

# The open grammar school

## The Project

The grammar school is a place where both forced and unforced interactions make up the education. Time spent inside of the class room is just as valuable as time spent outside of the classroom. Spaces like the aula and the schoolyard are functions which play an essential role within the fabric of the school. Here the focus lies not on the hard learning but more on acquiring social skills. With an estimated 750 pupils walking its corridors and sitting in its classrooms it will be a medium sized grammar school. Intense shifts in the usage of space form the heartbeat of the school.

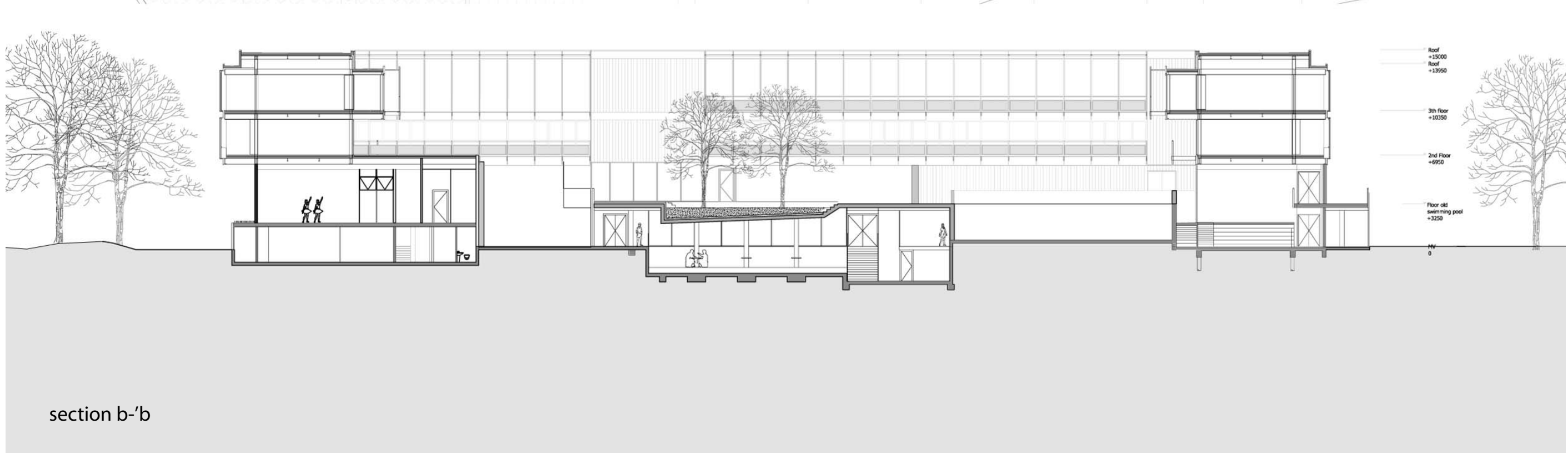
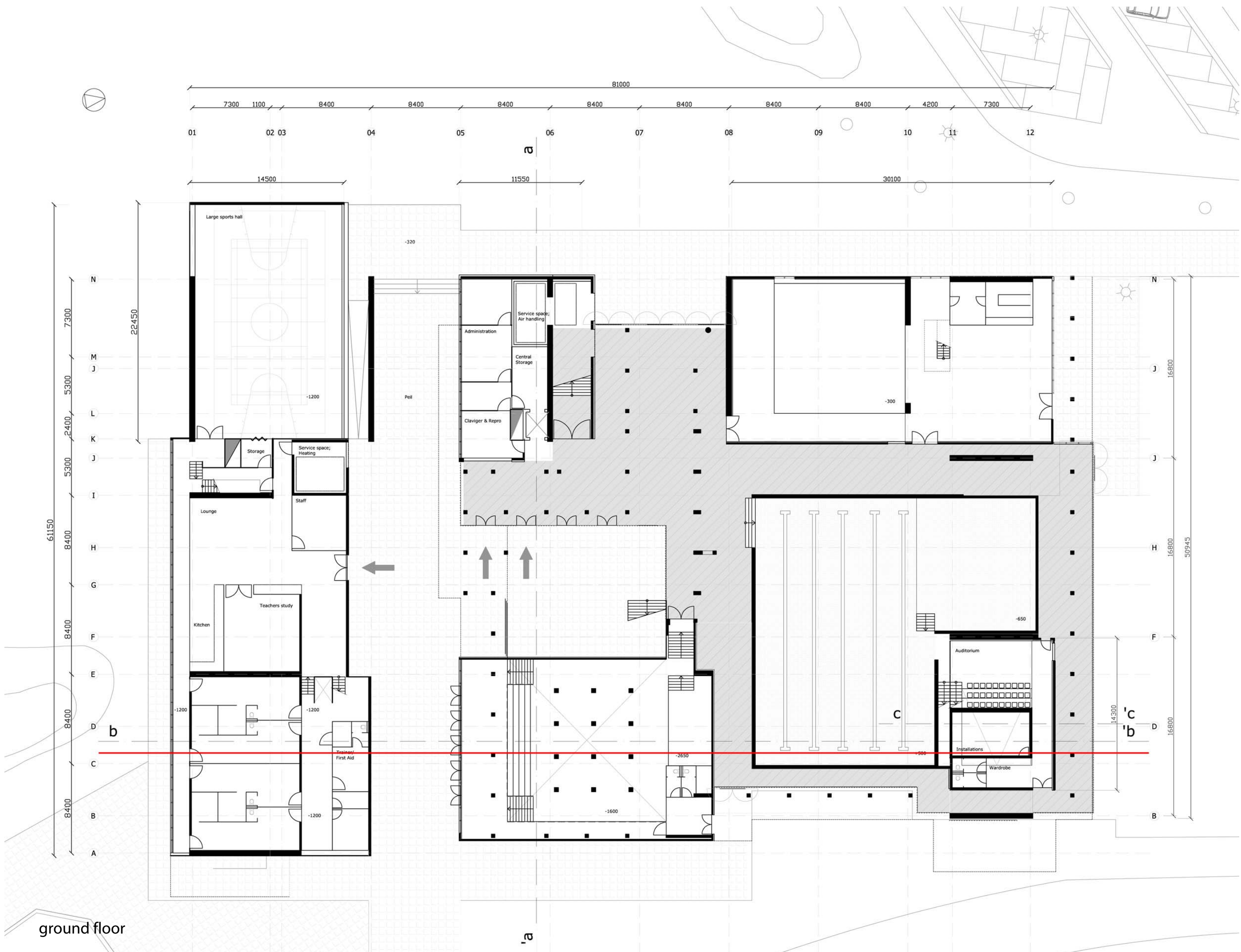
Building a grammar school in Amsterdam North is an exception to the rule, and asks for a thoughtful approach with respect to both its predecessors and its surroundings.



## The Context

The Noorderpark is about to be redeveloped. In plans from West8 its different parts which are currently separated by a highway and a canal will be reconnected. The park has an important recreational function for the surrounding neighborhoods. But, compared to the Vondelpark, which is roughly the same size, it attracts only a tenth of its users. The introduction of a school would mean a mutual reinforcement. The park benefits from the energy of the pupils and the school uses the park as its garden.

With the swimming pool in the northern part of the park about to be relocated, a large terrain will become available for new developments. Currently the swimming pool area is sitting between the Florabuur and the park. High brick walls and metal fencing prevent the neighborhood from going in. This chance of opening up towards the neighborhood became an important motif for choices in the design process.



When the swimming pool area is relocated it leaves behind several empty pools. Lying in the park they form a silent testimony off what once was there. These concrete ruins form the starting point of my design process.

A considered approach towards the surroundings in this case means directly adopting physical structures into the school. What used to be filled with water is now turned into the schoolyard. Its different horizontal planes form an artificial landscape surrounded by a natural one.

## The School

The horizontal layering is also present within the school. The raised schoolyard is used as a divider between the semipublic plinth and the rest of the school. Large functions like the aula, auditorium and sports facilities are all accessible from ground level. Because of its specific functional layout, the school is capable of inviting outsiders without causing serious disturbances in daily school life. This means it can add value and open itself up to the neighborhood in contrast to the old grammar schools. The openness is also apparent in its detailing. Corridors literally open up towards the schoolyard letting in light and air. This way a healthy learning environment is created in the spirit of Duikers 'Openluchtschool'.



A light steel structure contrasts the concrete plinth. This lightness is for practical reasons. Because the load bearing capacity of the old pool isn't sufficient to carry the whole school it has to stand on its own feet. Concrete walls stand on a regular grid 16,8 m apart. Where they meet the irregular grid of the swimming pool a dialogue is started. The volume which holds the classrooms is raised to the same height as the surrounding trees. Here the school envelops the schoolyard but at the same time opens up towards the water. A thick line of trees forms a natural boundary, changing colors with the seasons. The yellow light falling into the corridor is rythmed by the columns. From here the schoolyard forms a point of reference. Large windows at the ends of the corridors frame specific elements in its surroundings, like the orange roof landscape of Floradorp, or the dike houses on the other side of the water. This way the design tries to catch these valued elements, and bring them into its interior.



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