



Denham Court
Public School
EMPOWERING LEARNERS

Contemporary Learning Environments – Our Learning Hubs

Information for Parents

What is a contemporary learning environment?

Building on what already works and seeking to make it better – that's innovation! Quality teaching, smart use of flexible space and access to the right technology at the right time provides students with greater choice in how they demonstrate their learning.

Contemporary learning environments are designed to help students develop skills critical to thrive in an increasingly complex world. Contemporary learning environments are flexible so that teachers can design a wide range of learning activities to develop the skills and knowledge of students. They offer a range of furniture from seated desks to standing tables, whiteboard surfaces and shared tables and these support teachers in working with the whole class, in small groups or one on one in an engaging and welcoming space. So, a contemporary learning environment offers a lot of what we've always done with the entire class but offers more options for small group and independent work in a modern environment. In fact, research has shown that the physical design of a classroom can result in significant improvements in students' learning (1).

1. Salford, Clever Classrooms Report - <https://www.cleverclassroomsdesign.co.uk/>

Why is learning changing?

Contemporary learning and teaching strategies prepare students to better succeed in a changing world. The skills valued by the workforce, combined with the way we learn means the way we teach our students has evolved. Teachers still teach and instruct directly to the whole class when appropriate, but they now include opportunities for students to learn through small group and independent work that builds skills in communication, collaboration and teamwork. Technology is also integrated at the right time as a learning tool to develop new skills, collaborate and showcase learning in creative ways. Additionally, learning is not always isolated to one subject, rather it is often integrated across many. STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) is an example of integrated learning. This enables learners to make connections and apply skills and knowledge across multiple areas. In rethinking what learning and teaching look like for your children they will be well prepared for exciting futures!

What are the general capabilities?

The general capabilities (1) develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that our students require to live and work successfully in coming years. They include

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Information and communication technology capability
- Intercultural understanding
- Personal and social capability

These capabilities are sometimes referred to as 'soft' skills as opposed to 'hard' skills such as reading, writing and maths. We know that you want your children to be capable and confident in key areas like reading and writing and maths. It's also important that they develop personal skills around collaboration, communication, teamwork, and empathy just to name a few. Our new flexible learning spaces will allow for the teaching of essential subjects like English, science and maths but they will also better allow for the development of the general capabilities. The spaces will allow students to collaborate more effectively on tasks and projects while still being able to work with the teacher/s as a whole class, in groups or even one to one! Imagine how hard it would be to collaborate or develop team skills if children were stuck sitting in rows with no room to move – maybe you're having flashbacks to when you went to school!

1. <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10/learning-across-the-curriculum>

Why should we be excited by the new flexible learning spaces?

Our new building offers flexible learning spaces that not only allow for the teaching of core subjects like maths and English but that also better facilitate the development of general capabilities to be developed. The new learning spaces allow for collaboration on tasks and projects in a range of configurations that include whole class, small groups, or even one-to-one! While the new spaces are a wonderful aspect of our school, we know that at the end of the day quality teaching has the greatest impact on your child's learning. Our teachers are undertaking valuable professional learning to adapt their current strong skills into even better ones for use in these spaces. Thanks for being supportive of our journey and sharing in our new learning environments!

I hear a lot about collaborative teaching, what does that mean for my child?

In most co-teaching environments, two or more teachers share the planning, teaching and assessment of a group of students. There are many benefits; from nearly always having a regular and familiar teacher on the class, the opportunity to offer a greater range of learning options, to two or more teachers knowing your child and their needs well. Teachers also benefit from learning together as we all have different strengths and interests that can benefit others – two heads are nearly always better than one. If we want our students collaborating successfully, isn't it great that they can see our teachers doing it also!

How are noise levels within a co-teaching environment managed?

If twenty kids make that much noise, won't forty make double! That's a great question and one often heard when discussing co-teaching in new learning spaces. Of course, schools are noisy places, they are full of kids discussing problems, solving challenges and generally being kids. Just like they do now, teachers and students will work together to set guidelines that help manage noise within their learning spaces. Often there is a place for lots of conversation and at other times noise needs to be reduced to enable independent reading or reflection activities. New learning spaces tend to have more glass and natural light entering as research has proven that this enhances learning. To balance this, the use of soft wall coverings, soft and hard furnishings and ceiling insulation are usually included to reduce excessive noise. Importantly, sliding doors and walls, small breakout rooms or quiet spaces are usually included to ensure the needs of students and teachers are catered for. Our teachers will be making sure that students no matter where they are in the space can hear important instructions or listen to a friend share their learning with their classmates.



Co-teaching for changed practice in flexible learning spaces

The last decade has seen co-teaching gain even further momentum in the context of open-plan, flexible learning spaces where educators with varying backgrounds and areas of expertise work alongside one another as a matter of school policy. Research shows that co-teaching is an excellent strategy for building collective teacher efficacy, where teachers work together on shared learning goals and continually seek to understand their impact on students' learning. Collective teacher efficacy has been shown to have a very high impact on improving learning and teaching.

(Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018; Hattie, 2019).