

# 9 KING GEORGE'S AVENUE

Stately Symphony



**Owner:**  
*People's Association*

**Architect:**  
*Architects 61 Pte Ltd*

**Engineer:**  
*JS Tan & Associates*

**Contractor:**  
*Singapore Piling & Civil Engineering Pte Ltd*

**C**ompleted in 1933, the former Victoria School is a rare architectural treasure with school buildings built from both the pre- and post-war periods. Today, its venerated halls welcome a revitalised look, a refreshed purpose and a striking new five-storey addition.

### **Small Touches, Big Changes**

The look of effortless elegance that surrounds the finished project belies the many complicated challenges the project team had to overcome to see it through. In addition to the rectification of structural defects and the meticulous restoration of the original shanghai plaster walls of the main building, much effort was put into updating the building in various respects to fit its modern purpose. For instance, to satisfy minimum threshold levels, the entire ground floor slab of the main classroom block had to be raised by 200mm and this had to be supported by new micro-piling. Existing balustrades and railings were modified to meet minimum height requirements. The naturally ventilated building had to be adapted for air-conditioning. All these little touches were done masterfully with minimum visual impact to the building.



1933 school building restored with new five-storey extension at rear

### **Seamless Connectivity**

The connectivity between the restored building and the new five-storey block was well thought out and executed. Among them, the grounds are lushly landscaped, naturally ventilated spaces are seamlessly blended in, and a series of link bridges connect the old and the new to bring the pieces of this 'artwork' together.

### **Making it Work**

The project team demonstrated outstanding skill in using natural

ventilation and natural lighting to enhance the internal spaces. With some ingenious reconfiguration, more space was carved out for office use from the former narrow classroom corridors at the rear of the building. The original light shelf was cleverly enhanced with a ceiling profile that now serves the dual purpose of bringing in more natural lighting while concealing the mechanical and electrical services.

Indeed, the project is a highly commendable effort in integrating a new building and transforming a former school into a modern, environment- and people-friendly office. It is also laudable that the prototype 1967 hall-cum-canteen building was retained and restored as one of the last remaining examples of buildings of its style and configuration.



*Specially designed ceiling profile to bring in natural lighting*



*Open verandah with unique cross balustrade*



*1967 hall-cum-canteen building*



*Atrium space between meeting rooms and auditorium*



*Naturally-lit atrium space*



*Original front grand staircase*



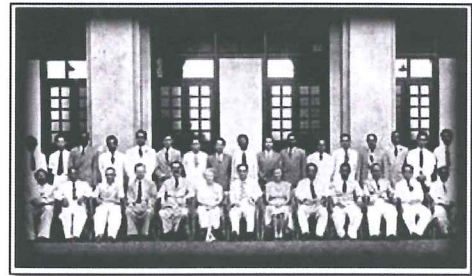
*Roof terrace overlooking the open field*

## Historical & Social Significance and Identity

Victoria School is an established school with a long history, with its humble origin as an English class in the Kampong Glam Malay School in 1876. Between 1900 and 1932, the school became known as the Victoria Bridge School when it moved to new premises at Victoria Street, near Victoria Bridge. In 1933, the school moved to the site at Tyrwhitt Road when the new school building was completed.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese called it the 'Jalan Besar Boys' School' and forbade the teaching of English. After the War, the school was rehabilitated. A 2-storey science block was added in 1950 and a new 2-storey hall-cum-canteen in 1967 to provide more facilities for the students.

The school continued to use the buildings on site until 1984 when it moved to Geylang Bahru before moving to its new premises at Siglap Link at 2003.



## Architectural Merit and Contribution to the Environment

The former Victoria School is one of the few early city centre schools still in existence today. It is rather unique in that, this development features school buildings from both the pre-and post-war period in a single site, marking important periods in terms of architectural development as well as social and political changes.



The main classroom / administration block built in 1933 next to the hall-cum canteen block on the left built in 1967. The 1950 science block is at the rear

The school complex used to comprise of 3 different buildings built at different times:

- a. the original main classroom / administration block
- b. the hall-cum-canteen block
- c. the science block

a. Main Classroom / Administrative Block

Constructed in reinforced concrete, this block is designed and built in 1933 by Frank Dorrington Ward of the PWD, whose works include the Supreme Court and the Former Traffic Police Building. The building has a long and narrow plan and boasts of a corridor that continues around the central spine of classrooms. A school hall, with concrete-arch structures, terminates the block at one end.



Corridor with well detailed cornices, columns, capitals & cross - Braced parapets



Well proportioned bays

The handsome flat-roofed building is built in the Neo-Classical style with a touch of Art Deco details employed at the parapets and brackets. The long frontage of the building is divided into 26 bays, separated by full rectangular double-storey columns, finished in Shanghai plaster with simple and elegant capitals. The spacing of the columns are narrower at each end where the staircases are, and slightly wider in the centre to mark the main entrance. Perforated concrete parapets with herring-bone struts are used at the second floor corridor and at the roof terrace.

The classrooms are characterized by their high-ceilinged spaces which allows for additional light and air into the rooms. The second floor has two layers of deep over-hanging eaves, protecting the internal spaces from excessive sunlight. This adaptation to the environment is also evident on plan as the classrooms open up on both sides to the corridors which further shades them from the strong tropical sun and encourages cross-ventilation.

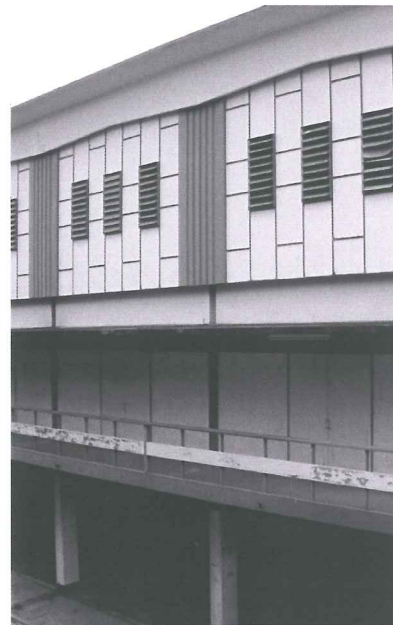
b. Hall-cum-Canteen

Built in 1967, the hall-cum-canteen is one of the early prototypes developed by PWD where the multi-purpose hall is located above the naturally-ventilated canteen area. School prototypes were developed in the nation-building years to produce schools that are aesthetically pleasing and are fast to build. This innovative spatial-planning technique was later repeated in other schools on the island. These standard designs are sometimes adapted to the various site conditions.

Designed in the Modern-style, the functions of the hall and the canteen are appropriately and vividly manifested on its facades with the 2-storey hall lifted off the ground by thin slender columns which is the canteen area. Circulation is via the exposed feature staircase at the front that resembles that of the old school hall of the main building, and the generous corridor that surrounds the double-volume hall.



Front of hall-cum-canteen block with feature window and cantilevered dog-leg stairs



Concrete steel frame with in-fill of pre-fabricated materials in a grid pattern

The "breathing skin" of the hall creates a geometric pattern on its façade while allowing natural air ventilation. The front elevation has a feature fair-faced brick wall with decorative pre-cast concrete air-vents while the sides are modular panels interspersed regularly with louvred windows.

Both buildings are rare on their own account. The original main building is a one-of-its kind educational building and the hall-cum-canteen block is the only known school hall left of this style and configuration. Located in the heart of the historic Jalan Besar area, the buildings fit well into the surrounding and add to the variety of buildings in the Jalan Besar area.

### c. The Science Block

The science block was a non-descript building of simple and functional design built in 1951. As it was not classified as architecturally significant, the science block was demolished to make way for the new PAHQ in 2007.