

# Māui whakakau, kura whakakau

## Teaching and learning environments to support priority learners

### FACTSHEET

**This factsheet summarises research aimed at better understanding how the features of modern teaching and learning environments support the needs of priority learners and demonstrate the value placed on their identity, language, and culture. It is intended to act as a guide for those involved in the visioning and design of any form of schooling facility designed for delivery of education to Māori and Pasifika students.**

This factsheet should be read in conjunction with other factsheets in the series. It focuses on key findings directly related to teaching and learning environments and priority learners. Literature on Māori and Pasifika student outcomes emphasises that effective teaching involves visibly valuing students' cultural backgrounds. Meaningful consultation with students, whānau and communities from the conceptual design phase is essential for developing a culturally responsive design and reaching a shared understanding of whānau and community vision for students.

### Whānau and community involvement

Ongoing whānau and community involvement is extremely important for supporting students' learning. Whānau can be supported to engage with the school by having spaces that they can access within the school. For example, if it was practical, a school might have a whānau room where families can meet with teachers, wait for their children, have a cup of tea or coffee and access the internet.

### Cultural visibility

The visibility of cultural symbols throughout the school is an important signal for conveying to students and whānau that their culture is acknowledged and valued by the school. Cultural visibility includes the aesthetics of the buildings themselves, the presence of cultural artwork throughout the school and the incorporation of cultural symbols or patterns in multiple media.

The increased visual transparency in modern learning environments causes a reduction in solid wall space for displaying artwork and so the design process should consider the appropriate balance between the two. Artwork, along with names given to learning spaces and buildings, should link the school to the history of its community and the local environment. These names should be displayed on signage around the school. Other areas should have signs showing their functional name (office, reception, etc) in te reo Māori.

### Interior spaces

Larger, open learning spaces provide flexibility to work in different groupings. Students can learn collectively and can easily come together in larger groups for activities such as kapa haka and waiata. These open learning spaces also support tuakana-teina relationships between students and teachers. Multiple groupings within open learning spaces support different teacher locations within the room and increase discursive teaching practice, which is linked to higher Māori student achievement.



Spaces should be oriented so that they receive good sunlight. Natural light is linked to increased student achievement and *Tamanuiterā* (the sun) is important in the *whakapapa* of Māori culture.

## Break out spaces

Visual transparency is important for supervision, but also supports students within these spaces to maintain their link to the rest of the group. Students working in small groups in these areas can provide feedback or support to other students, encouraging Māori and Pasifika students to feel comfortable taking risks in the main learning space by asking or answering questions in front of a larger group. When sited near a large multi-purpose space, these 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 the multi-purpose space.

## Language space

The location of this space signals the value accorded to the language, and so classrooms for Māori or Pasifika language learning should be located in a place on the site that demonstrates the *mana* of the language.

## Multi-purpose space

It was suggested that the multi-purpose space or *whare* is best located towards the front of the school, where it has the benefit of visually communicating cultural inclusivity, and allowing easy access for visitors and *whānau* to the school. While this space may be used for *kawa* and *tikanga* such as *pōwhiri* (formal welcome ceremony), it is more flexible if the space is not *tapu*. Community involvement in schools is easier to facilitate if the access points to the school are more apparent to visitors such as encouraging the natural flow to the *wharekai* (dining room), and from there into the rest of the school if appropriate. A self-contained multi-purpose space with *kīhini* (kitchen), space for sharing *kai*, break out spaces, and access to *wharepaku* (toilets) makes it easier for the community to use the school outside school hours.

A veranda in front of the multi-purpose space provides shelter during ceremonies, an overflow area for larger groups, and can be used for less formal activities. Consideration, when designing the multi-purpose space, should be given to storage (including for mattresses), floor covering, and the provision of showers.

Consideration of the location of the multi-purpose space may allow the outdoor space at the front to act as a *marae ātea* (courtyard). The separation of food preparation and eating from bodily functions such as ablutions and sleeping is fundamental to Māori and Pasifika cultures.

A contemporary way of providing kitchen facilities is to site the food technology area so it can be used for this purpose. Laundry facilities should be structured so that food related and body related laundry is washed separately.

## Furniture, fittings and equipment

Moveable furniture supports flexibility of spaces to be used for different activities. For example, movable seating within a multi-purpose space allows it to be used for a performance, or a ceremony such as a *pōwhiri*.

It is important to ensure seating, in all spaces, is suitable and comfortable for visitors, teachers and students with a range of requirements.

Different types of seating should be provided for students, including mats, soft seating, and seating that can be used outside.

## Outdoor spaces

It is important to make outdoor spaces culturally meaningful places for engaging and learning. This may include:

- Visual transparency in the form of interior and exterior windows to support learning and emphasise the connection between people and the natural environment.

*“We learn holistically and through all our senses. It’s important to be able to sense and be a part of nature. That’s where having a lot of area where you can see outside, you can see nature and it brings it into your learning environment, is really important.” Māori Participant.*

- Glass doors, decks and verandas make the outdoors an extension of the interior learning space.
- Further connection with the environment can be made by using native plants such as *harakeke* that can be harvested for weaving, and trees that can have the bark stripped for dyeing or other artworks.
- Cultural symbols can also be visually signalled in outdoor spaces, such as *kowhaiwhai* patterns in the concrete or other hard surfaces, or in the shape of garden areas and pathways.

