

Taking a fresh look at your learning space

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At this time of year, we tend to be spending more time inside so it is a perfect time to take a fresh look at your physical classroom or learning space to make sure it is supporting students to feel engaged, safe and ready to learn.

When reviewing your learning space, you will get the best results if you include your students at every stage so that you all do the thinking and build the environment together. If you work in the secondary context, you may need to collaborate with other teachers as well as different student groups.

Having a safe and welcoming learning space is a priority for many learners. When presented with the voting wall below adults typically vote for a range of options while results from groups of students have consistently favoured Manaakitanga — when I feel safe, welcomed, and cared for. Reviewing your physical spaces can play a part by removing unintended barriers and creating welcoming spaces that support a range of learners.

VOTE FOR
the most important thing to help you learn

<p>Māramatanga People who know me well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > understand me > know what I like > know my strengths > listen to me > involve my parents, whānau and whānau whānui 	<p>Rangatiratanga Everyone expects the best of me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > tells me what is expected of me > tells me when I'm doing well > encourages me > believes in me 	<p>Auahatanga Teachers who cater to my needs, interests and strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > are inventive and creative > make learning fun > teach in a way I understand > provide information in different ways 	<p>Manaakitanga When I feel safe, welcomed and cared for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > I can be myself > I am valued > I am respected > I am included > I get help when I need it
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Instructions: Place a chip in the glass jar to vote.
You can vote for more than one.

Image: Voting Wall – Ministry of Education resource developed for Festival of Education [1](#).
See [catalogue of all of the resources](#)

REFLECTING ON YOUR PHYSICAL SPACE

When looking at the physical space, think of how it works for a range of learners. Consider those with vision or hearing difficulties (including temporary issues such as bouts of glue ear), those who suffer from sensory overload and people with physical disabilities. Seemingly small background noises, smells, or discomforts can affect different people in different ways and can drive some students to distraction, prompting unwelcome behaviours.

Start by taking a dispassionate look at your classroom or learning space from multiple perspectives. Sit in different places around the room so that you can see, hear, smell, and feel it from multiple viewpoints. It can also be useful to have input from someone from outside your class to give fresh perspectives.

Some things to take particular note of:

- **Noise:** Listen for humming heaters, lights, and computers, road noise, other noises. Consider changing seating arrangements, masking noise with physical barriers and insulation systems to reduce problems. In more extreme cases you may need to approach your school leadership to consider more complex solutions such as installing acoustic ceiling tiles and acoustic wall linings or classroom sound field systems.
- **Lighting:** Look for spaces that are visually difficult because of poor lighting or glare, and consider replacing bulbs to increase or decrease strength, or change the [colour temperature](#), placing lamps and using curtains and blinds.
- **Warmth and air quality:** Feel whether spaces are cold or hot, drafty or stuffy, and consider a range of draft stop and fresh air options.
- **Navigation and layout:** Move through the space to check the physical layout of furniture is accessible with clear pathways to and from most used areas
- **Furniture:**
 - Sit at desks or tables to review the furniture for comfort, practicality, and appropriateness for a range of students of different shapes, sizes, and activity levels.
 - Review your seating arrangements and ask — is the arrangement supporting the type of learning we want to happen (e.g., grouping for collaboration) and the range of activities we are doing?
- **Visuals:** Look for spaces that might be visually overwhelming or dull. You might like to consider building areas that feel different to cater for a range of preferences.
- **Resources:** Access the classroom resources such as book shelves and classroom materials to make sure they are easy to navigate for all your learners.
- **Emotions:** Reflect on the ways that the space may make your learners feel.

- Think about options for different types of tasks — e.g., noisy collaborative tasks versus quiet independent tasks, and consider how you can cater for them.
 - As part of a wider, inclusive approach, artwork and culturally appropriate images and text can help a range of students feel welcome and valued.
- Organisation: Look at organisational supports such as labels, colour coding, and visuals that support students to be independent, complete tasks, and find the resources they need.

For more ideas see, [A Place for Learning: The Physical Environment of Classrooms](#). The Ministry of Education's [Designing quality learning spaces in schools](#) encourages boards of trustees to self-assess classrooms and judge whether their performance (in terms of acoustics, air quality, heating, temperature, insulation, and lighting) needs to be improved.

CREATING YOUR UNIQUE LEARNING SPACE

For inspiration, see the following EDtalk where Anne Kenneally profiles the review of her learning space in collaboration with her students: [Anne Kenneally: Creating learning spaces](#).

VIDEO: [Creating learning spaces](#) from [EDtalks](#). <https://vimeo.com/52111969>

Just as every teacher and group of learners is unique, each learning space will be unique. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for you, but, by having a fresh look at how your physical space works for you and your students you can help to create an environment where students feel welcome and ready to learn.

¹ See the Ministry of Education's [catalogue of all of the resources](#) for more information about using the voting wall in your school.



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[Lynne Silcock](#) is a facilitator for Learning with Digital Technologies and Connected Learning Advisory. Lynne has a background in secondary teaching and sports leadership. Her teaching experience is primarily in special education, but includes secondary maths, geography, and outdoor education. Prior to joining CORE, Lynne worked in the Ministry of Education as the national coordinator for the NZ assistive technology team. She has expertise in how specialised and standard technologies can be used to support all learners, but especially those with disabilities or special learning needs. She has been an advocate of Universal Design for Learning for many years as she sees the potential for this framework to help teachers support those who have failed to thrive in traditional classrooms.