

Flexible Learning Spaces

How the design of spaces can help student achievement

FACTSHEET

NOVEMBER 2016

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 the Ministry's literature review, *The impact of physical design on student outcomes*.



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"> • 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. • Good quality acoustics in traditionally noisy environments can contribute to a calmer learning environment. • Sudden noise should be kept to a minimum.
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural light is better for students. • It is important to be able to control lighting. • 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.
Heating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to control heating to suit the user is important. • Heating sources must be safe for students.
Ventilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible learning spaces must have good air quality. This lowers the chance of causing health difficulties.
Facility Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher quality facilities are linked to better student achievement and engagement. • Evidence suggests that students value spaces that look good, and are happier and feel more valued in a higher quality facility.

MODERATE/ADVANCED FEATURE OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING SPACES

KEY FINDINGS

Interior spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interior spaces need to be big enough for a range of learning activities, groups, and should be easily reconfigured.• Collaborative teaching practices and shared planning are essential when using a larger learning space.• Easy access to different learning spaces helps student outcomes.• Being able to see across learning spaces is important for supervising students.
Outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good quality outdoor spaces are linked to better student outcomes, particularly for primary-aged students.• Outdoor facilities should be accessible to all students and should have few barriers for easy access.• Schools should choose outdoor equipment that gives students of all sizes items they can use safely.
Access and circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There must be enough points of access for all students throughout the school.• Schools should try to avoid unintentional physical barriers, such as kerbs, narrow corridors, or heavy doors.• Accessibility for those who may have difficulty with objects like window or door handles, or moving storage, should be considered during the design phase.
Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thoughtfully designed storage increases time on task during lessons.
Colour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colour can be used as a visual aid for marking routes, or defining spaces or objects.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology improves student outcomes when it is used to extend teaching and learning practice.• Buildings should be future-proofed by being hard-wired and networked for technology.• Buildings should also include places for students and teachers to charge personal devices safely across the school.
Furniture, fittings, and equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.• Spaces should have flexible furniture and fittings, but schools should also consider how difficult it may be for people to move these items.• Items should be flexible, adaptable, and inclusive – students should have access to specialised equipment in common spaces.• Items should be easy to clean and durable.



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

www.education.govt.nz/flexible-learning-spaces

Here you will find another factsheet, *Making spaces work for everyone* and two full booklets on the impact of physical design on student outcomes.