

Are you ready for Term 1?

A guide to planning classrooms for teachers and education leaders.



Design spaces to support the way you teach

Before ordering for Term 1, look at how each classroom supports whole-class teaching, small groups, independent work and movement.

This guide gives you four layouts to try and a short checklist for deciding what needs to change.

How does your room need to work?

With a greater emphasis on explicit teaching and sequenced learning, teachers are spending more time at the front of class. However, they still need to be able to move around the room to access individual students, and facilitate different learning activities, as needed.

Many schools do not need new furniture to teach across structured learning, guided practice, group work and independent learning.

What's important, is a room that can adapt to support different activities.

What to consider

- 01 Does the teacher have clear sightlines to all students?
 - 02 Can all students see the teacher and board?
 - 03 Is there enough clear space to access all students?
 - 04 Do you have the right furniture for the age and stage of your learners?
 - 05 Are there defined spaces for different types of activities?
 - 06 Can your furniture be moved easily if needed?
 - 07 Do you have storage for resources?
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Explicit teaching in the room you have

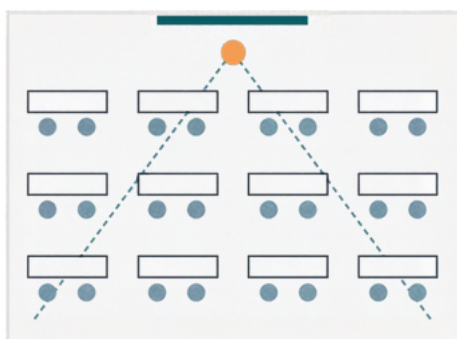
Explicit teaching works best when students can see, hear and follow the teacher clearly. That can be achieved in different classroom layouts. The aim is to make whole-class instruction easy while keeping the room useful for guided practice, independent work and group activities.

A room that moves easily between a few arrangements can support explicit teaching along with guided practice, group work, one-on-one support and independent learning.

Four classroom layouts and why they work

Each of these can be arranged from tables and chairs a school already owns. The focus is **adaptability** – how easily the room moves between layouts, rather than any single arrangement.

● Teacher
● Student
□ Table
◐ Group table
— Board
--- Teacher sightline



LAYOUT 1

Whole-class explicit instruction

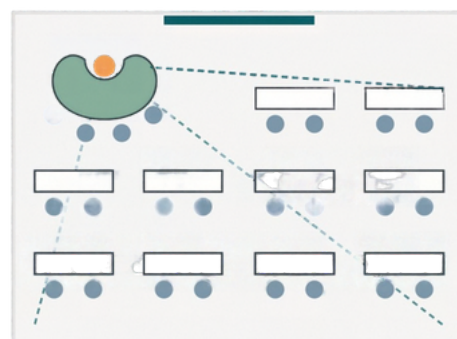
Everyone facing the front, with clear sightlines both ways.

BUILT FROM

Existing paired tables, re-oriented. No new furniture required.

WHEN TO USE

When introducing a new concept, modelling a process, giving instructions or bringing the class together for a demonstration. Check that every student can see the teaching point and that the teacher can reach students easily.



LAYOUT 2

Teacher-led small group and independent learners

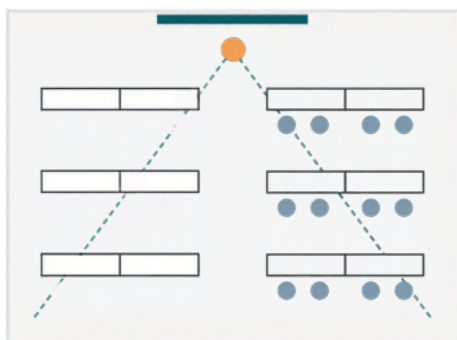
A small group with the teacher while the rest of the class works independently. The teacher keeps a clear line of sight across the whole room from the group table.

BUILT FROM

A table that seats four to six. A curved table with a teacher recess, such as the Paparoa, keeps everyone within reach, but a rectangle works.

WHEN TO USE

When the teacher needs to work closely with a group while other students complete familiar tasks independently. Keep the group table positioned so the teacher can see across the room, with clear routes to the other students.



LAYOUT 3

Structured partner practice

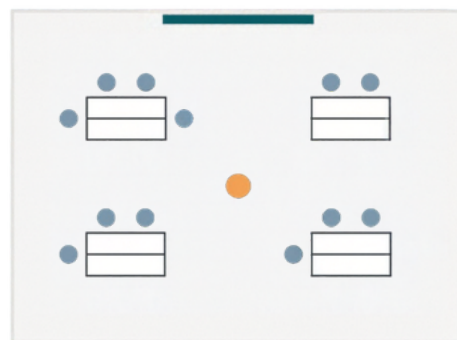
Turn-and-talk, paired reading, worked example practice. Still oriented to the front, so the teacher can pull the room back to whole-class delivery without anyone moving.

BUILT FROM

Layout 1, by sliding tables together. A quick change students can usually make themselves.

WHEN TO USE

When students need to discuss an idea, practise a worked example together or read in pairs after whole-class teaching. Keep sightlines to the front so the teacher can bring everyone back together without another furniture move.



LAYOUT 4

Collaborative and project work

Groups of four to six with open floor between them.

BUILT FROM

Layout 1, by rotating and clustering tables.

WHEN TO USE

When students need to share resources, solve a problem or make something together. Leave enough space between groups for the teacher to circulate and for students to move safely.

Fast resets make it work. The key is not what the room looks like when it is empty. It's how easily it moves from one setup to the next.

TEST YOUR RESETS

How long a change takes will vary by room, furniture and age group.

Try two arrangements with your class and note how long the change and reset actually take.

FROM	WHAT HELPS	YOUR TIME
Whole class to partner practice	Tables light enough for two students to slide, with edges that meet flush	
Whole class to small group	A group table that does not need moving, and sightlines that survive the change	
Whole class to collaborative	Tables that rotate and cluster without a teacher lifting anything	
Anything back to whole class	Floor markings or a known default. The reset is the part schools often forget to plan.	

Make room for different activities and needs

A room set up only for seated, forward-facing instruction leaves little space for the range of activities and support students need across a day.

Consider making room for:

- Clear floor space
- A quieter place for focussed work
- Accessible resources
- A place for teacher support

When might furniture need attention?

Use these checks to separate what can be solved by rearranging from what may need new furniture.

CHECK FIRST - OFTEN SOLVED BY REARRANGING

01 Do chairs fit the students?

Check whether feet reach the floor when students sit back. Swapping chair sizes between rooms can sometimes solve this before buying.

02 Can students move the tables themselves?

If changing the layout needs an adult, it is less likely to happen during a lesson. Check whether lighter tables could be swapped in.

03 Do the table shapes combine?

Push two tables together and check the edges meet flush. Gaps make partner and group work harder.

04 Is built-in storage dictating the layout?

Fixed storage can limit where furniture goes, particularly in some new builds. Mobile storage can free up floor space.

MAY NEED NEW FURNITURE

05 Is a new build arriving as a bare shell?

Some design-build classrooms arrive with little furniture fitted. Furnishing an empty room is a different job from replacing what you have.

06 Is the furniture at the end of its life?

When replacement is due, choose furniture that can adapt as teaching approaches change over its working life.

Before you order any furniture

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- ☐ Time how long it takes one class to move between two of the four layouts
 - ☐ Check chair heights against students actually sitting in them, in your youngest two year levels
 - ☐ Count how much clear floor a room has once everything is in place
 - ☐ Identify which of the four layouts your rooms currently cannot do at all
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Designing for how students really learn

Furnware makes school furniture in Hastings, New Zealand, and we have spent a long time understanding how students use furniture. Our research into how students sit, move and learn shapes our designs. Our team can also help schools plan new classrooms, update open or shared spaces, create small-group teaching areas or improve places for focussed work.



Help assessing your classroom

We offer a free, no-obligation walkthrough to help you assess your classroom. We'll look at how the space works for your teaching and talk through practical options with you.

[Book your classroom planning session](#)

TERM 1 ORDER DEADLINE

New Zealand wide: order before 30 November 2026
to ensure delivery in time for Term 1.