



Flexible Learning Spaces

Making spaces work for everyone factsheet – November 2016

Flexible learning spaces can support a diverse range of students. To help schools figure out the best way to do this, we have created this factsheet on what to consider when designing an inclusive space. This factsheet offers things to consider for students that require additional physical or learning support, and also helps schools create flexible learning spaces with Māori and Pasifika learners in mind.

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, How the design of spaces can help student achievement, and NZSPA's literature review, The impact of physical design on student outcomes.

What works for students that require additional physical or learning support?

- Using the principles of Universal Design for best practice in physical access and circulation.
- Getting furniture, fittings, and equipment right is important for students who require additional physical and learning support. Lighting, use of colour, the way furniture moves, and seating arrangements are just some things to consider.
- Consulting with students and whānau before designing the space to make sure everyone's needs are met.

Principles of universal design

Equitable use	The design is useful to people with diverse abilities.
Flexibility in use	The space can change to suit what the learner needs or prefers.
Simple and intuitive use	Spaces are easy to use – it doesn't matter how much experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration the user has.
Perceptible information	The user can figure out how to use the space effectively, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
Tolerance for error	The design minimises hazards, and accounts for the consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
Low physical effort	The design can be used without much physical effort.
Size and space for approach and use	The user should be able to approach spaces, change them to meet their needs, and reach what's in them regardless of their size, posture or how mobile they are.

For more information on flexible learning spaces, see NZSPA's website:

www.schoolproperty.govt.nz/designing-school-property

Here you will find another factsheet, How the design of spaces can help student achievement and two full booklets on the impact of physical design on student outcomes.

Design for Māori and Pasifika students – Māui whakakau, kura whakakau*

- Consultation with students, whānau, and the local community is essential for developing a culturally responsive space.
- Schools should maintain relationships with family and whānau after the space is finished – this encourages ongoing support for students' learning.
- Artwork should reflect the local area, and be prominent throughout the school to show students and whānau that their culture is valued by the school.
- The names given to buildings and learning spaces should come from the history of the community

Cultural considerations for school design

Learning spaces	• Can students learn together, and is there space for larger groups to do activities such as kapa haka and waiata? • Does the space support tuakana-teina** relationships between students, and between teachers? • Spaces which have more than one teacher in the room at a time allow a range of subjects to be taught at the same time, which is linked to higher Māori student achievement.
Break out spaces	• Break out spaces allow small groups of students to work together which can encourage Māori and Pasifika students to support each other in this close setting. This can make students feel more comfortable asking or answering questions when they're in front of a larger group. • Break out spaces can be used for smaller whānau hui, sharing kai, or as a safe place for younger children while whānau take part in an event in a nearby multi-purpose cultural space.
Valuing the language	• Classrooms for Māori or Pasifika language learning should be located in a place that demonstrates the mana of the language. The languages should be valued throughout the school setting.
Multi-purpose cultural space	• While a large multi-purpose space may be used for kawa and tikanga such as pōwhiri (formal welcome ceremony), it is more flexible if the space is not tapu. • If a school wishes to build a whare or fale, extensive consultation with local iwi or the Pasifika community is essential. • If the multi-purpose cultural space, along with the kīhini (kitchen) and wharekai (eating area) are separate from the main school, and have access to wharepaku (toilets), the community can also use these facilities outside school hours.
Kīhini and wharekai	• It is important that the preparation of food is separate from eating, sleeping, showering, etc. This separation is fundamental to Māori and Pasifika cultures. • The kīhini or food preparation facilities should be located near the multi-purpose cultural space.
Outdoor spaces	• The school's outdoor areas should have local plants, and could incorporate harakeke that can be harvested for weaving, and trees that can have the bark stripped for dyeing or other artwork.

* Māui whakakau, kura whakakau: This is the title of our literature review on the impact of physical design on Māori and Pasifika student outcomes. It reflects the educational transformation that can be supported by thoughtful design, and likens a school's ability to transform to Māui's ability to transform into all the birds of the forest. Māui is recognised as a common ancestor of Māori and Pasifika people.

**Tuakana-teina refers to the relationship between an older (tuakana) and a younger (teina) person, and is specific to teaching and learning in the Māori context.

