

# New Zealand: Modernising Schools in a Decentralised Environment

By Bruce Sheerin, Ministry of Education, New Zealand

*The government of New Zealand delegates property expenditure decisions to each individual school. Such a decentralised environment creates a challenge for school boards and principals to obtain advice on the complex issues around designing schools. To inform schools, the Ministry of Education provides numerous publications related to design and selected best practice samples via its website.*

## LOCAL DECISION MAKING

New Zealand schools have been responsible for their own maintenance since 1989<sup>1</sup> and for all their school property decisions since 2000. Each school's board of trustees (largely made up of elected parent representatives) is funded via a five-year budget to carry out its own maintenance, additions and refurbishments. The belief is that those who are closest to where education takes place are best placed to create the optimum environments for their students and teachers.

When a new school is to be built, the Ministry of Education sets up an establishment board of trustees to work with a designer, a project manager and a construction company. They ensure that the new school meets the needs of the curriculum, quality teaching and the community. The ministry does not determine the shape or form of the school design other than to assure that there are sufficient numbers of teaching rooms and that the project falls within the budget.

## INFORMING SCHOOLS

### Publications

The ministry offers a series of publications to guide schools in their decision making on interior design, acoustics, heating and insulation, lighting, ventilation, and air quality. Much of this material is based on research undertaken by the Building Research Association of New Zealand Ltd. and on surveys of school trustees, principals, teachers and students about their expectations for top quality teaching and learning environments<sup>2</sup> ([www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/classroomdesignsurvey](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/classroomdesignsurvey)).

*Designing Quality Learning Spaces* is a detailed and highly graphic publication targeted to board members, principals and teachers. It offers them a better understanding of the important factors in school design and helps them ensure their designers deliver high quality environments. The document assists school leaders in making informed decisions, based on current research, in order to provide

1. See OECD (2004), "School Property Funding in New Zealand", *PEB Exchange*, no. 53, October, pp. 7-9.

2. See OECD (2005), "Structures for Learning in New Zealand", *PEB Exchange*, no. 56, October, pp. 7-8.

their teachers and students with learning environments that are comfortable, healthy, and designed for the best possible teaching and learning. The publication is set out on the website as five separate PDF files for easy downloading ([www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/DesigningLearningSpaces](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/DesigningLearningSpaces)).

### Best practice samples

The ministry has published best practice samples to show all schools, and the designers they hire to help them, how some school boards have designed their new buildings or have remodelled their existing ones. More than 150 examples of new or remodelled school teaching and learning spaces in 70 New Zealand schools have been made available on the ministry's website ([www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/schoolremodels](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/schoolremodels)). They include:

- 20 or so new schools built in the last 10 years, covering primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels of education;
- remodelled classrooms at all levels of education where the upgrade was aimed at creating space for quality 21st century teaching for diverse students;
- specialist rooms for science, information and communications technology skills, and technology education;
- libraries/information centres;
- multi-purpose school halls and performing arts spaces;
- administration/reception areas;
- learning spaces for health, physical education and sports education;
- spaces created for students' social interaction, such as learning streets.

The exemplars are presented with photographs, floor plans, a detailed account of what the school set out to achieve in terms of its pedagogical goals and learning outcomes, and how the school helped meet government goals for engaging families and communities and achieving quality teaching. Also reported is how the selected schools consulted with staff and students in arriving at their building plans, what teachers can now do in the remodelled or new spaces that they could not do before, and what attention the exemplars gave to acoustics, ventilation, heating and lighting.

### Papatoetoe South Primary School

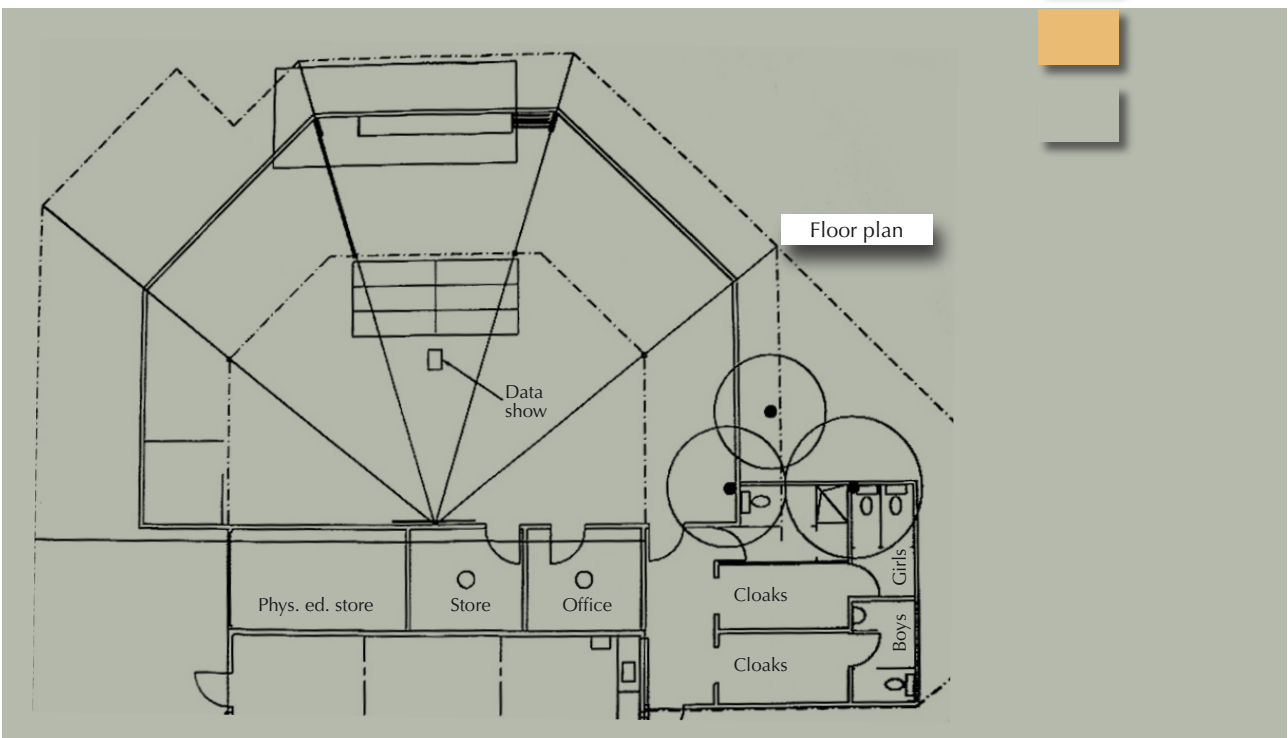
One of the exemplars is a new room added to Papatoetoe South Primary School in Auckland. This is a years 1 to 6 school (for students aged 5 to 11) in a low-income area with a roll of 590. The school needed a space for 40 students and 2 teachers which would enable a strong emphasis on student-negotiated learning assisted by technology.

The new room (see photograph below) features a school-designed mini-grandstand, two interactive whiteboards, several computers, two break-out rooms plus a large veranda, "best-practice" furniture, an air exchange system, a sound field system and full acoustic interior cladding.

The room's simple floor plan (below) allows space for 40 11-year-olds and their 2 collaborating teachers. Its breakout rooms, previously used for storage, now accommodate a robotics space to help students with problem solving and a small group quiet space. Large doors open onto an extensive veranda for indoor/outdoor learning.



Papatoetoe South Primary School  
New room



Floor plan

“We prefer teaching approaches which empower students to learn how to learn, life-long”, said school principal David Dawson. This leads to a self-negotiated learning model which uses graphic organisers and Blooms Taxonomy,<sup>3</sup> which gives students access to technology and emphasises literacy and numeracy skills throughout the school. The school expects all teachers to have high level skills with technology. Professional learning in this area is well advanced: teachers travel to Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States for development, and more than half the teaching spaces are equipped

3. “Bloom’s Taxonomy divides educational objectives into three ‘domains’: Affective, Psychomotor, and Cognitive. ... A goal of Bloom’s Taxonomy is to motivate educators to focus on all three domains, creating a more *holistic* form of education” (Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxonomy\\_of\\_Educational\\_Objectives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxonomy_of_Educational_Objectives), accessed 17 December 2007).

with interactive whiteboards. “We expect our teachers and students to set realistic learning goals; [our teachers] to know where every student is at and where they are heading with their learning, and to be able to help the students become autonomous learners and achievers. We provide the spaces and equipment to help these goals be achieved,” said David Dawson.

From exemplars such as this, taken from all over New Zealand, self-managing schools can see what is possible at schools old and new, pick up ideas, and guide their designers and builders towards the teaching and learning environments they want for their students and teachers.

*If other countries have websites or publications offering information on designing and remodelling school buildings that may be relevant to New Zealand schools, the Ministry of Education would be pleased to link to them.*

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