What is smart classroom design for our schools?

To help ensure all teaching and learning meets the needs of the 21st century, every Victorian government school is being rebuilt, extended or renovated – the largest school building program in Victoria’s history.

Driven by new practices in teaching and learning that build on the recognition of the powerful impact that school design has on how well students do at school, we are creating flexible learning spaces or ‘smart classrooms’ designed to suit the individual needs of every student.

We want to build learning environments that are stimulating for students and support quality teaching and new technology.

The design of Victorian schools reflects the way teachers work to cater for the changing needs and interests of each student. This recognises that students learn and work at different rates and need a broad range of learning opportunities. This includes tutorials offered by individual teachers, workshops for larger groups, and time to do independent study.

As part of this change, Mordialloc College has created a dynamic eLearning Centre as the home-base for all Year 7 students and to build a community of learners. The centre has flexible learning and teaching spaces for groups of various sizes, and includes a resource area, wet area, individual pods (classrooms), as well as presentation space and an outdoor learning area.

“We’ve learnt that children don’t learn by sitting still. In our learning space children can move around to access the various resources they need,” says Lorraine Harris, principal at Mordialloc College.

Classroom furniture is light, sturdy and flexible. It can be easily rearranged by students or teachers so that a small group can work around a cluster of tables, or students can work in self-directed way individually at a table. In the smart classroom, students do not have their own desk or place, and the teacher does not have their own desk either.

Smart classrooms are also environmentally sustainable, so that they can model good environmental practice for our students. To make classroom and school design choice easier for schools, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has prepared 25 innovative standard smart classroom designs.

“They’ve always got an opportunity to express their opinions and, because we’re always monitoring them, no one’s ever left behind,” says Felicity Stewart, teacher, Mordialloc College.

A reflective space, where students might work by themselves, or in a group of up to three, would be acoustically and visually private, with movable tables and comfortable seating. A creative space for small groups of three to five students would include round tables, storage for student’s work and resources, and a display and projection area. An interactive space for larger groups of up to 75 students – could include space to allow team-teaching and collaborative learning, with large screens and display areas, allow for noise, and include movable furniture and links to outdoors.

These spaces are flexible. They allow for teaching using new technologies, such as interactive whiteboards. These whiteboards are connected to the internet, and allow research and other material to be displayed.

Through wireless connections, students’ and teachers’ computers can be used in any part of the classroom – even outside – because maximising the use of each space is one of the best ways to support learning.

For more information, visit http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/infrastructure/