



# Flexible Learning Spaces

## How the design of spaces can help student achievement – November 2016

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**This factsheet is a quick guide for schools, family/whānau, and communities creating a flexible learning space. It provides you with a starting point for the design of your space, and outlines the most important things to consider for your students, teachers, and community.**

**As this is just a quick overview, we recommend you read this alongside our other resources. Take a look at our website to find our other flexible learning spaces factsheet, Making spaces work for everyone, and NZSPA's literature review, The impact of physical design on student outcomes.**

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### **Key overall findings**

- Quality teaching is the biggest driver of student outcomes
- The space needs to suit your school's teaching and learning practices
- Good quality acoustics, lighting, heating, and ventilation are associated with improved student outcomes (see table below)
- Furniture, fittings, and equipment have the potential to improve student outcomes (see table below)
- Teaching and learning practices continue to evolve. Flexible learning spaces can support teaching and learning as it changes in the future
- Schools must design flexible learning spaces that work for everyone.

| Core feature of flexible learning spaces | Key findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Acoustics                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good acoustics are important – they help students correctly interpret what a teacher is saying, and stop students from tuning out, and can make teaching easier.</li> <li>• Good quality acoustics in traditionally noisy environments can contribute to a calmer learning environment.</li> <li>• Sudden noise should be kept to a minimum.</li> </ul> |
| Lighting                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural light is better for students.</li> <li>• It is important to be able to control lighting.</li> <li>• Windows should stop views from being a distraction, minimise glare and heat from the sun, and keep the light from creating strong contrasts in the learning space.</li> </ul>                                                               |
| Heating                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to control heating to suit the user is important.</li> <li>• Heating sources must be safe for students.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ventilation                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible learning spaces must have good air quality. This lowers the chance of causing health difficulties.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Facility Quality                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher quality facilities are linked to better student achievement and engagement.</li> <li>• Evidence suggests that students value spaces that look good, and are happier and feel more valued in a higher quality facility.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                |

| Moderate / advanced feature of flexible learning spaces | Key findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interior spaces                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interior spaces need to be big enough for a range of learning activities, groups, and should be easily reconfigured.</li> <li>• Collaborative teaching practices and shared planning are essential when using a larger learning space.</li> <li>• Easy access to different learning spaces helps student outcomes.</li> <li>• Being able to see across learning spaces is important for supervising students.</li> </ul> |
| Outdoor spaces                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality outdoor spaces are linked to better student outcomes, particularly for primary-aged students.</li> <li>• Outdoor facilities should be accessible to all students and should have few barriers for easy access.</li> <li>• Schools should choose outdoor equipment that gives students of all sizes items they can use safely.</li> </ul>                                                                    |

| Moderate / advanced feature of flexible learning spaces | Key findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access and circulation                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There must be enough points of access for all students throughout the school.</li> <li>• Schools should try to avoid unintentional physical barriers, such as kerbs, narrow corridors, or heavy doors.</li> <li>• Accessibility for those who may have difficulty with objects like window or door handles, or moving storage, should be considered during the design phase.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           |
| Storage                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughtfully designed storage increases time on task during lessons.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Colour                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colour can be used as a visual aid for marking routes, or defining spaces or objects.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Technology                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology improves student outcomes when it is used to extend teaching and learning practice.</li> <li>• Buildings should be future-proofed by being hard-wired and networked for technology.</li> <li>• Buildings should also include places for students and teachers to charge personal devices safely across the school.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Furniture, fittings, and equipment                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Furniture, fittings, and equipment should be chosen to support the design and layout of a flexible learning space and suit the size of the users.</li> <li>• Spaces should have flexible furniture and fittings, but schools should also consider how difficult it may be for people to move these items.</li> <li>• Items should be flexible, adaptable, and inclusive – students should have access to specialised equipment in common spaces.</li> <li>• Items should be easy to clean and durable.</li> </ul> |

For more information on flexible learning spaces, see NZSPA's website:  
[www.schoolproperty.govt.nz/designing-school-property](http://www.schoolproperty.govt.nz/designing-school-property)  
 Here you will find another factsheet, Making spaces work for everyone and two full booklets on the impact of physical design on student outcomes.