and be imaginative in a dynamic setting. Older students prefer furniture that feels more mature, like taller options such as a study bar. They also appreciate a mix of spaces for socializing and collaboration, as well as spots for some individual study or alone time. →

Just as important as the furniture are the colors. Color plays an important role in student well-being and learning outcomes. Studies have found that some colors, like white, green, and blue, evoke feelings of curiosity and satisfaction among students. While more reserved colors like gray and black had the opposite effect, making some students feel worried and uneasy.

Vestre furniture can be adapted to suit any surroundings and comes in any color imaginable. Every single item of urban furniture can be made unique, complementing its surroundings. The furniture can easily be tailored to different concepts or the school's identity—adding playfulness, enhancing aesthetics, and adding functionality.

The homes of insects, bees, and birds—and an outdoor classroom

Another key take-away, is the need for and importance of moving the classroom outdoors. According to several studies on outdoor classrooms, this can benefit students in multiple ways:

1. Hands-on learning: It helps students to learn by doing and strengthens the link between theory and practice.
2. Engagement: Learning outdoors can be more interesting and engaging.
3. Mental health: Being outdoors can reduce stress and anxiety, especially important as many students are feeling more stressed nowadays.
4. Interacting with nature: Spending time in nature can be mood lifting and improve mental well-being.
5. Environmental awareness: Direct experience with nature can make students more aware of environmental issues and their responsibility to protect the environment, crucial for promoting sustainability and environmental protection.

Our furniture series “Vestre Habitats” can play a crucial role in schools’ educational provision by serving as living outdoor textbooks. The series is designed to preserve and increase biodiversity in urban areas, providing a safe home for insects, bees, and birds. It has been developed in partnership with biologists and has been tested and optimized to meet the needs of the various species.

By using Vestre Habitats as examples, students learn about various plants and insects, their life cycles, and how they interact with each other and the environment. Habitats can be used to promote outdoor learning and physical activity, both of which are crucial to students’ physical and mental health. ■





Schools' Outdoor Space – A Meeting Place for All



Bjørnbek & Lindheim
c/o Line Løvstad Nordbye
Landscape architect & CEO



A school is so much more than a building and a schoolyard. A school is a learning environment, an activity venue and not least a social community. Children and young people spend many hours a day at school, so as landscape architects we have the important task of creating physical surroundings that contribute to wellbeing and quality of life. For many, outdoor time at school is the only time they spend outside during the day. Our ambition is therefore always to ensure that outdoor spaces in schools provides a good framework for social safety and physical challenges as well as the desire to explore and get a sense of achievement for all students.

The significance of schools for the community

Whether you live in a busy city or out in the countryside, schools in Norway are highly significant as meeting places for the local community, across generations as well as different social and cultural backgrounds. We have a longstanding tradition of schools' outdoor areas being open and accessible to all, 24/7 and year-round. That is why we look for solutions where the school and the local community work together and "borrow" areas and functions from each other. In many places, schools function as community centers with premises rented out to clubs and societies in the evenings and at weekends, providing communal dinners at pick-up times as well as library services or other cultural offerings. Outside school hours, the playing fields, gymnasium, and sports hall are often fully booked, and the outdoor space is used as a playground, social meeting place, and activity venue. We always try to allow the school to become a natural part of the footpath system in the neighborhoods, both to promote everyday green journeys and because the flow of people increases safety in the area.

The site's potential must be realized

We would argue that there are unique qualities to any site, whether a brand-new school is being built or a school is being upgraded. Our job is to investigate these qualities and to look for all opportunities for the site's distinctive features and identity to leave a clear mark on the overall school environment. These can be things like a good local climate, a beautiful view, existing vegetation or water features, exciting topography and geology or other attractive factors in the surroundings which add value to the site. There will also be challenges that must be solved in each project. It could be that the site is exposed to weather and wind, that is it shady, congested, noisy, too steep, or too flat. A sign of a successful project is for the architectonic elements in the building and landscape to help erase the site's weak points, while bringing out valuable qualities in the concept and in concrete solutions.

Outdoor spaces must be planned first

A school project often starts with the school's necessary functions being placed on site, and the programmed interior areas having to find their logical place in relation to one another. In this early phase our most important message is that the best and most valuable areas on the site must be mapped and reserved for the students' outdoor space. It may seem so easy to remove a small forest on the site to make space for a building. But →

getting this forest back as a valuable playground, a unique biotope for learning, or a natural barrier against weather and wind will take dozens of years. On the other hand, when we appreciate the site's qualities as features of the project, we ensure cost-effective, attractive, and unique outside space which the community can partake in and benefit from.

Zoning of the site

We always work closely with architects to ensure building volume and landscapes are developed in collaboration. The purpose is to create a clear division of zones with strong connections between the school's indoor and outdoor areas. We organize the site so that there is an arrival zone where students, employees and visitors are welcomed in a car-free, attractive square which leads to the main entrance. Parking, "kiss and ride", goods delivery, and garbage disposal take place in a space-efficient zone toward the outer boundaries of the school. This provides more space for varied zones for creative play, health-promoting activities, social interaction, and a stimulating learning environment within demarcated areas. Buffer zones which create spatial boundaries between defined areas are important for all features to function side by side. At the same time, shared use and overlapping activities are also key to increased activation and inclusion.

Variation creates a diverse community

Children and young people are different, and school should be a welcoming place for everyone. This requires an empathetic approach where we look at the needs of individuals and different groups as well as the wider community. Social sustainability in the school environment is about offering students, employees, and the local environment equal and great opportunities, where everyone can feel safety and belonging. This forms a good basis for health and quality of life. Variation is often the key to everyone being comfortable and finding their place, so that school is experienced as a diverse and inclusive community. It is an important criterion that the elements we add to a school facility are flexible and robust so that they can be used in many different ways and by different groups at all times of the day.

Furniture as a meeting place

We use furniture as an important means of supporting social relations, inviting activity, play and learning and not least facilitating inclusion and participation for all. To get this to work as we want, we have conscious strategies for



where we plan meeting places and living spaces. Simply summarized, social zones work well closest to the entrances with gradually more activity and physical exercise the further away from the school building you get. Meeting places linked to the building's functions should accommodate spaces to eat, learn and be part of a social crowd in both small and large groups. We also form social satellites in the facility; small places with informal furniture which are attractive because they are close to exciting activity zones, or more comfortable furniture where the site invites you to stay longer.

Somewhere to belong

How we place furniture elements in relation to each other is highly significant for the way the furniture zones are used. Identical benches in a row invite a completely different experience and use to varied furniture scattered about. We need the full range of furniture in schools' outdoor spaces so that everyone can find their place. "My place" is controlled by many factors and can vary according to the weather, the view, attraction values, and not least the social mood which controls whether I want to observe or participate actively. I believe many feel this way, and this indicates that we need a large selection of furniture to cater to everyone's needs. Variation is valuable in school outdoor areas. We must accommodate the full spectrum: from tranquil benches nestled in greenery to sheltered seating areas for quality conversations and social gathering places teeming with people. ■



Boosting Learning Outcomes



with Outdoor Spaces

In her book “Welcome to Your World,” American author and architecture critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen finds that “the physical environment of a school can account for as much as 25% of a student’s ability to learn.” This means that to ensure the best learning outcomes, *all* features of a school campus must be considered, not just the classrooms.

Recently, we attended the ASLA Conference on Landscape Architecture in Minneapolis, where we gained crucial insights into the challenges faced by school administrators, developers, and landscape architects. Understanding these issues is vital for us to effectively support them in realizing their vision through furniture solutions.

In the presentation “Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities: How Green Schools Promote Wellness and Equity”, key issues in school and campus development were discussed. The overarching aim for constructing schools and campuses, regardless of the age group they serve, must be to foster spaces that enhance health, encourage social interactions, and support learning. At Vestre, our core focus is on

creating social meeting places that cater to diverse user needs.

Providing spaces to play—no matter where you live

In Scandinavian countries, “Allemannsretten” or “the right to roam” is enshrined in law. It means that everyone is entitled to make free use of the open countryside for recreational purposes, and can be extended to free use of public facilities such as parks, kindergartens, and schools.

In Norway, Denmark and Sweden, you will rarely find schoolyards locked after school hours. Rather, these spaces serve as social hubs where children and others can play and participate in activities, even on evenings and weekends.

This, of course, stands in contrast to →

“If all schoolyards in the US were transformed and opened to the community after hours, 80 million people would have access to a new park within a 10-minute walk of home.”

— Andrew Wickham, Project Leader at LPA Design Studios

many other countries, where campuses are gated and locked. A paradox when you take into consideration that in the US, 5 million children live closer to a school than to a park.

As unstructured play contributes significantly to learning, access to parks or other play areas is crucial for facilitating learning, not just during school hours but also in children’s spare time.

Access to nature nurtures childhood development

Establishing environments that cater to different needs is necessary to provide healthy schools. This means creating spaces where smaller or larger groups can gather, as well as areas for individual learning, tranquility, and quiet.

This is not just applicable to classrooms, but to the school as a whole. In the presentation, Danielle A. Cleveland, Project Leader at LPA Inc., talked about how interacting with nature can improve children’s developmental health and help develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Outdoor spaces are an important part of the learning environment, as access to greenery is known to improve engagement, focus, and

learning abilities. Additionally, interaction with nature is known to reduce stress, anxiety, and physical health issues.

When Senior Facilities Development Manager in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Julia E. Hawkinson, presented her findings, she stressed the importance of making the green schoolyard essential for learning and implementing it in the curriculum. Her views were supported by Andrew Wickham, Landscape Architect at LPA Design studios: *“It’s about how this space is going to be used and understanding the curriculum, the teachers, and how they teach so that we can design spaces that support that.”*

According to Julia, this means incorporating curriculum-related trees, plants, and shrubs to make outdoor spaces integral to learning. At Vestre, we see this connection extend to furniture. By including seating for observation, writing, and discussion, we can further enrich the outdoor learning experience.

Optimizing learning environments for all ages

Consider your own working environment—do you have community tables where you →





“A preschool learning environment is going to look very different than a high school learning environment. There are different things that are critical to their development.”

— Danielle A. Cleveland, Project Leader at LPA Inc.

can eat and socialize on your breaks? Do you have comfortable chairs where you can sit for longer periods of time and work? Do you have seating arrangements that facilitate discussion and teamwork?

Danielle A. Cleveland emphasizes the importance of planning campuses with various features for children and teenagers. They require private spaces for socializing, larger areas for group activities, and quiet spots for individual work and relaxation. However, the developmental stages of children of different ages also require different learning environments.

She emphasizes that different learners have different needs. That’s why having a variety of spaces on campuses is crucial.

Schoolyards are one of the most important social meeting places Vestre contributes to. It’s the meeting place that can make the biggest difference—not just for the children but also for the entire community.

Vestre’s contribution to boosting learning outcomes

When planning schools and campuses, creating optimal learning environments involves careful consideration both indoors

and outdoors. Highlighting the role of furniture in these spaces is important for us. As landscape architects design areas tailored to diverse needs, we can contribute by offering the right furniture solutions to meet these needs.

Good dialogue with all stakeholders ensures our furniture solutions enhance activity, social interaction, and learning. Outdoor furniture is vital for students’ learning environments and outcomes. Collaborating on optimal solutions contributes to healthy and productive learning spaces.

Furthermore, by opening these spaces to the community, every single user will benefit, whether they are students, teachers, or otherwise a part of the community. By having furniture like community tables and benches that facilitate communication in open spaces, we allow people to spend time together and build a stronger sense of “we”. ■

Long-lasting and low-maintenance furniture

Furniture for schools must be able to endure heavy use. That's why Vestre is committed to making furniture that can last forever. With sustainable materials and advanced surface treatments, we provide a 15-year guarantee on wood and paint, as well as a lifetime guarantee against rust. We supply spare parts for all the furniture we have ever manufactured. If we don't have them in stock, we will make them for you. And with just a little bit maintenance every now and then, ever-lasting furniture is, in fact, a very achievable goal.



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