

## **“THE BEAUTIFUL MIND OF AUTISM” A PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN**

Autism is a disorder that affects an individual’s communication and social skills. However, autism is also a “gift” and every child born with autism is born with a hidden talent and a unique mind.

Since autism is increasing in Bahrain and the number of facilities are limited, it is important to design a primary school that will help develop the talents of both the hyposensitive and hypersensitive autistic children, which are the two major classifications of autistic children in terms of how they respond to their surrounding environment. Hyposensitive autistic children do not respond quickly to certain sensory input and they are classified as “sensory seeking”. On the other hand, hypersensitive autistic children respond quickly to sensory input, which could be very overwhelming.

Through “Social Sensory Architecture” a suitable sensory experience for both types of autistic can be created to allow them to learn, communicate, socialize, and become active members of the society through their genius minds and talents.

Under one roof the building is divided into four main zones. The first zone is for the hyposensitive autistic children. In this zone, the ceiling gradually slopes to a higher ceiling in order to increase the echo and reverberation time. A skylight with different colored glass is introduced in the center of this zone with bright colored gypsum panels hanging in the interior at different levels to create a beautiful play of light, shadows, and colors. Moreover, the hyposensitive garden is designed as a courtyard with an irregular, asymmetrical, triangular form and non-parallel walls, causing sound to disperse in different directions and the echo changing from corner to corner. All these elements will therefore help stimulate the children’s senses and create a sense of excitement to their learning experience.

The second zone is for the hypersensitive autistic children. With this zone sloping to a lower ceiling to reduce the echo, indirect lighting with clerestory windows, calm colors in the exterior & interior, and an open hypersensitive garden, the children’s sensory overload will be reduced and a calm environment is created.

The hyper and hyposensitive zones are each further classified as per the different age groups which are separated by a transitional space composed of indoor plantation and a sitting space around it to act as a place for children to socialize and to allow them to transition smoothly from one space to the other.

The third zone is the common faculties and lifestyle learning experience area that is located between the hypo & hypersensitive zones to help engage both types of children and encourage them to socialize as they would in the real world.

The final zone is the administration area, which is located at the main entrance and in the center of all the zones to maintain a controlled environment.

The vast outdoor spaces are composed of gardens, playgrounds, bicycle track, and an animal care garden, which helps enhance the children’s motor skills and stimulate their sense of touch.

By creating the right environment for each of the hyposensitive and hypersensitive autistic children, their communication skills will be enhanced, their talents will be expressed, their talents will transform into skills, and their skills into future employment, which will allow them to contribute as members of the society through their creative minds.