HISAR SCHOOL

SUMMER 2026 PROJECTS



EFFICIENCY LAB FOR ARCHITECTURE



Syncopation of Scales:

Transforming Learning Environments at Hisar School

Over the past three decades, Hisar School in İstanbul has developed a progressive educational program within its urban campus. However, the physical environment has become inadequate to support the expanding scope of its program and the aspirations of its educators. Given the constraints of its urban site, building ground-up facilities is not a viable option. Creating new learning environments therefore requires the transformation and reimagining of the school's existing spaces.

Efficiency Lab for Architecture, a team of architects, planners, designers, and educators with extensive experience in designing learning environments, was commissioned to assist Hisar School with this transformation. As a first step, the firm developed a masterplan to establish a holistic framework for the campus, making each project part of a larger, multi-year transformation. The Preschool and Primary School projects completed in summer 2026 represent the first phase of this vision.

"The masterplan allowed us to move beyond reacting to immediate spatial needs and establish a larger framework for how the physical environment could support Hisar's educational ethos," says Aybars Aşçı, AIA, LEED, President of Efficiency Lab for Architecture. "Through immersive workshops with the educators, we developed a series of spatial concepts that guided the design of the transformation."

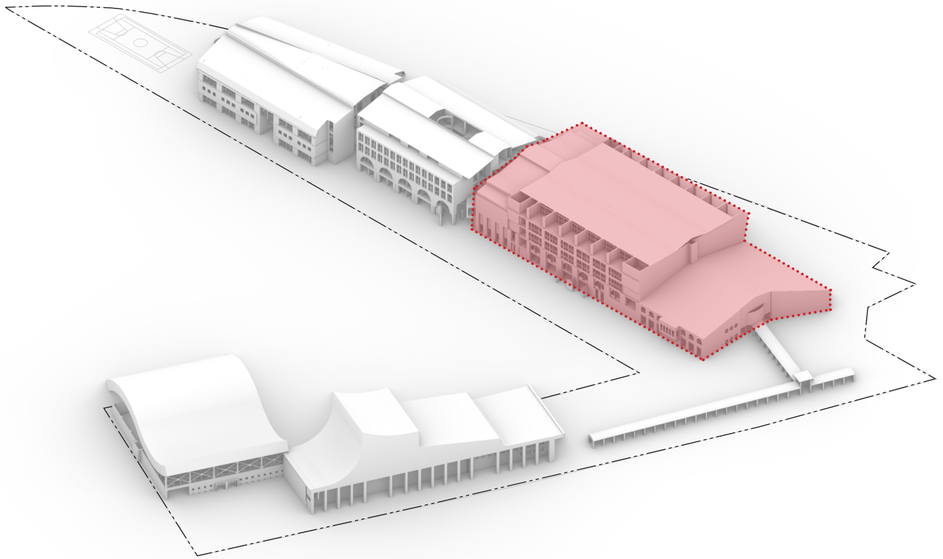
Creating a syncopation of scales within the new learning environments is one of these key concepts. "Different modes of learning happen at different scales, and the school environment should support this," explains Aşçı. "By nesting and juxtaposing spaces of different scales, we create a spatial paradigm that allows children to shift between individual exploration and social learning."

DESIGNING FOR EMPATHY

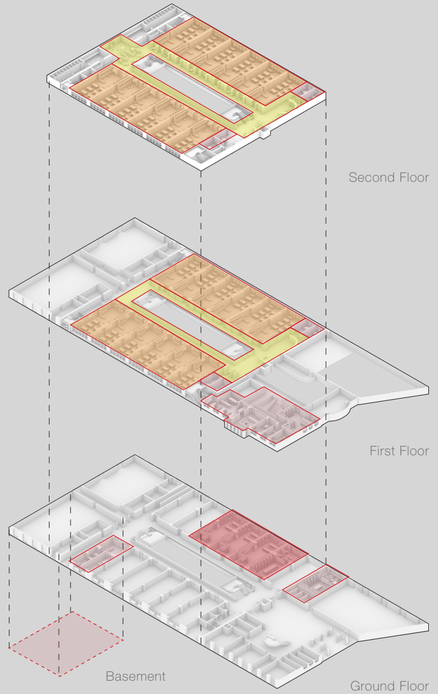
In his recent book, *Designing for Empathy: The Architecture of Connections in Learning Environments*, Aşçı explores the relationship between the physical environment and the development of empathy. "Much of my research asks how the physical environment can encourage us to move beyond our own point of view," says Aşçı. "For young children, this is particularly meaningful. Architecture can create spatial nudges that encourage perspective-taking and support the development of empathy. At Hisar School, these ideas are explored in a syncopation of scales, creating a playful learning environment that supports children's cognitive development through engagement with the physical, social, and cultural world around them."

PROJECT SCOPE

Location: Göktürk Merkez Mahallesi, İstanbul Caddesi No:3, Eyüp/İstanbul 34077, Türkiye
Program: Preschool Classrooms, Primary School Classrooms, Support Spaces, Offices, Student Commons.
Floor Area: 3,800 m² (40,900 sq. ft.)



Student Commons
Primary Classroom
Preschool Classroom
Admin & Support



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PRESCHOOL

Classroom

“By nesting and juxtaposing spaces of different scales, we create a spatial paradigm that allows children to shift between individual exploration and social learning.”
Aybars Aşçı (President, Efficiency Lab for Architecture)

MODES OF LEARNING

From Individual Exploration to Social Learning



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COCOON

A nurturing environment for curiosity and exploration

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BEFORE AFTER

An existing arched window becomes the geometric starting point for a wood cocoon that anchors the sequence. Following the curve of the window, it forms an intimate, child-scaled environment within the larger classroom, bringing together natural materials, planting, and daylight while opening directly onto an outdoor learning garden. The cocoon epitomizes the experience of early learning: a nurturing environment that gives children the freedom to explore, develop at their own pace, and gradually expand their relationship with the world around them.

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NESTED SPACES

The Preschool classrooms at Hisar School are conceived as nurturing environments shaped around the experience of the child. The elongated proportions of the existing classrooms are transformed into a sequence of nested spaces that vary in scale and character to support multiple modes of early learning.

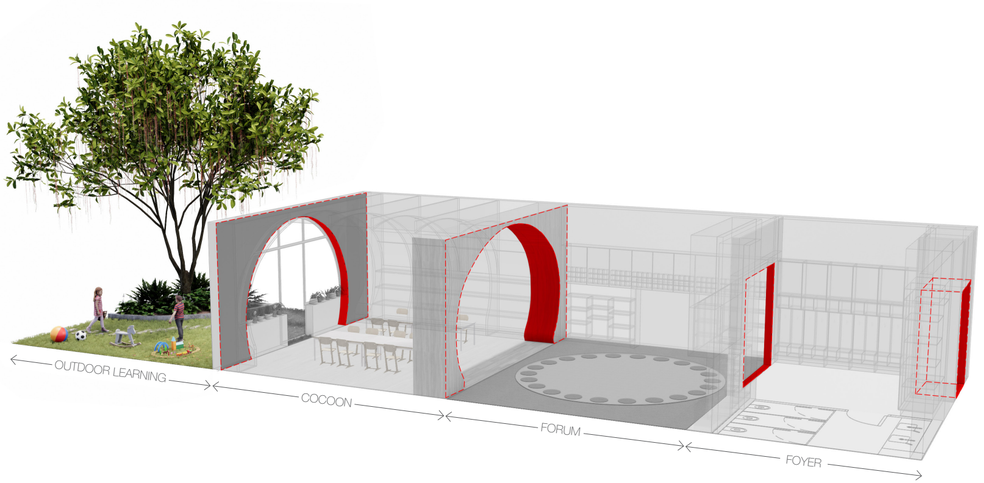
The sequence begins with an entry zone accommodating the children's cubbies and WCs, creating a transition between the school corridor and the classroom. Beyond it, a softer, floor-based environment supports interactive play. A circular acoustic light and an area rug define a central forum area where children sit together on the floor, while cushioned niches around its edges create smaller spaces for reading, block play, and individual activities.



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THRESHOLDS

Thresholds play an important role in the experience of these nested spaces. As children move between different modes of learning, these moments of transition are made architecturally conspicuous. An illuminated wood portal marks the entrance from the corridor, a vivid orange frame defines the transition into the floor-based play space, and the curved enclosure of the cocoon marks another threshold before the classroom opens to the outdoor learning environment.













PRIMARY SCHOOL
Classroom

CLASSROOM WITHIN A CLASSROOM

The **“classroom within a classroom”** concept introduces a spatial duality, creating two distinct yet interconnected learning environments. This spatial differentiation supports multiple modes of learning and interaction within the same classroom.



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BEFORE AFTER

In the Primary School, the elongated rectangular shape of the existing classrooms is transformed through a “classroom within a classroom” concept, creating two spaces with distinct scales and characters.

A blue entry zone accommodates student cubbies while creating an informal learning environment. Built-in seating niches provide smaller-scale settings for reading, conversation, and individual work. A threshold with integrated bookshelves frames the transition into the main learning space, articulating the distinction between the two environments.

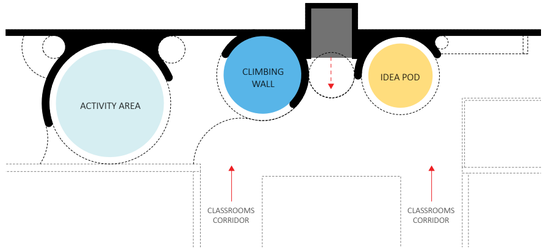
Passing through this threshold, the material character shifts to hardwood flooring, while planters along the window ledge introduce natural elements into the classroom and strengthen its connection to daylight and the landscape beyond.



PRESCHOOL & PRIMARY SCHOOL
Shared Support & Commons

PODS

A constellation of distinct pods creates a diverse learning landscape within the student commons. Defined through shifts in geometry, materiality, texture, and color, these spaces accommodate reading, small-group learning, collaboration, retreat, and physical activity.



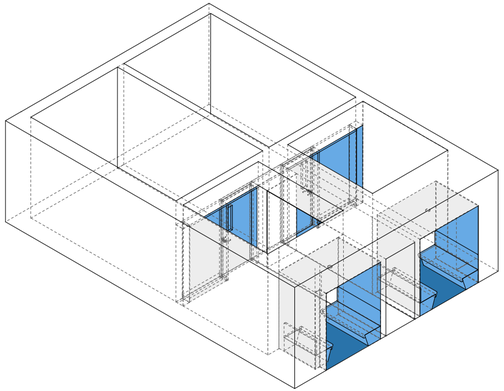




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NICHES

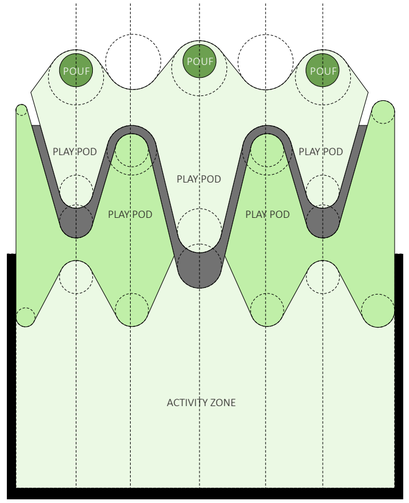
The word “niche” is etymologically associated with the idea of a nest. In evolutionary biology, niche construction theory describes how organisms actively modify their environments to create habitats that support their development. Within the larger school environment, these intimate, child-scaled spaces create a sense of place and belonging, transforming circulation areas into a learning habitat for children.





PLAYSCAPES

An undulating landscape of soft, child-scaled enclosures creates a series of interconnected spaces for movement, exploration, and social interaction. Integrated into the school's circulation areas, these playful forms transform transitional spaces into an active learning environment, blurring the boundaries between movement, play, and learning.









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In education, **threshold concepts** transform understanding by introducing new ways of perceiving a subject.

In architecture, thresholds similarly mark shifts in spatial perception.

The conspicuous entry thresholds of the Primary School classrooms make these transitions part of daily life, allowing shifts in spatial perspective to become embedded in children's experience.

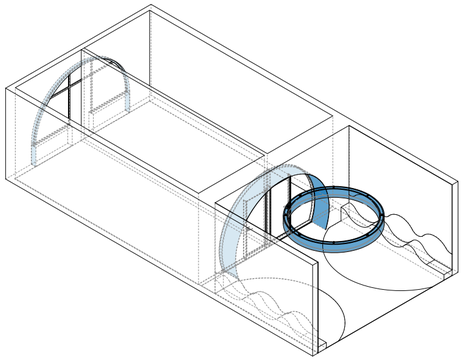




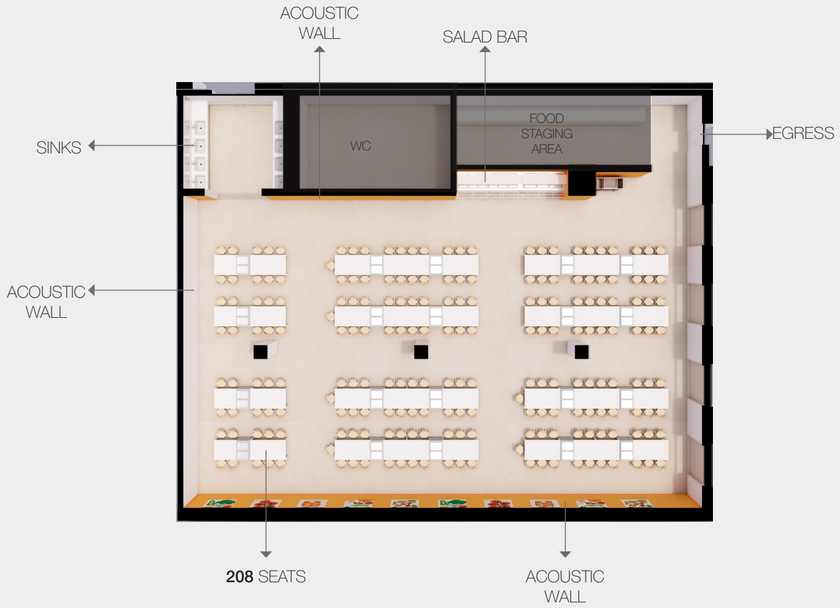
BEFORE

AFTER

STUDENT SUPPORT CENTER



DINING HALL





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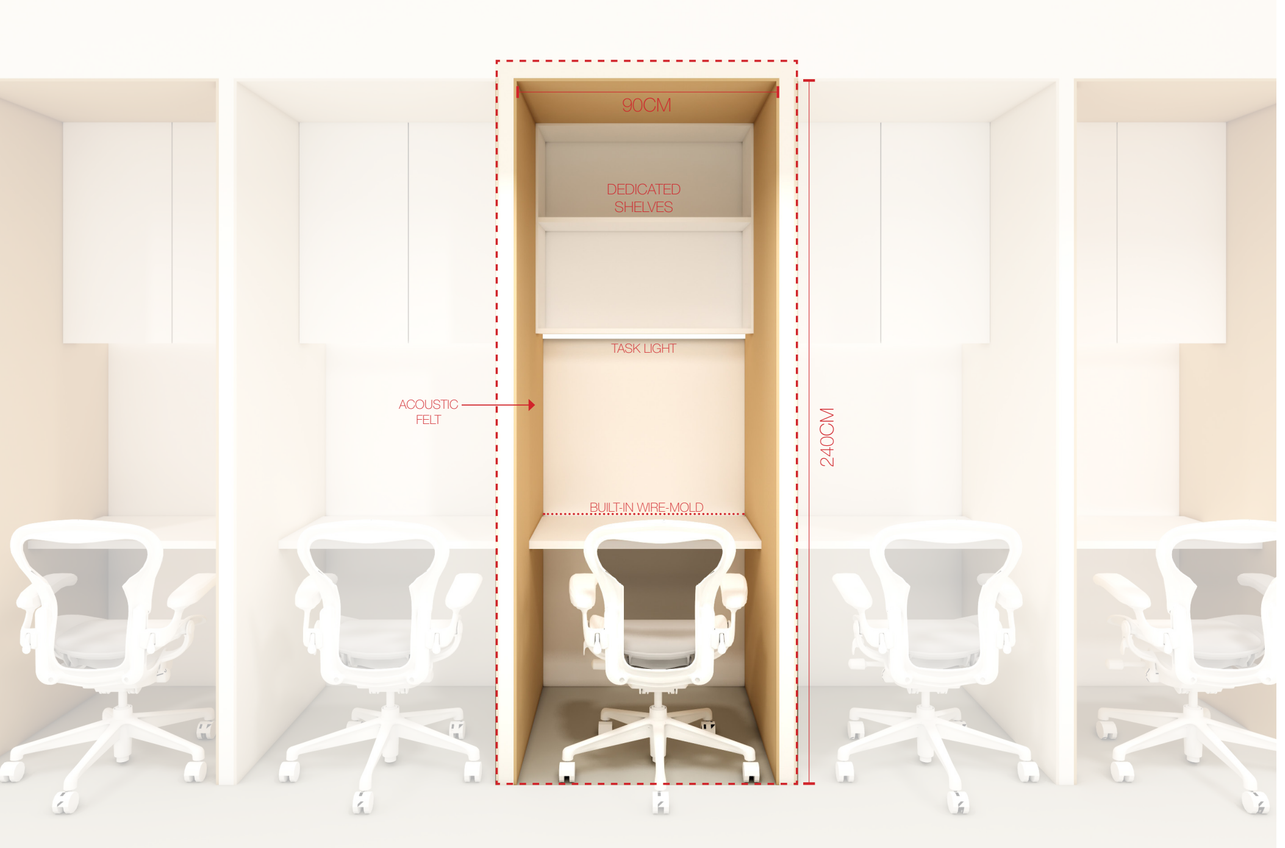


ADMINISTRATION
OFFICES

STAFF WORKROOM



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BEFORE AFTER

PRESCHOOL PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE

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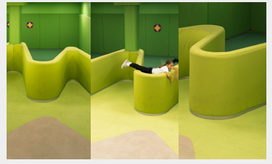


PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM





PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM


SHARED SUPPORT & COMMONS





ADMINISTRATION OFFICES

Project Credits

Design Architect: Efficiency Lab for Architecture

Executive Architect: AS/OS Architecture and Design Management

Lighting Designer: MCC Lighting

Acoustic Designer: MEA Acoustics

MEP Designer: Meridyen Mechanical Engineering

General Contractor: Bülent Eryılmaz

Specialty Millwork Contractors (Preschool Classrooms):

BEKK Construction, Aks Furniture Design

Photographer: Cemal Emden

HISAR SCHOOL

SUMMER 2026 PROJECTS



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PRESIDENT

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