

AN ECD ROOTED IN PLAY

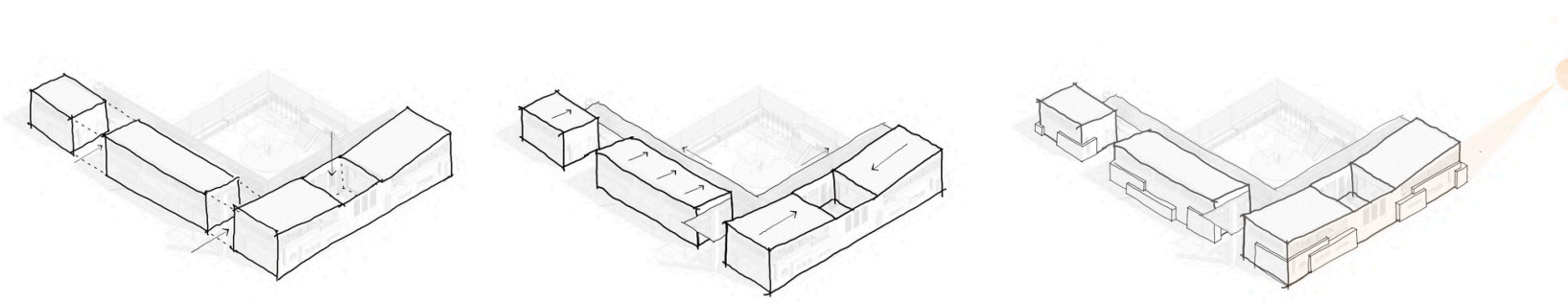


Across South Africa, the need for early childhood development is urgent—not only in access, but in the quality of space we offer young learners. Too often, ECDs are seen as infrastructure rather than opportunity. This project begins with a different question: what does the world look like at a child’s height? How might architecture not just contain learning, but awaken it? This is just as true for my chosen site, the town of Payne, just outside of Mthatha.

The design is grounded in the simplicity of a classroom around a tree—a form as old as teaching itself. Turning its back to the road, the building creates an inward-facing courtyard, wrapping learning spaces around a shared garden, a playground, and a covered place to grow food. This inwardness creates calm, safety, and delight. A child moves between light and shadow, texture and threshold, guided not by corridors but by curiosity.

Scaled to the hand and the eye of a child, the building is tactile and breathable. Perforated block walls catch the sun; timber screens offer glimpses through. The roof lifts to bring daylight deep into the space, while wide overhangs protect from rain and heat. Materials are simple—cement-stabilised blocks and timber—chosen for affordability, repeatability, and local familiarity. Construction becomes a kit-of-parts: modular, teachable, and adaptable to different sites.

This is a place where structure teaches quietly—how to look closely, how to move gently, how to imagine. It doesn’t overwhelm with colour or complexity, but offers small surprises: the shape of a window, the rhythm of light, the softness of earth. The school becomes not only a place of learning, but a landscape of becoming—rooted in the everyday, but open to wonder.



Mass and Cutouts

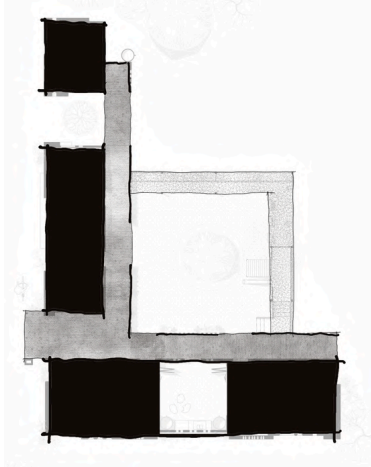
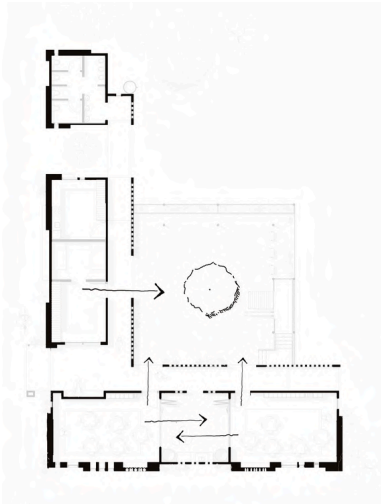
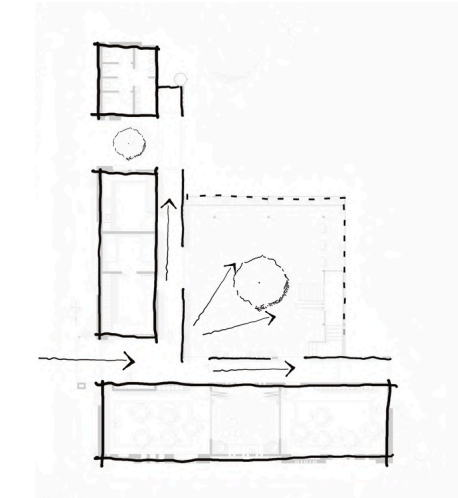
The building is segmented into 3 main modules. Cutouts allow for movement, light and thresholds between spaces, inside, outside and in-between. The cutouts allow for the building to be modular in the way that the different blocks can be organised.

Roof Design and Drainage

The roof directs water down and towards tanks for drinking and cleaning. The internal courtyard between the two classrooms acts as an additional space as an extension to the classrooms

External Walls as Thermal Mass

The orange and blue walls wrapping the external facades act as a thermal mass, allowing for passive heat gain. The thick walls allow for deep openings and small windows at a child's scale that can be inhabited.



Circulation

The building turns its back on the street to allow for circulation around a private courtyard surrounded by a vegetabel garden and playground.

Openings and views

The building has controlled views at a child's level to inspire curiosity and inhabitation within the classroom. Stacking poly-carbonate doors are used to transform the classrooms into one space. The inside of the building is fully permeable.

Roof Types

There are different roof types to curate different spatial experiences. A insulated and covered roof for indoor inhabitable spaces, circulation space that is covered by permeable plastic roofing and a lighthweight reclaimed timber pergola for the garden spaces.



1 Classroom
For very small ECD's, still allows the same principals of sheltering away from the road and turning in towards a courtyard

2 Classroom
For 40 students, the courtyard allows for play space and gardening space inspiring a wholistic learning environment

3 Classrooms
This ECD shows 3 classes and how the roof design can allign to extend the facade. The same core principals of design continue through.

