

St Martins School

CASE STUDY

AUGUST 2015

Schools all around the country are adapting their teaching and learning approaches in response to major shifts in technology use and the way students learn. This publication is one of a series which showcases how schools have taken the pedagogical journey and converted existing space to trial different types of learning environments and settings. This case study looks at St Martins School in Christchurch.

ST MARTINS SCHOOL is a decile 9 school in Christchurch. The school caters for years 1 to 8 (ages 5 to 13) and has 540 students (August 2015). Ethnic composition is 80% NZ European/Pakeha, 8% Maori, 3% Asian, 2% Pacific and 7% other.

The school operates out of both permanent and relocatable buildings – most dating from around the 1970s. It also has an administration block and new classroom block built in the 1990s.

Background

St Martins School is a large primary school that has taken a significant and powerful journey over the past 5 years, resulting in a shift in mindset of the whole school community.

There is clear passion for teaching and learning centred on a shared vision, goals and aspirations. While these changes have been driven through the need to provide best practice in teaching and learning, the changes have been supported through minor alterations to the physical building environment.

The journey

St Martins School has been on a journey of pedagogical change for the past 5 years. The journey was inspired by evidence-based research from Julia Atkin, Adrienne Alton-Lee, John Hattie, and more recently the OECD.

Following an extensive research the whole school began the shift in mindset towards a distributed leadership model which was about growth, relinquishing ownership, and everyone taking responsibility for all students.

A clear understanding of shared aspirations, vision and goals were developed and everything the school does must contribute to reaching those goals and aspirations. The school looked at student learning pathways and used the national standards to create a baseline.

Student progress is carefully monitored and the school reflected on what good pedagogy means and what assessment looks like. It was important for the school to develop the right culture and professional learning model to support these aspirations.

A number of staff members visited schools which have begun to adapt and change their approach to teaching. Through these visits, staff could see how new approaches were working and see the impact on students. The visits also allowed staff to see how spaces could be adapted to support different teaching approaches.

The whole school began a journey of reflection and future-focused teaching and started to make small changes in the way it practiced teaching and learning. It began to provide more individualised teaching and learning opportunities that supported all students. It started to move away from the 'one size fits all' approach where 80% of the teaching is provided to students who are already familiar with the content.

The leadership model has three teams. The Navigation Team considers "where are we going?" They spend at least 1 day a week researching best practice and consider how that practice can benefit the school community. The Implementation Team takes these ideas and makes them happen. The Learning Teams focus on literacy, numeracy, inquiry and performing arts. Every teacher is a member of one of these teams, and each teaching level is represented within each of the Learning Teams.



"The values of the school are deeply held beliefs highlighting what our school community considers most important for our learners so that they will thrive in diverse communities. These values will be reflected in all actions and interactions, including with learning settings within our school."

Rob Callaghan - Principal, St Martins School

St Martins School believes that future-focussed teaching includes:

- Mutual respect / high level of motivation.
- Co-constructed learning outcomes.
- Co-constructed success criteria.
- Curriculum and teaching and learning programmes that are connected to students' interest, prior learning, experiences, talents and the real world.
- Learners working collaboratively with classmates and others from around the world - the global classroom.
- Performances, projects and multiple forms of media being used for learning and assessment.
- Student-centred learning with the teacher as a facilitator of learning/coach.
- Curriculum programmes that address student diversity and that are culturally responsive.
- Understanding that the learning process is as important as the learning outcome intended.
- Learning designed to enhance higher order thinking.
- Focussing on developing values, key competencies and creativity.

And now

The school spent considerable time reflecting on best practice and understanding the factors that have the biggest impact on learning. The school operates a sustainable distributed leadership model and a collaborative partnership approach to developing its practice - teacher/child/space where students voice their opinion on their learning. It is an holistic approach that allows the school to focus on innovation. Teachers are confident, have professional pride and they strive to be the best. Teachers and students are "learning together" and there is a shared ownership of the school, all based around the schools values. Professional development is strong and there is a high trust culture. There is continual improvement and more recently the school is looking towards the OECD research, specifically 'The 7 Principles of Learning'.

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| 1 | Learners at the centre | 5 | Stretching all students |
| 2 | The social nature of learning | 6 | Assessment for learning |
| 3 | Emotions are integral to learning | 7 | Building horizontal connections |
| 4 | Recognising individual differences | | |



The collaborative model is supported through minor modifications made to the buildings through property prototyping. A number of buildings at the school have been opened up to provide bigger, open, flexible teaching and learning spaces. This has led to flexible, self-regulated learning and collaborative practices. Teachers feel confident to work in these spaces.

There are positive relationships between students and teachers, and between students. Students are highly engaged in learning. Behavioural issues and bullying are rare. The school has a very positive and calm atmosphere, lending itself to a safe, stable environment for students to learn in.

The property prototyping enabled the school to trial its vision for collaborative teaching practices and individualised learning for students, before committing to a major building programme under the Christchurch Schools Rebuild programme.

In 2016, the school will commence its journey within the Christchurch Schools Rebuild (CSR) programme to substantially redevelop the school buildings that will enable and support the vision of the school. Doing the research, trying out different ways of teaching and learning, and developing different spaces in which to teach and learn over the last 5 years, has not only contributed to the pedagogical success of the school, but will make a significant contribution to their decisions about how learning spaces and settings will be designed in the future.

Once the journey had begun from an educational delivery perspective, the school began to think more about how the buildings might support and enable collaborative practice.

As part of the Ministry's prototyping initiative, the school had the opportunity to make some changes to teaching spaces to trial different teaching practices. The school initially opened up a wall between 2 classrooms, the adjacent cloakroom/toilet space, and the porch area.

Almost instantly this transformed the cloakroom and toilet area from a place where behavioural issues were common, into an extension of the classroom - without compromising privacy. Students responded positively and began to respect the old cloakroom area as an extension of their classroom space resulting in a significant reduction in behavioural issues in that old space.

The transformed space enabled 2 teachers to collaborate in a single area. This supported a more individualised and independent learning culture.

"Our learning community is built on the foundation of respect and caring, providing opportunities to participate and contribute, to be responsible, actively involved global citizens.

We aim high to achieve personal best in all areas of our learning."

Rob Callaghan - Principal, St Martins School