

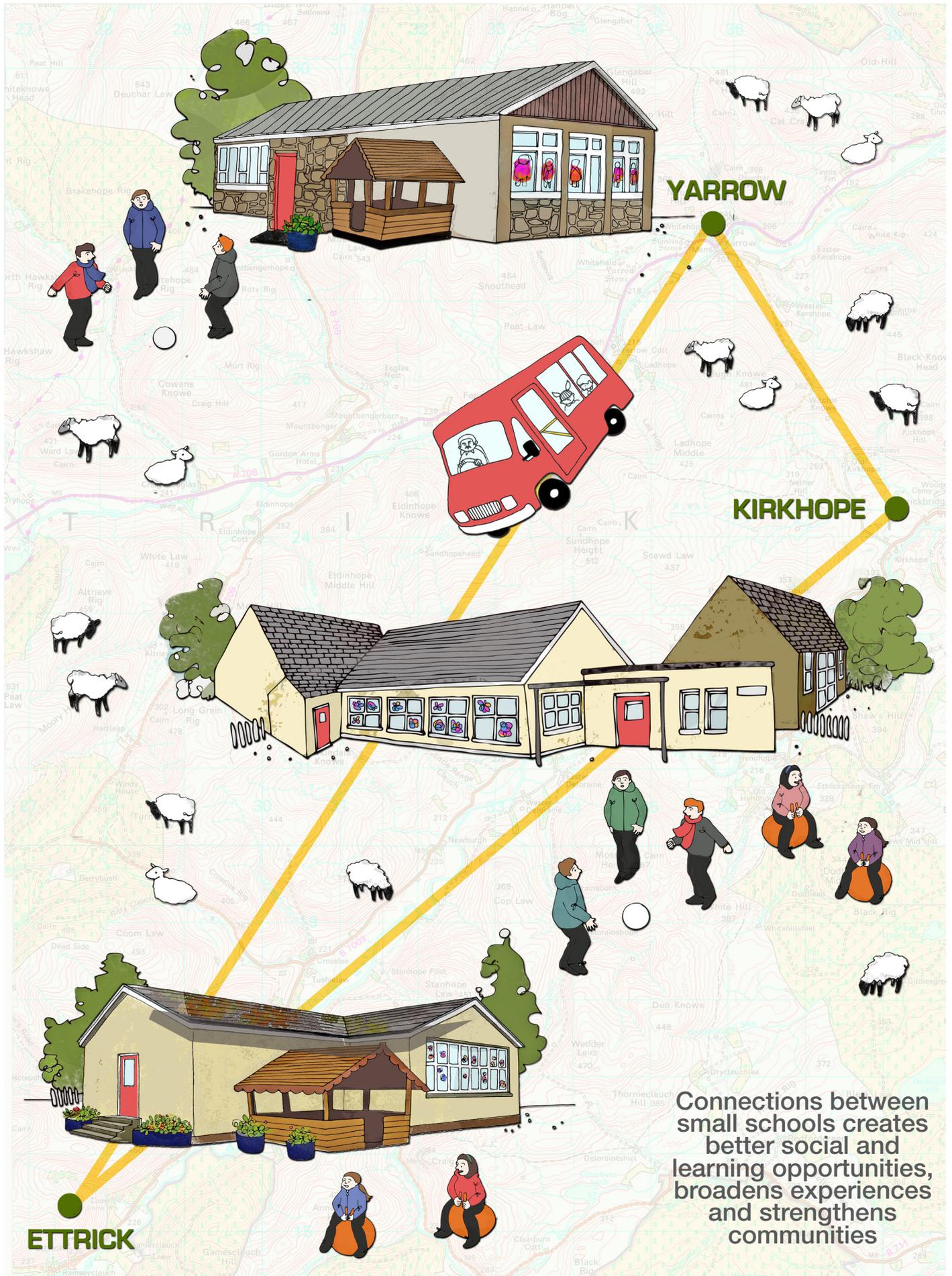
Ettrick, Yarrow & Kirkhope Primaries

Small School Design: Case Studies



Architecture+DesignScotland
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Trio of Small Schools : Connections for Learning



Small School Case Studies

Overview

This trio of small rural schools - Ettrick, Yarrow and Kirkhope Primaries - are located near Selkirk in the Scottish Borders. They range in school size from Ettrick Primary, with just three pupils, Yarrow with seventeen through to the largest, Kirkhope Primary, which has nearly forty pupils plus a further ten children in the nursery.

The three schools are located across two valleys with thirty miles of country roads linking the communities.

They joined up in 2009 and maintain a close relationship through a carefully planned programme of collaborative working throughout the year.

Perspective

Architecture and Design Scotland (A+DS) visited these three Schools during Spring term of 2012 to see the learning spaces and meet with the Headteacher. This case study, which is part of a series of 'Small School Design Case Studies' gives their views on the project including these overall impressions;



- < Front Cover: Art in the window at Ettrick
- < Opposite: Illustration of the three schools (Illustration: Abigail Hall)
- ^ Ettrick and Kirkhope Primary Schools
- ∨ Yarrow Primary School

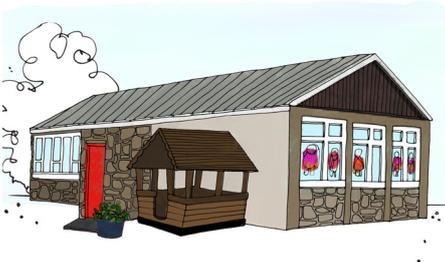


Small School Case Studies

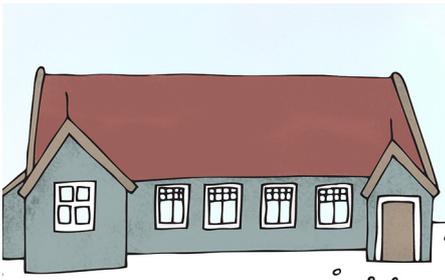
Background



Ettrick Primary, built in 1964, is situated in the heart of the Ettrick community and the smallest of the trio of schools. It was a two teacher School with thirty pupils in the 1980's but with a recent decline in families moving into the area, the current school role is just three pupils. Situated in beautiful countryside surrounded by farmland and hills, the school has excellent and generous outdoor learning spaces with gardens and wildlife areas and an 'outdoor classroom' in the playground.



Yarrow Primary was built around 1971 and is situated in the small village of Yarrow approximately nine miles from Selkirk. Yarrow has seventeen pupils and like Ettrick enjoys a quiet location surrounded by countryside with scenic views. The school has ample outdoor space for the children to enjoy, with good recreation spaces, play space, a garden and, like Ettrick, an outdoor classroom which is enjoyed in the finer weather.



Kirkhope Primary is the largest of the three Schools and is located in Ettrickbridge, a small village approximately seven miles from Selkirk. The School was built in 1874 and then extended with an annex in 1957 and more recently for the nursery extension. With a School role of thirty nine pupils and ten nursery children they have two buses that bring children in from the surrounding countryside each day. Kirkhope is located on a constrained site, and having been extended twice over the years, it has a smaller playground and they therefore run a rota for use of the main playground area.

Working across communities

These Schools have long been active collaborators: before they joined with Kirkhope Primary in 2009, Yarrow and Ettrick Primaries had already been paired and working together successfully for many years. In the context of the Curriculum for Excellence they now have an even stronger focus on collaboration and shared learning activities.

These collaborations brings many benefits, but the schools also continue to acknowledge and to celebrate their unique identities.

- ^ Top: Ettrick Primary School
- ^ Middle: Yarrow Primary School
- ^ Bottom: The Boston Halls in Ettrick which are used for collaboration days
- ✓ Below: Kirkhope Primary School (Illustrations: Abigail Hall)



Small School Case Studies

Collaboration Days

Collaboration days are planned as and when it fits with the curriculum and when the weather permits.

The staff and students come together at the host school for a day of theme-based, cross-curricular activities and the pupils and the staff make full use of this time with their peers. This allows pupils to work with others at the same stage as well as working as part of a larger group.

In addition to their collaboration days, wider learning initiatives such as 'Generation Science' have provided further opportunities and funding for shared learning activities across the Schools.

The schools regularly join up for sports at Kirkhope Sports Field and programmed activities such as Rugby or Gymnastics in Selkirk. As required they use community facilities such as local Theatres (Eastgate and Bowhill) as well as Community Halls, Churches and Sports Fields.

All of these face to face interactions across their communities provide opportunities for new learning and social bonds to form.

Virtual Collaborations

The schools are also exploring more virtual collaboration:

- they identified that there is a lot of potential for use of IT as the emerging curriculum demands activities like discussion, debate and chairmanship, which can be difficult to support in very small schools.
- the schools have recently started to use 'Glow Meet' and hope that this will help them achieve better delivery of joined up programmes, both in terms of pupil connections and staff co-ordination on preparatory work.

Community Paper

Between the Schools, they run 'The Valley's Wee Paper' launched in September 2011 with some historical research plus new articles and features on activities in the Schools and Community. As well as fun activities for the children the paper helps to capture and share community connections from past and present times.



^ Above: Pupils working collaboratively at Yarrow Primary
v Bottom: Pupils work for the Mardis Gras At Yarrow and Ettrick Primaries

The most recent collaboration day between the schools was for the Mardis Gras festival, and examples of this work were visible across the schools





Small School Case Studies

Inside The Schools

Other than the recent Nursery extension at Kirkhope, none of the schools have been adapted in any significant way since their construction. All have had maintenance and minor decorative uplifts over the years. The three schools provide four main types of space inside the buildings:

- A 'welcome space': lobby which is the semi-public area of the school and provides information boards and some space for parents, children and staff to mingle
- The 'classrooms', one at Ettrick and Yarrow Primaries and two at Kirkhope Primary
- A 'multi-purpose learning room' for all other activities including dining, music, art, ICT and 'break out' learning
- An 'admin space' with a small office area and resource store

The Classrooms

Both Ettrick and Yarrow have a single classroom for all children from primaries one to seven and have one class teacher and a classroom assistant. All children learn alongside one another, seated in composite groups at tables. The largest school, Kirkhope, has two classrooms and two teachers - one for juniors and one for seniors.

Typically the classrooms have a range of appropriately sized tables and chairs in relation to the age groups. The walls are equipped with the required learning equipment such as white boards, and provide pin up space for display of children's work. Learning reference materials on the walls range from phonics displays for early years children to research projects for older pupils within a single space.

Many of the classrooms have large window areas with beautiful views, but these do limit the available space for pin-up and can sometimes cause glare and bleaching of pupils work.

Pin up space

Pin up space inside the classrooms is key issue in all three schools. We observed that in these small schools the need for display space exceeded the requirements of typical 'year based' classrooms in larger schools.

At Ettrick there is a concertina door between the classrooms which in the past was used to open the space up for larger group activities. In recent years the folding wall door has remained closed as the need for pin up space has outweighed the need for flexibility. At Kirkhope the shortage of pinup space arises from the building configuration, with through-routes and many doors, together with the built-in storage in the rooms limiting access to the walls.



- ^ Pin up space is particularly important in these small schools
- < Opposite: Mixed age classroom at Yarrow and the juniors classroom at Kirkhope
- ✓ Below: Colourful artwork is on show throughout the schools

Pin up space is a key issue. There is a breadth of pupil work to document on the walls and the school see this as particularly important for the Curriculum for Excellence.



Small School Case Studies

Break out space and multifunction space



The children at all three Schools work in mixed age classrooms and as such have a broad range of learning abilities and social skills. There is frequent need for 'break out' activities to support their learning, many of which take place in multifunction rooms. These spaces are used in parallel with the main classrooms throughout the course of the day. The multifunction room provides for all learning and social activities outside of the classroom: dining, art, music, ICT and breakout space.

These spaces typically provide a mix of settings: fold-down dining tables and a servery hatch provide for dining; mixed sizes of tables and chairs for breakout; learning resources in storage of all types; office equipment such as photocopiers; ICT benches for computer work; sink areas and easels for art and wet work; play space and equipment for early years; assorted props for a range of subjects including potted plants, musical instruments and sewing machines.

The multi function learning rooms provide spaces for dining, art, music, ICT and breakout space for all ages of learner



In Kirkhope Primary, the multifunction room is accessed directly off one of the classrooms. While the space organisation is not ideal, it has led them to find ways to create additional break out space in the corridors to minimise disruption. This area includes a library, a table for small group or one-to-one work and prep work as well as a small photocopy and resource area. Driven by the existing space constraints they have creatively managed to provide a mixture of spaces for small group activities and student led learning to happen more easily, making use of "every nook and cranny" in the building.

Scale of furnishings and fittings

Looking at the multifunction spaces across the three small Schools, what is most immediately apparent is the diversity and quantity of loose furniture for all sizes of learners. Within the classrooms the furnishings are 'zoned' into clusters of tables for age groupings, whereas in the multifunction and mixed use areas it is less easily organised. In these rooms you see tiny and large chairs, side by side and stacked, alongside a mixture of scales of office storage, furniture and equipment.

At Kirkhope Primary there was a particular mismatch of the scale: the fitted furniture around the perimeter of the 'juniors' classroom had been originally designed for use by the 'seniors'. Over the years, the use of the classrooms had swapped over, and now the young children are in a classroom with larger units against the walls. This means they are unable to reach over the tops of the units, to pin up (or interact with) the materials on the walls.

- ^ Improved breakout spaces created in the corridors at Kirkhope Primary School
- > Opposite: Outdoor breakout space at Yarrow Primary.
- > Bottom: Multifunction learning spaces have to provide for a diversity of activities including art and gardening projects



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Good Ideas for Small Schools

Many of the challenges and opportunities around how you make best use of space are common with larger schools, while others are quite particular to the small school context. It was agreed that providing of a good range of spaces is vital in small schools, as not all learning can be supported in the classroom.

Suggestions included:

- Provide 'versatile' spaces that support a diversity of activities including dining, breakout, sharing, formal and informal working
- Create familial spaces that are thoughtful, comfortable and have a 'non-institutional' feel
- Provide 'interactive learning walls' at pupil accessible heights for pupils to pin up work, statements of intent and evidence of improvement
- Create settings that provide for all ages and sizes of learner, with infants and seniors often sharing the same spaces
- Provide space for storage including learning resources and furniture to enable items to be stored neatly and create more 'space' for learning
- Creating a good arrival experience, a welcoming space for interaction and mingling, with display space for School and Community news.
- Get pupils involved in the design of the space, and decorative changes to their School
- Make the most of mobile technology including IT at the desk to enable easier learning and to free up space for other uses
- Be creative with space and use every nook and cranny - when you have less space you have to be much more clever and creative with it
- Provide private space for meetings and staff breaks away from the classroom and office areas
- Consider semi open building types which create feelings of enclosure but without inhibiting open interaction and enable people to be 'in or out of the action'
- Provide access to a gym space or a space which is flexible enough to be used for exercise in the school or local community



"The most useful tools for schools would be ideas for creative use of space and the creative re-use of readily available resources"

Headteacher

"It would be useful for children to participate in improving their spaces. They could help us to know how to make it better"

Headteacher

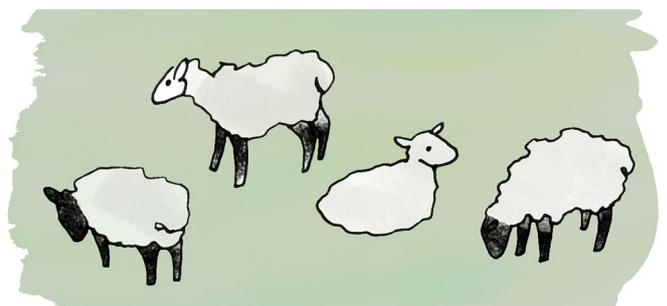
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Key Message

A robust network and a strong sense of community has been built across all three schools. Through creative collaboration you can expand learning experiences and strengthen relationships across our communities.

Through connecting across communities, we create opportunities for children at small schools to be part of something bigger

- < Outdoor play at Yarrow Primary
- √ Illustrations from the trio of schools
(Illustrations Abigail Hall)



Project Information

Schools: Ettrick, Yarrow and Kirkhope Primaries
Location: near Selkirk
Council: Scottish Borders Council
Age Range of Pupils: 5 to 11 years
School Roll: Ettrick - 3 pupils
School Roll: Yarrow - 17 pupils
School Roll: Kirkhope - 39 pupils (plus Nursery)

This Case Study has been produced by the Schools Programme at Architecture and Design Scotland (A+DS). For more information about what we do, visit SmarterPlaces.org.

Credits:

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