
VANCOUVER SCHOOLS

Establishing Their Heritage Value

City of Vancouver • Vancouver School Board

Thematic Outline and Criteria for Grouping and Assessing Schools

11 May 2006 (revised)

A. Aesthetic and Functional Values

THEMES

For most of the twentieth century, school-builders wanted clean, safe, and modestly ornamented buildings in a contemporary architectural style that would reflect well on the community and reflect the value that the community placed on public education ... without costing too much.

- **Style and Form:** Vancouver's schools were designed in architectural styles and forms that reflect the architectural values of their day and the fiscal constraints placed on the builders. Early schools tended towards individualism, later ones towards standardization. Some of the common styles are Beaux-Arts Classicism, Early Modern, and Modern; some of the common forms are 'barbell' (early 20th century), rectangular (between the wars), and irregular (later 20th century).
- **Prototypes:** Some schools were innovative in design and became prototypes for later ones. These include the 'pioneer' or 'starter' school and the standardized post-war school.
- **Architects:** Some architects are closely associated with schools in Vancouver and its former suburbs. The VSB retained staff architects. Some names closely associated with schools include VSB architects Norman Leech, F.A.A. Barrs, H.W. Postle, and E.D. King; Bowman in South Vancouver; and Twizell & Twizell, Gardiner & Mercer, and Townley & Matheson in Point Grey.
- **Materials:** School architecture reflects the values of 'school-builders' (elected trustees and professional educators) as well as architects. The choice of materials reflected the importance assigned to creating a strong impression (see 'civic icon,' below), making fireproof buildings (see 'health and safety,' below) and, in recent times, the demand to build economically. Some early schools were built in wood, but most permanent construction was in brick, concrete, and/or steel.
- **Civic Icon:** Some schools are 'civic cathedrals' that were built to impress and reveal the high value that the community placed on public education. They are the most substantial buildings –

and sometimes one of few older buildings – in many neighbourhoods. Often placed on prominent sites, schools are local landmarks.

- **Health and Safety:** School interiors were designed to be well-lit and ventilated, and were fitted with progressive plumbing features, all seen as good sanitation and a key defence against disease. The efforts can still be seen in many Vancouver schools, with large windows, transoms over doors, and large ventilators. Fireproof construction is an enduring theme related to safety.
- **School Site and Landscape:** Many school sites were developed in stages, each reflecting a different approach to architecture and a different stage in a neighbourhood's development. They reveal changing approaches to both school architecture and neighbourhood history. Some show this 'collage' particularly well. Some school sites are also noted for the quality of their landscape or individual landscape features.

CRITERIA

A.1 Architectural Significance: The building and/or the school site is recognized as an excellent, innovative, or early example of a particular architectural style, form, or era, within the scope of the history of Vancouver architecture.

- This is a measure of how useful the school would be in teaching the history of Vancouver architecture.
- An important prototype of a style or a form – i.e. an early or particularly good 'barbell' plan – would be recognized here.
- Includes consideration of the merit or recognition of the architect.
- The integrity of a building, particularly of the exterior (but not of a school site), should be taken into account.

A.2 Architectural Quality: Valued for the excellence of its design, use of materials, details, and/or craftsmanship, both outside and inside.

- This is a measure of 'beauty' – of the quality of design and detail.

A.3 Civic Icon: Recognized as a landmark in the neighbourhood or city-wide.

- Reflects the physical prominence of the school and/or its site within its neighbourhood context, or within the larger city context.
- Reflects the high value that citizens place on public education, and the desire to reflect that value aesthetically.

A.4 Health and Safety: Reflects the creation of a beneficial educational environment.

- Has design features that responded to the need for abundant natural light, good ventilation, or fireproof construction.

A.5 School Site: Illustrates particularly well the 'collage' of having been built in stages; or has landscape features of considerable interest or quality.

- The 'collage' illustrates the evolving approach to the totality of a school and its site.
- This criterion also illustrates the evolution of the relationship between architecture, the site, and the community.
- This criterion applies only to the assessment of an entire school site, and not to an individual building.

B. Educational Values

THEMES

- **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** School buildings and grounds reflect changing ideas about what teachers should teach (curriculum) and how they should teach it (pedagogy). Some schools reflect specific educational experiments, ranging from the introduction of manual training at Strathcona in 1900 to open learning at MacCorkindale in the 1960s. Increased attention was paid to schooling as training in the post-war, post-Sputnik era. All schools embody the educational values of their day.
- **Formalism vs. Progressivism:** Disagreements about pedagogy and curriculum have always been part of education. 'Formalists' have focussed on training memory in a disciplined environment. Often called 'child-centred,' 'progressives' have promoted a broader curriculum, more room for creativity, and less formal discipline. This tension is evident in Vancouver and has informed what schools have taught, how they have taught it, and thus, the schools are built or modified.
- **Childhood and School Attendance:** Going to school has not always been a part of childhood. School attendance became mandatory in BC only in the twentieth century. As children moved from being workers to being students, and attended school for longer periods of time, more schools had to be built. The schools reveal changing notions as to a 'proper' childhood. Increased enrolment among adolescents changed what secondary schools taught, as they offered a broader range of subjects. This in turn changed schools, for example, as vocational training became part of secondary education, space was added to accommodate it.

CRITERIA

B.1 Curriculum: Reflects changing ideas about *what* to teach students.

- For example, the school contains a room or space that was purpose-built to teach a new subject, such as physical education (a gymnasium), manual training, domestic sciences, or may have a library or auditorium.

B.2 Pedagogy: Reflects changing ideas about *how* to teach students.

- Reflects a particular style of learning, such as formal or progressive methods, and/or new ideas about educational opportunity and access.
- This is therefore a measure of whether the school has features such as open learning area or family groupings; or whether the physical arrangement, size, and type of classrooms / furnishings illustrate a particular moment in educational values.

B.3 Childhood: Reflects changing ideas about childhood – who should be educated and for how long

- For example, the establishment of a school to serve a certain age group, such as a junior high school, reflects the desire to keep this age group in school longer, as well as ideas about what kind of education this age group needed or wanted.

C. Historical Values

THEMES

- **Part of Neighbourhood and Community History:** Schools are part – and microcosms – of the history and the culture of neighbourhoods. School construction often coincided with the establishment of the neighbourhood and additions reflect the growth of the neighbourhood. Schools and their grounds are also formal and informal meeting places for the community, places of shared experience. School grounds often have climbers, other equipment, and community gardens, which make them important gathering spaces for neighbourhoods.
- **Part of Vancouver History:** Schools are also part of the history of the larger City. The schools that were built before amalgamation of Vancouver and its former suburbs are reminders of one aspect of this history. School building in Vancouver has always been tied to the economic situation, with far more schools built during prosperous times than in recessions. The City grew in size and population during boom periods, especially in 1905-14 and 1945-70 (with the VSB being one of Vancouver's major builders during the 1950s and 1960s). Many schools reflect the way the City and its suburbs grew, whether reflecting the population growth that stemmed from the extension of streetcar service, or the large tracts of land were not developed for housing until after World War II.
- **Part of Canadian History:** Schools can also tell us about Canadian history. Some post-war schools were built in direct response to population growth that resulted from government housing programs for veterans or as a result of the baby boom.

CRITERIA

C.1 Boom Times / Bust Times: Reflects the historical or economic development of the neighbourhood, Vancouver, its former 'suburbs,' or Canada at the time the school was built.

- This criterion looks for good illustrations of each era: e.g., before the 1905 boom, 1905-14, between the wars (bust times, and so very little construction), 1945-70, and since 1970.
- This considers the connection between neighbourhood history and civic history. For example, the first school established in a particular area (eg. Carleton as Collingwood's original school, Queen Mary in West Point Grey, and so on).

C.2 Community Service: Has a long history of community use and engagement.

- Relates to the school's role (inside or outside) as a meeting place for non-school community activities and as a place the community has actively shaped.

C.3 Legacy and Moment: Associated with particular persons, organizations, events, or historical patterns that are important in the history of Vancouver and its schools.

- This identifies civic figures, important teachers or principals, highly valued events over the years, considers graduates/alumni of the school, and more.

D. Social Values

THEMES

- **Boys and Girls, Children and Adults:** School buildings and programs reflect the differences society saw between girls and boys. Early schools had separate boys' and girls' entrances. Schoolyards were also segregated. Boys took classes in manual training and girls learned sewing and cooking. At high school, boys took 'shop' and girls learned to type. The hierarchical structure of earlier schools, in which teachers and principals have authority over children, has been flattened somewhat in recent school buildings with open areas and other such features.
- **Ethnic Diversity:** Different ethnic groups experienced school differently. Until the 1960s, Vancouver was predominately white. Since the 1970s, schools have become much more diverse, and proactive in offering English as a second language and celebrating cultural differences. Changes in the legal status of minorities also contributed to changing attitudes toward education. Some schools are associated with the history of specific cultural groups. For example, Strathcona is closely associated with the Chinese community, General Gordon is important to the Greek community, and Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh to First Nations.
- **Citizenship:** Schools have always played a role in training children to fit into society and to play a role as citizens. Schools have been encouraged to be 'clearing-houses of democracy' and to play an important role in cultivating nationalism and Canadianization. This is seen in school names: earlier schools reflect the attachment to Britain, whereas newer names commemorate noteworthy Vancouverites (e.g. Elsie Roy).
- **Opportunity:** Schools have been asked to be 'social levellers.' In Vancouver, this meant most children had similar opportunities at all schools. Children were 'sorted' within schools, rather than between them.
- **The Ties that Bind:** Shared narratives, school experiences, and routines connect people to community, to siblings and parents who attended the school, and to the physical place. They represent a collective attachment to schools that embody meanings that are important to the community. They also bind together students and staff, and people of different backgrounds. Many staff in the Vancouver system had longstanding associations with particular schools; their life's work is associated with one or two schools. People value schools' names and personalities.

CRITERIA

D.1 Gender, Ethnicity, and Special Needs: Reflects changing social values with respect to gender and ethnic differences and towards students with special needs.

- This can be seen in a number of things, such as the separation of girls and boys, reflecting a multi-cultural student body, or accommodating students with disabilities, and is revealed both in the physical characteristics of the school as well as its history.
- Also reflects the school's links to a particular ethnic community. For example, the school may have a history of service or engagement with one or more particular ethnic communities.

D.2 Identity and Memory: Valued particularly highly by the neighbourhood community and by the school's alumni and former staff.

- The school has a significant story to tell about the community; these narratives in the parts, explore interrelationships, and speak across gaps.
- Evokes memories, personal values, or a sense of 'who we are.'
- Some measures of this are the closeness of contact among alumni, the frequency of reunions, the number of school histories that have been written, or the existence of a local historical group.
- May reflect the presence of long-standing school traditions or pride in the attendance of multiple generations of families.

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