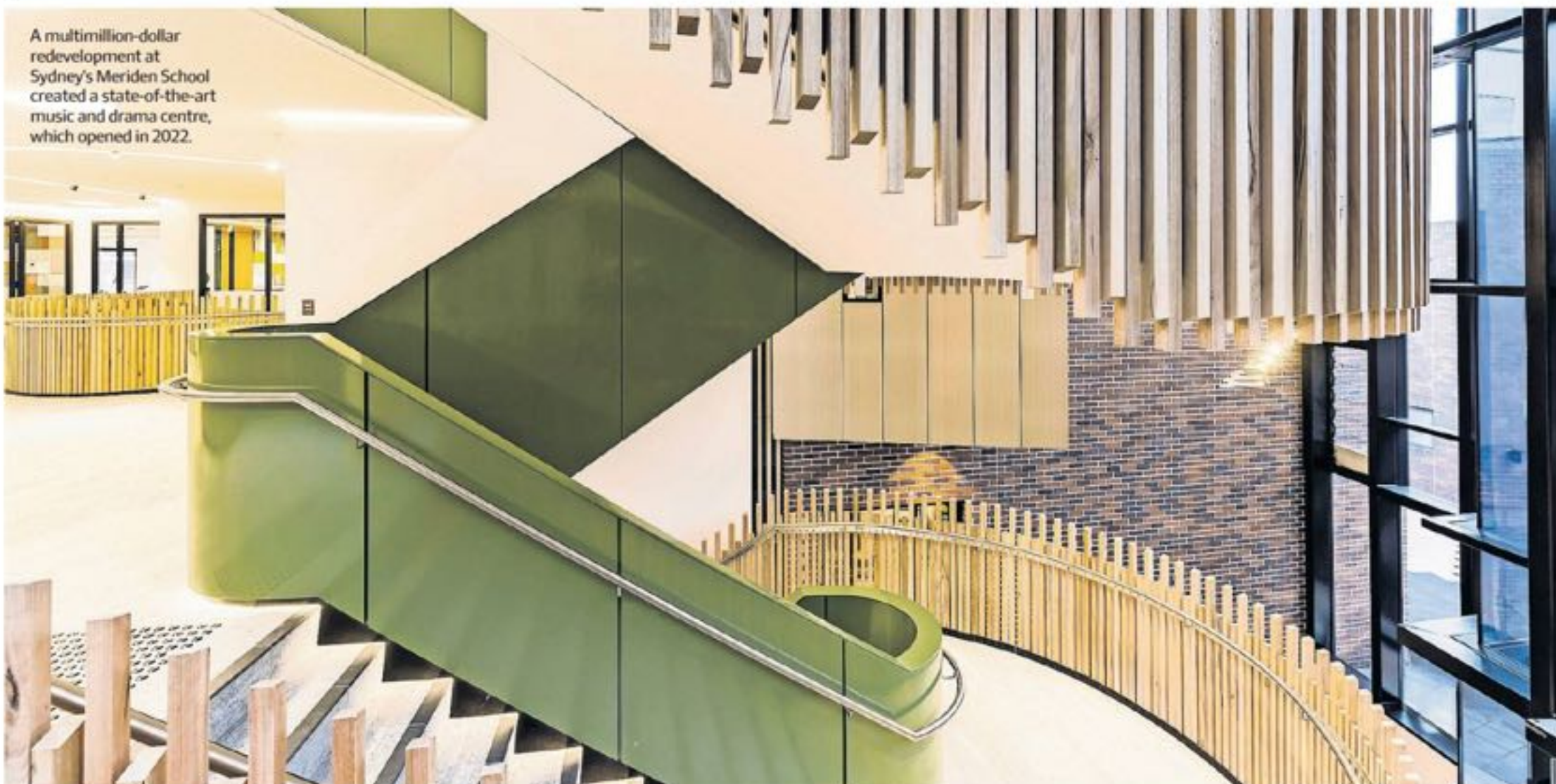


A multimillion-dollar redevelopment at Sydney's Meriden School created a state-of-the-art music and drama centre, which opened in 2022.



Building the classrooms of tomorrow

Leading schools are investing heavily in flexible, tech-enabled and wellbeing-focused classrooms, writes Elissa Doherty.

Walk down a school corridor today and you might spot microphones on teachers, USB ports in lockers and students scrawling on whiteboard-type cupboards.

It's a virtually unrecognisable world for today's parents and teachers, who grew up with chalk, blackboards and overhead projectors.

But it's not just technology that's transforming the classroom. Recognition is growing that the built environment plays an important role in promoting student wellbeing and facilitating collaborative learning.

So, how are architects designing the classrooms of the future?

Think clusters of classrooms

attached to breakout spaces, study nooks in corridors, calming colour palettes and the use of natural materials to nurture wellbeing.

The days of students sitting in rows facing the blackboard (or smartboard) are dwindling, as the humble classroom is deconstructed (it's now called a "learning environment"). Instead, the focus is on flexible rooms that can adapt to different learning styles, with moveable furniture and a range of spaces for group work or solo study.

Elliet Spring, a director at MGS Architects, has worked closely with staff at Xavier College in Melbourne to design its new year 7 and 8 building. She says learning is not static, and buildings can't be either.

"We're trying to create more flexible spaces so that you can adjust them as you need, and speak to students in small groups, or bring classes together," says Spring, whose firm works with the Victorian School Building Authority.

"At Xavier, for example, we created learning neighbourhoods consisting of five classrooms around a shared learning hub. All of those classrooms have



MGS Architects worked with staff at Xavier College in Melbourne to design its new year 7 and 8 building, which functions as a glass-walled flexible learning neighbourhood.

large glass sliding doors that open onto the breakout space in the centre, where students can work on projects together. The teachers are nearby and can see them, so they have this measured transparency."

She says there has been a shift away from the trend of fully open-plan class-

rooms as they weren't beneficial for all students.

"It can work in some schools but there have been issues with acoustics, particularly with younger students who can't focus as well and those who are neurodiverse," she says.

Continued page 4

Taking a student-centred approach

From sport to STEM, tech studies and music, Sydney's Meriden School has gone back to the drawing board in a major rebuild.

What's emerging is a truly 21st-century school, with sculptural facades, high-tech classrooms, microphone-wearing teachers, touch screens and outdoor cooking terraces.

The jewel in the crown of the Sydney school's multimillion-dollar redevelopment is a state-of-the-art music and drama centre. Opening its doors in 2022, it incorporates 13 sound-proofed music studios, a drama theatre, rehearsal spaces and customised equipment.

Principal Lisa Brown says student-centred design is at the heart of the master plan, with flexible classrooms built around relaxed, informal "learning commons".

"Not all students learn the same way, so we are creating adaptable spaces that allow teachers to design learning activities and differentiate their instruction to each student," she says.



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