

Balwyn North Primary School (previously North Balwyn State School No 4638)

Prepared by: GML Heritage

Address: 94 Maud Street BALWYN NORTH

Name: Balwyn North Primary School	Survey Date: December 2021
Place Type: Education	Architect: Percy Everett
Grading: Individually Significant	Builder: Unknown
Extent of Overlay: Refer to map	Construction Date: 1949-59



Figure 1 Balwyn North Primary School, 94 Maude Street, Balwyn North. (Source: GML 2021)



Figure 2 Balwyn North Primary School, 94 Maude Street, Balwyn North. (Source: GML 2021)



Historical Context

This place is associated with the following historic themes taken from the *Boroondara Thematic Environmental History* (2012):

6.3.4 Suburban infill after Second World War

8.2.3 Making education universal

Balwyn North is a residential suburb situated 10 kilometres east of central Melbourne. To its south is Balwyn, which is separated from Balwyn North by Belmore Road. It is bounded on the north by Koonung Creek and the Eastern Freeway. The suburb was formerly part of the City of Camberwell and from 1994 has been part of the City of Boroondara.

1940s and postwar development

There had been a scattering of new housing development in the area north of Belmore Road from the late 1930s, but this area was developed significantly from the early 1940s as the new suburb of North Balwyn. Occupied with orchards and small farms, this was the one of the last remaining expanses of undeveloped land relatively close to the city. Balwyn North became the suburb of choice for many young married couples building new homes in the 1940s and 1950s (a proportion of which included returned servicemen). The suburb developed as quintessentially middle class, with a high proportion of brick homes and a notable absence of industrial activity. The ridge that ran along Doncaster Road was an advantage to house blocks in the adjoining streets, providing sought-after views to the distant ranges and encouraging the building of often grandiose double-storey homes. Public transport was provided with the extension from the electric tram from East Kew to North Balwyn in 1938, along High Street and Doncaster Road. A large shopping centre, known as North Balwyn Village, developed along Doncaster Road.

In the 1950s, the potential for large-scale residential development in North Balwyn was recognised by a private company, A.V. Jennings Pty Ltd, which proposed the Trentwood Estate on a large tract of land off Doncaster Road (Built Heritage 2015:12). From 1947, Balwyn and Balwyn North were acknowledged not only as epicentres for the Small Homes Service but also for Modernist architect-designed homes in general. A number of notable architects, including Robin Boyd, designed Modernist homes in Balwyn in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the streets east of Balwyn Road, including the elevated area around Beckett Park.

This new residential expansion in Balwyn North, which included the Greythorn area in the 1950s, in turn brought commercial development. Several local retail strips appeared in the north of the study area, including in Bulleen Road at Dorado Avenue, in Balwyn Road between Lucifer and Echo streets, and, most notably, the prominent strip on Doncaster Road, just down from the Trentwood Estate. In 1960, G.J. Coles opened a large store on the corner of Doncaster Road and Burke Road, which was Melbourne's first American-style self-service drive-in supermarket complex. New schools and churches also appeared during this period of development. Balwyn High School, located in Balwyn North, opened in 1954, followed by Greythorn High School in 1959. Several new churches were constructed, extended or rebuilt to provide for burgeoning congregations (Built Heritage 2015:12). This included new Catholic churches at Deepdene, Balwyn and Balwyn North.

Since the 1990s, a significant influx of new immigrants into the area has seen the extensive replacement of interwar and 1940s homes with new residential development. The suburb of Balwyn



North today is favoured by many new home-owners for access to Balwyn High School—a co-educational government secondary school with nearly 2000 students.

The building is associated with the expansion of community facilities in Balwyn North in the early post-war period. While the school had originally been mooted in the late 1930s (when there was a minor boom of residential expansion after the electric tram route was extended to Doncaster Road), the Department of Education wisely elected not to proceed with the project until after the Second World War. By the late 1940s, homebuilding in the Balwyn North area had resumed, although would not reach a peak until the later 1950s. Opened in 1950, the state school was actually predated by a local private school, St Bede's Roman Catholic Primary School (1946), but otherwise marked the beginning of a new era of state educational facilities in Balwyn North, which included a high school (1954) and four more primary schools at Greythorn (1953), Boroondara (1954), Koonung Heights (1954) and Bellevue (1957).

Place History

The original portion of the Balwyn North State School was erected in 1947-50 following a decade of agitation from the local community. In a letter to the editor of the *Argus*, published in December 1939, the president of the North-West Camberwell Progress Association stated that “my association has striven for three years to obtain a state school in the North Balwyn [*sic*] area” (*Argus*, 2 December 1939:9). He pointed out that almost one thousand new dwellings had been erected in the area since 1936, and noted that, while land for a school has been offered to the Education Department on several occasions, “these proposals have been negatived [*sic*] by the Ministers”. The proposal was revisited in early 1945, when the provision of a state school at Balwyn North was put forward as a way to relieve overcrowding at the existing school in East Kew; however, the official word was that ‘at the moment, that was impossible because of shortage of manpower and materials. When that position was relieved, a new school would be built’ (*Age*, 8 February 1945: 2).

It was also during 1945 that Percy Everett (1888-1967), Chief Architect of the Public Works Department (PWD) in Victoria, embarked upon a study tour of the USA. During this trip, he examined the latest trends in modern school architecture and, on his return to Victoria, began to develop a new type of classroom based on a hexagonal module. Of these classrooms, Everett later wrote that ‘they are a square less in area than the ordinary rectangular room, but advantages to pupils and teachers will be reflected in vastly improved acoustics. The teacher, while speaking softly, may be heard distinctly by every pupil. The vision also is improved. No child will be too far from a colourful blackboard to see the written lesson clearly’ (*Argus*, 15 August 1949: 4).

As neatly summarised by Philip Goad, the scheme offered a ‘panoptic strategy of visual and auditory access to the teacher, the optimisation of natural daylight through window walls and clerestories, and use of the hexagon as a natural gathering shape for learning: the prototype for a “classroom planned around the pupils’. By definition, the hexagonal form provided maximum floorspace with minimum materials, thus reducing construction costs at a time when wartime restrictions were still in effect, and also allowed for further expansion when necessary (Goad 2012).

Everett's innovative scheme was developed during 1946 and, the following year, it was resolved to erect the prototype school at Balwyn North on land that the Education Department had acquired at the corner of Maud Street and Buchanan Avenue. In January 1950, the *Argus* reported that ‘Victoria's most modern state school, now almost complete, will open at Maud Street, North Balwyn [*sic*], in January 31’. The Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, G A Osborne, was quoted as saying that the

school was of the 'latest design' and was thought to be the first primary school in Victoria with central heating. Originally four classrooms, an office, staffroom and entrance hall were built. By 1959 additional classrooms were added giving the building its unique V-shaped plan. This resulted in a building that comprised a central wedge-shaped block (containing an office, staffroom and entrance hall) flanked by pairs of radiating hexagonal classrooms. Providing accommodation for 200 pupils, the new school 'was expected to relieve congestion at the Balwyn, Deepdene and East Kew schools'. (*Argus*, 21 January 1950:6)

As it turned out, the opening of the state school at Balwyn North proved very timely. A year later, when the Balwyn State School in Balwyn Road was destroyed by fire, some of its pupils were temporarily accommodated at Balwyn North until rebuilding was completed. The Balwyn North State School was itself expanded soon afterwards by the addition of a prefabricated Bristol classroom, for which tenders were called in August 1952. By 1959, seven additional classrooms had been built. By that time, however, enrolment levels at Balwyn North had already begun to decline due to the establishment of other state schools in the area, including those at Greythorn (1953), Boroondara (1954), Koonung Heights (1954), and Bellevue (1957). Nevertheless, the Balwyn North State School expanded further during the 1960s with the provision of a library and assembly hall (1966) and an art and craft centre (1968). The school had 500 pupils by 1973.

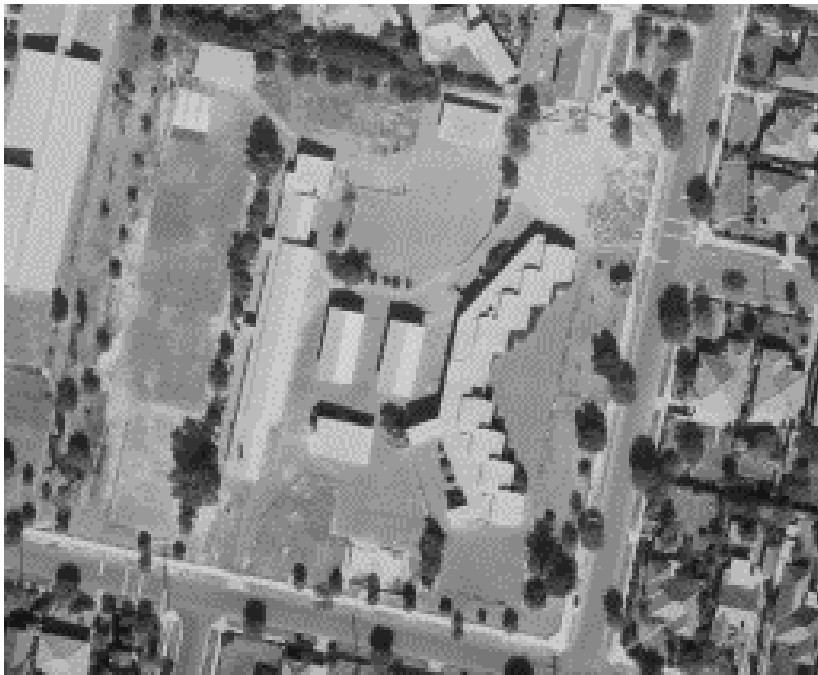


Figure 3 1969 Aerial view of Balwyn North Primary School. (Source: Landata)

The original grouping of eight hexagonal classrooms have undergone a number of alterations and additions over the years. The majority of these additions have been to the south (rear) side of the building, with the addition of extra classrooms and community facilities that follow the angle of the original building and a centrally placed library along the southern elevation. The most obtrusive addition has been to the entry area facing Maud Street where an Arts and Crafts room has been added. These additions have been undertaken in a sympathetic manner using similar coloured brick work and a flat roof profile.

While some of the original timber framed windows remain extant, several have been replaced with aluminium modules.

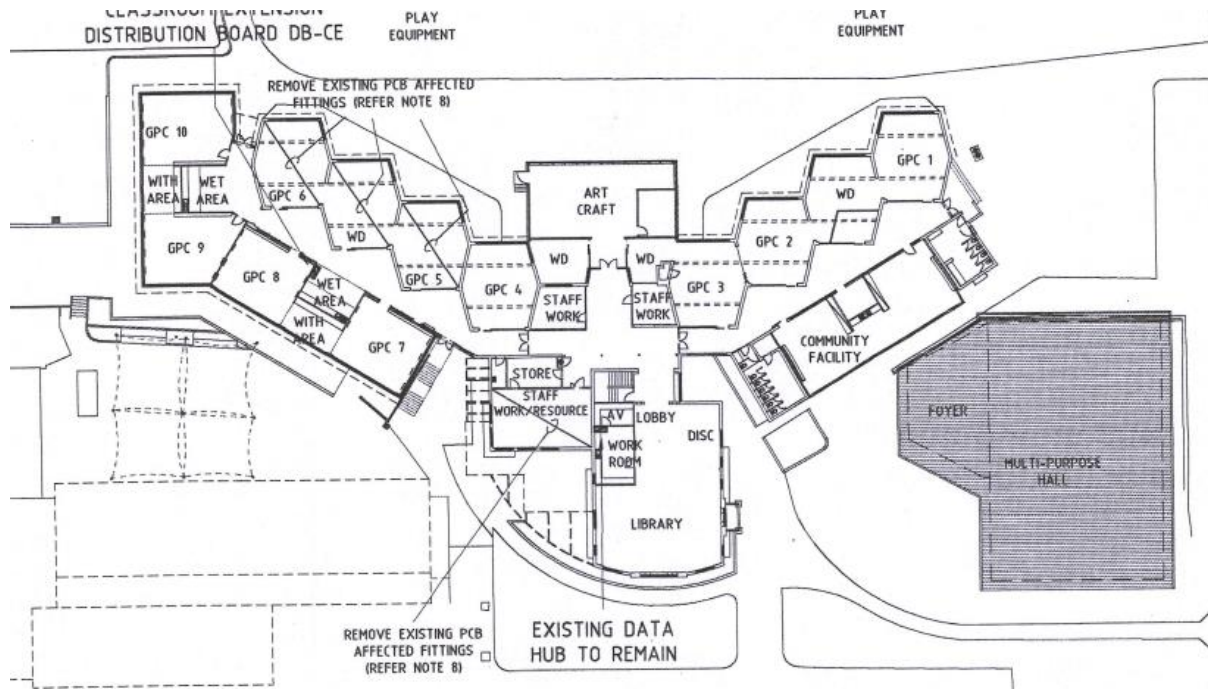


Figure 4 Floor plan showing the eight original hexagonal classrooms and circulation corridor behind. GPC7-10, library, staff work/resource room, community facilities and art craft space are all later additions. (Source: BP 2580)

Percy Edgar Everett, architect (1888–1967)

Percy Edgar Everett was a significant Victorian architect, best known for the work produced during his long tenure as Chief Architect of the Public Works Department from 1934 to 1953. Everett was born in Geelong and received his architectural training there. He studied at the Gordon Technical College and was articled to local architect W H Cleverdon. Between 1907 and 1910 he was employed as an architectural draftsman to the Geelong Harbour Trust before joining the firm of Seeley & King, where he later became a partner. Everett was headmaster of the Brunswick Technical School in 1916. He later went on to develop the architectural curriculum for the Victorian Education Department, and took up the position of headmaster of Brighton Technical School in 1932 (O'Neill 1996).

From 1934, Everett occupied the office of Chief Architect in the Public Works Department. Creating a strong design division within the department, separate to the divisions of documentation and contract administration, he insisted on absolute control of the design process, including the approval of all architectural drawings. Embracing an architectural eclecticism that he embodied in the work produced by the Public Works Department during his tenure, this resulted in a broad range of architectural works completed in the Art Deco, American Beaux-Arts and Modernist styles (O'Neill 1996). Everett's design education was influenced by his 1930 study tour to North America, Britain and Europe, including Russia (Goad 1999:135), and to the US again in 1945 (O'Neill 1996). Works completed by the Public Works Department were prolific, with Everett increasingly preferring the Moderne style for many institutional buildings (Goad 2012:239–40). Everett's projects covered a variety of public



buildings, including courthouses, police stations, prisons, mental hospitals, sanatoriums, schools, tertiary institutions and residences of government employees (O'Neill 1996). Notable buildings by Everett for the Public Works Department include the Frank Tate Building at the University of Melbourne (1939–40), Russell Street Police Headquarters (1942–43) and the Caulfield Technical College (now the Caulfield Campus of Monash University) of 1950 (Goad 2012:239–40) Everett retired from the department in 1953 (O'Neill 1996).

Description

The original portion of the Balwyn North State School, set well back from the Maud Street frontage, is a single-storey flat roofed cream brick building on a highly unusual plan. This comprises a central skillion-roofed rectangular block flanked by two rows of hexagonal classroom modules, laid out with each successive module slightly offset from the last, which results in a distinctive stepped facade and an overall V-shaped plan form. Each of these hexagonal classrooms has generous glazing to the street: a full-width bay comprising four large timber-framed sashes, plus a fifth bay that returns down the side wall (either as a window or, in some cases, as a glazed door). Each classroom also has a projecting lantern roof to provide a narrow but continuous clerestory windows to the north and south sides.

When seen from the principal (Maud Street) frontage, the building appears relatively intact, inasmuch as the stepped rows of hexagonal classrooms, with their lantern roofs, clerestory windows and glazed frontages, can still be readily interpreted. Notably, they also retain their original unpainted finish to the cream brickwork. The central part of the facade, where an entrance foyer and staff rooms were originally provided, has been remodelled and extended in more recent times. Current aerial photographs indicate that additions have also been made to the rear (south) side, although these are not visible from Maud Street, are not considered to detract from or diminish the distinctive form of the original building when seen from that side.



Figure 5 2022 Aerial view of Balwyn North Primary School showing the original eight hexagonal classrooms designed by Percy Everett laid out in a V plan. Note the flat roofed buildings attached to the southern façade of the building and the central northern room are later additions. (Source: Nearmap)

Integrity

The eight 1949-50 Percy Everett designed classrooms at the Balwyn North Primary School are somewhat intact with some changes made to original and early fabric. The building retains its original distinctive floor plan of eight stepped hexagonal classrooms, with lantern roofs, clerestory windows and glazed walls to the north. It retains its original materiality and built form which includes walls of cream brick, flat roof with deep eaves, and timber framed window walls although some of these have been replaced with aluminium. Internally the building retains many of its original fitting and fixtures which includes a central heating system believed to be the first installed in a primary school in Victoria. Additions have been made to the south side of the building however, these are not visible from Maud Street (principal façade) and do not impact on an understanding of the original built form and design intent of the building. The addition of an arts craft room along the north elevation where the entry originally was, is somewhat intrusive. However it is of a scale and materiality that does not distract from the original building. Moreover the unique built form and planning of the classrooms as envisaged by Percy Everett remain clearly legible.

Overall, the place has moderate integrity

Comparative Analysis

In the relatively short time span between 1947 and 1952, Percy Everett proposed to erect at least twenty new schools across Victoria using his new hexagonal classroom system. Recent research by Dr Philip Goad, however, has identified only eight examples known to have actually been built before

Everett's design was abandoned in favour of a more efficient and cost-effective solution, the LTC (Light Timber Construction) classroom. Several of the hexagonal-planned schools were designed and constructed concurrently with the prototype at Balwyn North, namely the Red Hill Consolidated School on the Mornington Peninsula (1947-51), the Moorabbin West State School (1948-50) and the Darling East (later Solway) State School at Ashburton (1948-50). At least one other was designed and constructed subsequently, for the Newlands State School at North Coburg (1951-52).

Only four of the eight realised hexagonal schools still survive as of 2022 – those at Solway Primary School, Winston Road, Ashburton, Balwyn North Primary School, 94 Maud street, Balwyn North, Newlands Primary School, cnr Murphy and Elizabeth streets, Preston and Red Hill Consolidated School, 341 Arthurs Seat Road, Red Hill.

The Solway Primary School in Winton Road, Ashburton – the only other example in the City of Boroondara – appears to remain in a comparably intact state. It has a slightly different plan form, with its eight hexagonal classrooms in a linear row, as opposed to the gentle curving configuration seen at Balwyn North. While it seems to retain its unpainted cream brick finish and multi-paned timber-framed windows, the building itself is largely concealed from view along its principal (Karrak Street) frontage by subsequent additions. Currently, only a few select glimpses of the original building remain evident along the property's Taylor Street frontage. By contrast, the distinctive form of prototypical example at Balwyn North is still clearly visible, and thus readily interpreted, from the street.

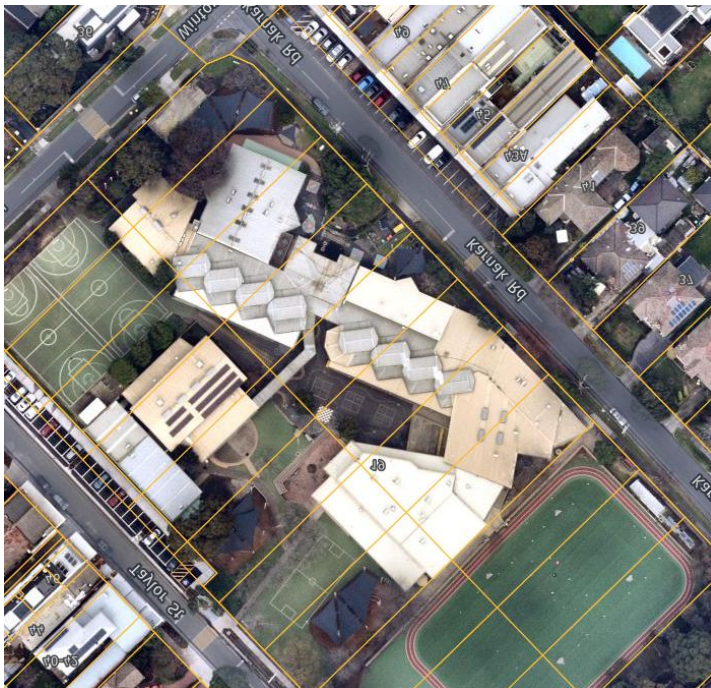


Figure 6 Aerial view of Solway Primary Scholl showing the eight 1950 hexagonal classrooms in linear layout. (Source: Nearmaps)

The Red Hill Consolidated School at 341 Arthurs Street Road, Red Hill was built in 1949/50 and comprises four hexagonal classrooms in a linear row. Aerial imagery shows that the built form of the class rooms appear intact, although new buildings have been built around them with one joining to them at their eastern end. It was not possible to confirm if the materiality of the classrooms is intact as they are not visible from the public domain.

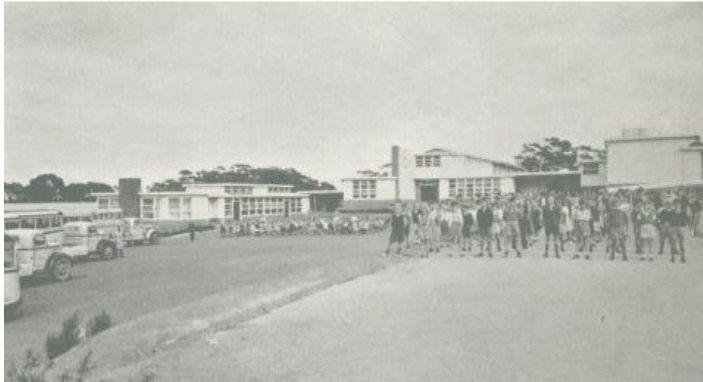


Figure 7 Red Hills Consolidated School, 341 Arthurs Seat Road, Red Hill built 1949-50 to a design by Percy Everett. (Source: Victorian Places)



Figure 8 Aerial view of Red Hills Consolidated School showing the four 1949/50 hexagonal classrooms in linear layout (Source: Nearmaps)

The Newlands Primary School at the corner of Murphy and Elizabeth Street, Preston was built in 1951. Originally comprising six hexagonal classrooms in a linear row, a second row of four classroom were added to the south of the first row. Consequent additions have joined the two rows of classrooms which now form the northern and southern edge of an internal courtyard. Aerial imagery shows the built form of all ten classrooms to be intact. Although difficult to see from the public domain, the classrooms appear largely intact with their cream brick walls unpainted, and timber framed windows, orientated to the north, extant.



Figure 9 Aerial view of Newlands Primary School showing 10 hexagonal classrooms arranged around a courtyard. Note the six northern classrooms were the original building, built in 1951 and the four southern rooms a later addition. (Source: Nearmaps)



When compared to the other remaining schools built in Victoria using Percy Everett's hexagonal modular design, the North Balwyn Primary School stands out as an intact and highly evocative example of his progressive design. It retains its original built form and materiality and, when viewed from Maud Street, clearly expresses Everett's design intent of providing maximum sunlight and ventilation for students. As with the other examples, it retains its distinctive hexagonal modular floor plan, face brick walls of cream brick, flat roofs with deep eaves and large walls of glazing. What sets it apart is its unique V shaped plan (all the other schools had a linear arrangement) and its visibility from the public domain along Maud street, being set close to the road and with no building built in front of it.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criteria referred to in Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, August 2018, modified for the local context.

CRITERION A: Importance to the course or pattern of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (historical significance).

Balwyn North Primary School (formerly North Balwyn State School No 4638), built 1949-59, is historically significant as the first primary school built in the Balwyn North area. Its construction was in response to the dramatic increase in population in the area during the 1930s and 1940s that was brought about by the extension of the electric tram line along Doncaster Road in 1938 and the subdivision of farmland for residential development. The school was built in response to the demands of the local community and demonstrates the expansion of community facilities in North Balwyn in the early postwar era. It marks the beginning of a boom in the establishment of state schools in the wider area, which included Alamein (1950), Balwyn North (1950), Solway (1950), Greythorn (1953), Boroondara (1954), Koonung Heights (1954), Bellevue (1957), and Boroondara North (1968), as well as the establishment of Balwyn High School in 1954.

North Balwyn Primary School was originally conceived as a series of eight modular hexagonal classrooms laid out in a V format, which was designed for the Department of Education by Percy Everett, chief architect of the Public Works Department. The school was a prototype for this innovative new modular system based on top-lit hexagonal classrooms to provide greatly improved visual and acoustic properties. Although Everett proposed to build at least 20 schools using this bold and innovative system, only eight are known to have been realised before the scheme was discontinued in 1952. Of these, only four now survive. The example at Balwyn North, which is one of two extant examples in the City of Boroondara (the other being located at Ashburton), is of additional significance as the prototype for the entire scheme.

CRITERION B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (rarity).

N/A

CRITERION C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Boroondara's cultural or natural history (research potential).

N/A



CRITERION D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

N/A

CRITERION E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

Aesthetically, the original portion of the Balwyn North Primary School (formerly North Balwyn State School) is significant as the prototype for an innovative new type of state school architecture in Victoria that was developed by Percy Everett, following his return from an overseas tour in 1946. Influenced by what he had seen overseas, Everett proposed a modular system of hexagonal classrooms with lantern roofs and clerestory windows that would not only provide learning spaces with enormously improved acoustic and visual properties, but simultaneously minimise construction costs at a time when labour and materials continued to be restricted by wartime shortages. Laid out on a distinctive V-shaped plan the eight modular hexagonal classrooms embrace Modernist design ideal, including unadorned walls of cream brick, flat roofs with deep eaves, and walls of glazing. Orientated towards the north, facing Maud Street, and utilising a distinctive V-shaped layout, the building is an evocative example of Everett's innovative design. (Criterion E)

CRITERION F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

N/A

CRITERION G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

N/A

CRITERION H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Boroondara's history (associative significance).

N/A



Statement of Significance

What Is Significant?

The building that comprises eight Percy Everett designed classrooms built between 1949 and 1959, located at Balwyn North Primary School, 94 Maud Street, North Balwyn, is significant.

Elements that contribute to significance include:

- Distinctive V-shaped plan creating eight modular hexagonal classroom spaces
- Unpainted cream brick walls.
- Flat roof with deep eaves and lantern roofs and clerestory windows.
- Original pattern of fenestrations and door openings.
- Timber framed window walls.
- Views to the building from Maud Street allowing its design intent to be legible from the public domain.

Latter additions to the south of the building and at the original north facing entry (crafts/art room) are not significant.

Significance is enhanced by the retention of original interior fittings and fixtures including the central heating system.

How Is It Significant?

The building is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why Is It Significant?

North Balwyn Primary School is historically significant as the first primary school built in the Balwyn North area. Its construction was in response to the dramatic increase in population in the area during the interwar years that was brought about by the extension of the tram line along Doncaster Road in 1938 and the opening up of farm land for subdivision. The school was in response to community pressure and demonstrates the expansion of community facilities into Balwyn North in the early post-war era. It marks the beginning of a boom in the establishment of state schools in the area which included Alamein (1950), Balwyn North (1950), Solway (1950), Greythorn (1953), Boroondara (1954), Koonung Heights (1954), Bellevue (1957), and Boroondara North (1968). (Criterion A)

Built in 1949-50, North Balwyn Primary School was originally conceived as a series of eight modular hexagonal classrooms designed by Percy Everett laid out in a V format. The school was a prototype for this innovative new modular system based on top-lit hexagonal classrooms to provide greatly improved visual and acoustic properties. Although Everett proposed to build at least twenty schools using this bold and innovative system, only eight are known to have been actually realised before the scheme was discontinued in 1952. Of these only four now survive. The example at Balwyn North, which is one of two extant examples in the City of Boroondara (the other being located at Ashburton), is of additional significance as the prototype for the entire scheme. (Criterion A)

Aesthetically, the original portion of the Balwyn North Primary School (formerly Balwyn North State School), at 94 Maud Street, Balwyn North, is significant as the prototype for an innovative new type of

state school architecture that was developed by Percy Everett, Chief Architect of the Public Works Department, following his return from an overseas tour in 1946. Influenced by what he saw overseas, Everett proposed a modular system of hexagonal classrooms with lantern roofs and clerestory windows that would not only provide learning spaces with enormously improved acoustic and visual properties, but simultaneously minimise construction costs at a time when labour and materials were still restricted by wartime shortages. Laid out on a distinctive V-shaped plan the eight modular hexagonal classrooms embrace modernist design ideal including unadorned walls of cream brick, flat roofs with deep eaves and walls of glazing. Orientated toward to the north facing Maud Street and utilising a distinctive V-shaped layout, the building is an evocative example of Everett's innovative design. (Criterion E)

Grading and Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Boroondara Planning Scheme as an Individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Boroondara Planning Scheme:

External paint controls	
<i>Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?</i>	No
Internal alteration controls	
<i>Is a permit required for internal alterations?</i>	No
Tree controls	
<i>Is a permit required to remove a tree?</i>	No
Outbuildings and fences exemptions	
<i>Are there outbuildings or fences which are not exempt from notice and review?</i>	No
Victorian Heritage Register	
<i>Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?</i>	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted	
<i>Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?</i>	No
Aboriginal heritage place	
<i>Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?</i>	No
Incorporated plan	
<i>Does an incorporated plan apply to the site?</i>	No

Identified by:

Built Heritage Pty Ltd 2013



References

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