

Design responsive physical environments

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Design learning for all' from the Guide:

[Behaviour and learning](#)

Includes:

Design for all from the outset

Knowledge of learners influences design decisions

Create calm spaces

Design outside spaces

Develop inclusive classroom environments

Visibly value students' cultural backgrounds

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Strategy: [Design learning for all](#)

Suggestion: [Design responsive physical environments](#)

Date

18 June 2026

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/design-responsive-physical-environments

Design for all from the outset

A learning space will only work well for everyone if it is designed to do so. Design with ākonga, whānau and the wider team to consider multiple perspectives that may influence belonging, learning and behaviour.

Considerations might include:

- Flexible spaces which provide a variety of seating, desk and space options to support different types of teaching and learning.
- Honouring Te Tiriti and visibly valuing te ao Māori, for example, using te reo Māori, dual language texts, and Māori contexts and images.
- Making values and high expectations visible to students, for example, displaying the school values and ways to show those values.
- Sensory needs, such as lighting, noise, visual clutter, and sensory supports such as blankets, familiar objects, music, or soothing sounds.
- Valuing diversity, for example, visuals and resources that celebrate different ways of being.
- Gender and sexuality, for example signage, toilets and bathrooms.
- Mobility, for example, visual and physical pathways, smooth surfaces and ramps that promote ease of movement.
- Wellbeing and belonging, for example, use the Te Whare Tapa Whā model for supporting the physical, spiritual, emotional, social, environmental, and relational elements of hauora.

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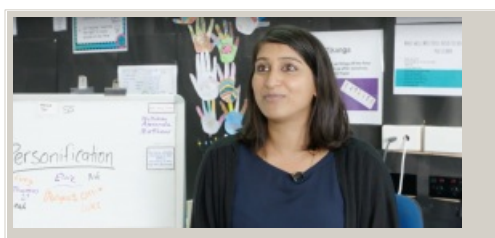
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Knowledge of learners influences design decisions

Anita Patel describes how UDL thinking has influenced her practice.



Video hosted on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/220585051>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Ministry of Education, inclusive education videos \(NZ\)](#)
<https://vimeo.com/album/2950799>

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Create calm spaces



Source:

[Mark Osborne](#)

<https://leadinglearning.co.nz/profile-mark-osborne/>

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Design outside spaces

Create visual and tactile landmarks to support student orientation when working and moving in and around outdoor spaces.

In your design, consider:

- ✓ coloured or tactile pathways for moving between buildings
- ✓ sculptures or cultural artifacts to act as keys to locations and spatial mapping of areas
- ✓ safe spaces where students can seek support from a peer or an adult
- ✓ using clear, high contrasting signage to identify buildings
- ✓ naming and attaching visuals to buildings, so that students can easily identify spaces.

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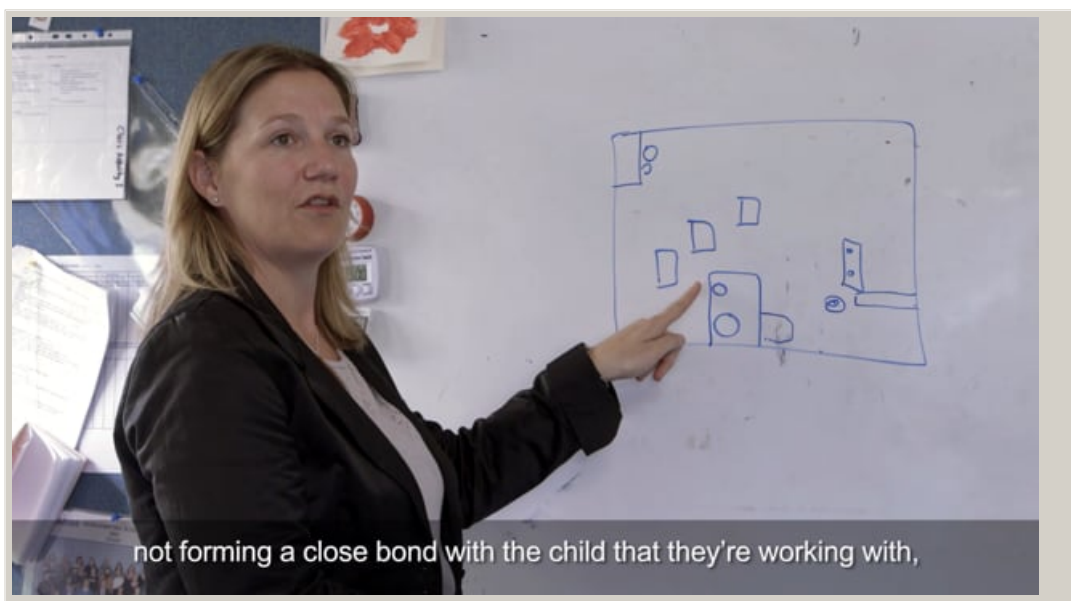
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Develop inclusive classroom environments

Justine Henderson from Berhampore School talks about how they have designed a flexible classroom that is responsive to varying student needs.



Video hosted on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/159138467>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Ministry of Education, Inclusive Education videos](#)

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/2950799/video/159138467>

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Visibly value students' cultural backgrounds



Source:

[Kelston Primary School](https://www.kelstonprimary.school.nz/)

<https://www.kelstonprimary.school.nz/>

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Visually reflect the different cultures of your school community in your environment through language, signs, and images.

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