IN THE NEW BUILDING, TEACHERS WORK MORE COLLABORATIVELY TO PLAN AND DELIVER LESSONS WHICH ARE TAILORED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR ABILITIES OR INTERESTS.

TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT

Bhavini Pandya explains how one school in New Zealand transformed its learning spaces while being true to its motto.

As school logos go, Wesley Primary School's is definitely one of a kind. It's inspired by the school's location, ethos and culture. The school in Mount Roskill, a suburban area in Auckland, New Zealand, sits between two *maunga* (mountains): Owairaka and Puketapapa.

These *maunga* are represented in the logo as a W, the circular shape represents Te Ao Māori, the language and culture of Māori, and within it are Te Ranginui, the Sky Father, and Papatuanuku, the Land. They are thrust away from each other to show that children have room to grow, and the school motto, Ki te Mārama, which translates as "towards enlightenment", is displayed.

The lower part of the logo is two connected parts of the maunga; one is a fern, just beginning to stretch out its frond, and the other is a child, sheltered and nurtured by *whānau* (families).

Ki te mārama
Towards enlightenment
WESLEY
PRIMARY SCHOOL
Te Kura Tuatahi o Wēteri

The logo puts into imagery what the school puts into action: as a small school, with just 126 pupils, it's a place where everyone knows each other, the community focus is strong, and the culture of the whānau is embedded throughout.

The flexible environment

Wesley may have an established culture, but that doesn't mean innovation is off the table. For the past two years, the school has been working through the "Planning Learning Spaces in Practice" Design Framework to transform its teaching and learning practices.

The journey began in 2019 when former principal Brenda Martin established the need for a new school building. She worked with RTA Studio architects to create the first preliminary design, which was sent to New Zealand's Ministry of Education. Within the brief, the schoolidentified its learning agenda with a strong focus on the needs of the learner, and decided it wanted to achieve this through three key pedagogical themes: learning through play, through support and through inquiry and experiences.

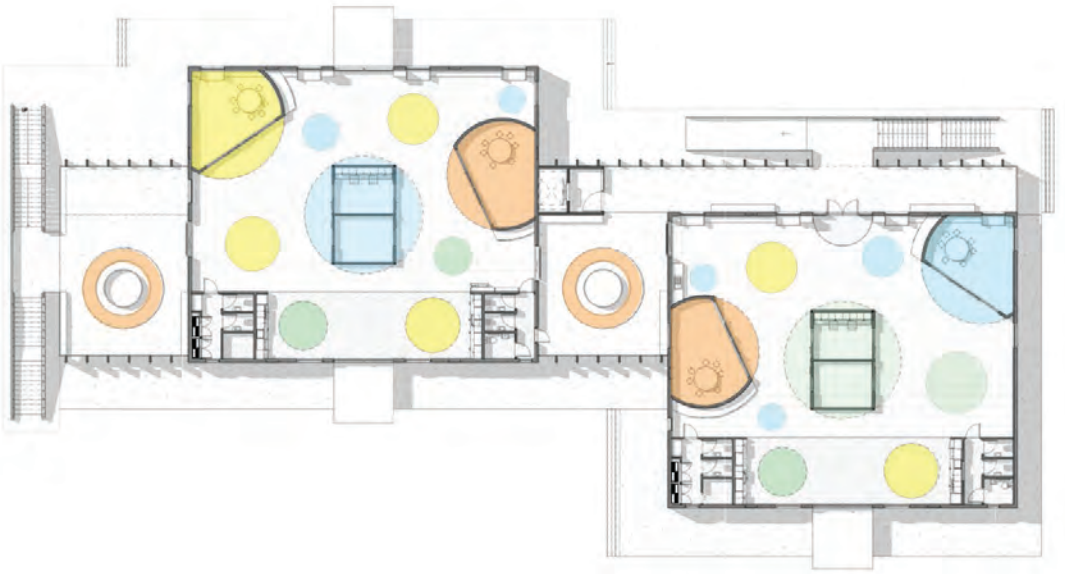
When Lou Reddy took over as principal in 2020, he engaged with the Planning Learning Spaces in Practice (PLSiP) framework, and decided that this would be at the heart of the new school design. The PLSiP seeks to address a fundamental flaw in education systems around the world: many learning spaces simply aren't fit for purpose. The framework, therefore, supports school leaders who want to refurbish existing learning environments or design new spaces that actively support their learning goals.

It's a collaborative experience that involves the entire

teaching staff and wider schools community, and one that ultimately guides schools to become creators of a new, ongoing relationship between pedagogy and space. For Reddy, this approach suited Wesley perfectly: he wanted to ensure that when the teachers transitioned over to the new building, they felt they had ownership of it, and felt confident that it would serve their needs, and the needs of students.

So, what does the new design look like, and how does it differ to what was there before? Perhaps the most notable change is the introduction of collaborative learning spaces in place of single-cell classrooms. Staff recognised that the traditional teaching model, which sees teachers be solely responsible for their own classrooms, was no longer effective for twenty-first century learning. Today, the school operates as a hub model, in which several classrooms are grouped

...WHEN NEW STAFF JOIN THE SCHOOL, IT'S QUICK AND EASY TO INTEGRATE THEM BECAUSE THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS IS SO VISIBLE.



CLASSROOM LAYOUTS HAVE BEEN RECONFIGURED TO INCLUDE MORE AGILE AND ADAPTABLE FURNITURE, WHICH CAN BE REARRANGED EASILY TO SUPPORT DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES.

together to form a larger learning community. This encourages collaborative teaching and learning, and provides more opportunities for peer-to-peer support and problem-solving. The hub model allows for greater flexibility and adaptability in the use of space, which is crucial in promoting a more student-centred approach to learning.

In terms of physical space, there have been significant changes to ensure that the school is accessible and flexible for students. Classroom layouts have been reconfigured to include more agile and adaptable furniture, which can be rearranged easily to support different types of learning activities. There was also investment in new storage solutions, which are designed to be flexible rather than fixed, allowing students to take ownership of their learning materials.

A student-centred curriculum

To support the new learning spaces, the school has also made changes to the way in which it plans and delivers its curriculum. In the new building, teachers work more collaboratively to plan and deliver lessons which are tailored to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities or interests.

This approach not only helps to engage students in their learning but also encourages them to take ownership of their learning journey. Specialist spaces were built in from the outset, rather than being an afterthought: there are dedicated spaces on both floors for students to have access to the outside area for outdoor learners, and also dedicated food tech areas, makerspace studios and breakout rooms.

Finally, throughout the transition, staff recognised that some students may require additional support in these new collaborative learning spaces. As a result, they have been working on implementing a range of learning-support services that will allow every student to pursue excellence as defined by themselves and their *whānau* (families).

The new building opened in 2022, and so far, the school is reporting an immense impact. Teachers are reporting that there is increased collaboration within the whole team, enhanced through collaborative teaching and planning, and by having a dedicated meeting area to discuss the big ideas which come about in the hub.

Student progress and independence has also improved; all the teachers now work with all the students, and inter-hub student groups offer interventions and support specific areas of the curriculum, like mathematics. Students can move independently throughout the space, inspired by their passions and interests. They are supported to use resources with little to no teacher input, and have more choice, not just in the projects they pursue, but also the teachers they want to engage with.

Staff say that students are getting more access to hands-on, integrated, contextual and culturally sustaining learning experiences, and staff's awareness of how these experiences are resourced and who has access to them has also increased. And when new staff join the school, it's quick and easy to integrate them because the teaching and learning process is so visible.

Visitors, too, have expressed enjoyment and excitement at being in the space. This is just the first stage of the build, and the impact is obvious. However, the journey from design to build hasn't been plain sailing.

And now that staff and pupils are teaching and learning in the new school, questions have arisen which need to be addressed, before the space is extended further in the second stage of the project.

These questions include how staff can support students with learning needs that span an increasingly wide spectrum, how they can improve the attention span of our students among a hive of activity, and how they can organise learning in the space.

Of course, as the school moves into this next stage and considers these questions, it will be supported by the PLSiP team, architects and project managers. And if they need reminding at any stage what they're trying to achieve, they can always look back to that incredible school logo for a reminder. ■