THE DESIGN SCHOOL

Learner Wellbeing and Safety

Palmerston North School of Design Ltd - 9429

Palmerston North School of Design Limited, trading as The Design School (TDS), is a specialist provider of foundation and bridging education in Graphic Design and Fashion Design, operating from campuses in Palmerston North and Whangārei.

Established in 1993, The Design School provides opportunities for creative learners to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence and qualifications required to progress into higher-level education and employment within the creative industries.

The School was originally established to support learners experiencing unemployment, educational underachievement or disengagement from traditional education. It has since developed into a specialist design education provider supporting learners from a wide range of educational, cultural and personal backgrounds.

Entry into leading tertiary design programmes and the creative industries is highly competitive. The Design School therefore places considerable emphasis on developing strong foundational capabilities, creative thinking, technical skills and individual portfolios that enable learners to pursue their aspirations successfully.

Our Approach to Learner Wellbeing and Safety

The Design School recognises that educational achievement is closely connected to learner wellbeing. Social, emotional, physical, cultural and personal circumstances can significantly influence a learner's capacity to participate, engage and succeed in education.

Pastoral care is therefore an integral component of the School's educational philosophy and everyday operations, rather than a separate service.

Our approach is proactive and preventative, seeking to identify and address barriers before they significantly affect learner wellbeing, engagement or educational achievement.

Support is individualised and may include assistance with attendance, motivation, mental health, personal circumstances, financial hardship, literacy and numeracy, and access to appropriate professional and community services.

The School provides course materials and access to essential practical resources without additional cost to learners. Where appropriate, further assistance is available to help learners overcome financial or personal circumstances affecting their participation.

The Design School acknowledges the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and is committed to culturally responsive education that recognises and values learners' identities, languages, cultures and experiences. Māori perspectives, including the holistic understanding of wellbeing reflected in Te Whare Tapa Whā, inform the School's approach to learner support and educational success.

The Studio Learning Environment

A distinctive feature of The Design School is its open studio learning environment, where learners from different programme levels and design disciplines work alongside one another.

This environment encourages collaboration, observation, creative exploration and the sharing of knowledge and experience. Learners are exposed to creative processes and technical capabilities extending beyond their current level of study, supporting the development of confidence, aspiration and independent creative practice.

The individualised, project-based teaching model enables learners to pursue their own creative interests while developing the competencies required for their qualifications and future pathways.

Staff maintain close relationships with learners, providing regular guidance, feedback and support. Attendance, project progression and assessment achievement are monitored throughout enrolment, enabling potential difficulties to be identified and addressed at an early stage.

The physical and digital learning environments are designed to be safe, welcoming, inclusive and accessible, providing learners with a sense of belonging and opportunities to develop their creative and personal identities.

The School recognises that successful learning environments must respond to the characteristics and needs of their learners. Appropriate structure, supportive relationships, clear expectations and opportunities for increasing independence are therefore important elements of its educational approach.

Learner Voice and Continuous Improvement

The Design School maintains a culture of continuous improvement informed by learner feedback, educational performance, staff observations, stakeholder engagement and external quality assurance processes.

Learner voice is gathered formally through mid-year and end-of-year reviews, graduate surveys and individual learning planning, and informally through regular interactions with teaching staff and management.

This information is considered alongside attendance, achievement, progression, pastoral care information and feedback from higher-level education providers to evaluate the effectiveness of the School's programmes and learner support systems.

The 2025 Annual Organisational Review demonstrated the value of this integrated approach.

Learner satisfaction remained strong, with an overall rating of 4.29 out of 5 and tutor support achieving 4.79 out of 5. The School also achieved parity in educational achievement for Māori learners, reflecting positive progress in its commitment to equity and inclusive educational opportunities.

However, the review identified emerging challenges within Youth Guarantee and Level 2 provision. Although learners continued to report high levels of tutor support, some experienced difficulties with motivation, attendance, self-management and achieving their intended educational goals.

These findings reinforced the understanding that effective pastoral support must be accompanied by teaching approaches that help learners develop the personal, social and learning capabilities needed to make successful use of the opportunities available.

During 2025, the School developed improvements to programme induction, time management, stress management, project planning, structured group discussions and the use of design sprints. These changes are intended to strengthen early engagement, provide appropriate learning support and progressively develop learner independence.

The effectiveness of these improvements is being evaluated through learner feedback, attendance, engagement, project progression and educational achievement.

Commitment to Learner Success

The Design School's commitment to learner wellbeing and safety is founded on the belief that every learner should have meaningful opportunities to develop their capabilities and pursue their aspirations.

This requires more than the provision of safe facilities, appropriate resources and effective teaching. It requires an educational environment in which learners feel valued, supported, connected and capable of achieving success.

By integrating pastoral care, culturally responsive practice, individualised teaching and continuous organisational self-review, The Design School seeks to provide the conditions in which learners can flourish creatively, personally and academically.

The School remains committed to understanding and responding to changing learner needs while maintaining the high expectations, creative exploration and individual achievement that have characterised its educational approach since 1993.

TEO information 2025

TEO Name	The Design School			**MoE number**	9429	
Code contact	**Name**	Mike Saywell		**Job title**	Director	
	Email	mike@designschool.ac.nz		**Phone number**	06 3580188	
Current enrolments	**Domestic learners**	**Total #**	126	**18 y/o or older**	41	
				Under 18 y/o	85	
Report author(s)	Mike Saywell					

The Design School's 2026 Learner Wellbeing and Safety Self-Review, drawing on evidence from the 2025 calendar year, finds that the organisation maintains well-established, effective systems for supporting learner wellbeing, safety, inclusion and educational achievement.

The 2025 evidence demonstrates consistently strong learner satisfaction, particularly in the quality of tutor support, together with positive graduate pathways, achievement parity for Māori learners and significant investment in the quality of physical and digital learning environments.

The absence of recorded complaints, appeals and serious incidents during 2025 provides additional positive evidence of the operation of the School's learner support environment.

The review also recognises that strong pastoral support and positive learner experiences do not automatically ensure successful educational outcomes for every learner.

Emerging challenges within Youth Guarantee and Level 2 provision have highlighted the importance of developing self-management, social skills, engagement, confidence and independent learning capabilities alongside creative and technical skills.

The School's response has been to strengthen early engagement, programme induction, project structures, feedback and learner support, while maintaining its commitment to individualised creative education and high expectations.

The continuing development of the studio learning environment recognises that educational success is influenced by the interaction between individual learner needs, teaching practices, peer relationships and the wider learning environment.

Management will continue evaluating the effectiveness of these changes through learner voice, attendance, engagement, educational achievement, pastoral care information and ongoing organisational self-review.

The Design School remains committed to providing safe, inclusive, culturally responsive and supportive learning environments where learners can develop the knowledge, skills, confidence and personal capabilities required to achieve their educational and career aspirations.

Stage of implementation for each outcome

Indicate the stage of implementation that most reflects your organisation's current level of understanding and practice for each outcome, based on the continuum provided in Appendix 1.

Organisational structures to support a whole-of-provider approach to learner wellbeing and safety

	Rating
Outcome 1: A learner wellbeing and safety system	Well implemented
Outcome 2: Learner voice	Implemented

Wellbeing and safety practices for all tertiary providers

	Rating
Outcome 3: Safe, inclusive, supportive, and accessible physical and digital learning environments	Well implemented
Outcome 4: Learners are safe and well	Well implemented

Summary of performance under each outcome

Organisational structures to support a whole-of-provider approach to learner wellbeing and safety

	Summary of performance based on gathered information (i.e. how effectively is your organisation doing what it needs to be doing?)	**How do you know?** (i.e. note supporting evidence with analysis to make sense of what it means)
Outcome 1: A learner wellbeing and safety system	The Design School maintains a comprehensive, integrated learner wellbeing and safety system supported by its Pastoral Care Plan, Student Handbook, individual learning plans, staff responsibilities and management oversight. The School's preventative approach enables staff to identify and respond to barriers affecting attendance, participation, wellbeing and educational achievement. Pastoral support is embedded into everyday teaching and studio operations. Staff maintain regular contact with individual learners and are empowered to respond to emerging needs, including referral to professional and community services where appropriate. Practical support, including access to essential supplies and supermarket vouchers, assists learners experiencing financial hardship. During 2025, management strengthened its evaluation of learner outcomes by examining attendance, engagement, achievement and learner characteristics alongside wellbeing and pastoral care information. This resulted in a more detailed understanding of emerging needs within Youth Guarantee and Level 2 provision and informed improvements to programme delivery developed for 2026. The School continues to approach learner wellbeing as a shared organisational responsibility, with management providing strategic oversight and tutors providing individualised day-to-day support.	The 2025 Annual Organisational Review confirmed that pastoral care systems continued to operate effectively. Learner satisfaction averaged 4.29 out of 5, with tutor support achieving 4.79 out of 5. There were no recorded complaints, appeals or serious incidents during 2025. The School achieved Māori achievement parity, with Māori qualification completion of 72.0% compared with 69.4% for all learners, and Māori course completion of 78.2% compared with 77.9% overall. The School's Learner Outcomes Improvement Plan was accepted by TEC in December 2025 without a requirement for further progress reporting. TEC recommended continued explicit monitoring of achievement parity. Review of weaker Youth Guarantee performance also demonstrated that the School's monitoring systems were capable of identifying emerging risks and informing targeted improvement. **Evaluation** The wellbeing and safety system is well implemented. Its principal strength is the integration of individualised pastoral support into everyday learning. The priority for continued development is strengthening preventative strategies that help learners translate available support into consistent engagement, independence and successful educational outcomes.

Outcome 2: Learner voice	Learner voice is embedded into The Design School's teaching, learning and organisational review processes. The School's open studio environments, individualised teaching model and high levels of staff contact provide opportunities for learners to express their needs, aspirations, concerns and feedback throughout their enrolment. Formal learner reviews are conducted during the year and supplemented by graduate surveys, feedback from higher-level education providers, individual learning plan reviews and ongoing project discussions. Digital communication and learning platforms provide additional opportunities for learners to communicate with staff and access support. During 2025, learner feedback was analysed by programme and level to identify differences in experience and outcomes. This analysis identified that, although learner satisfaction and tutor support remained strong overall, some Level 2 learners were less positive about achieving their intended goals and having their wellbeing needs met. Management considered these findings alongside attendance, engagement, achievement and staff observations. The resulting programme improvements focused on strengthening induction, personal organisation, project planning, engagement and the frequency of feedback. This demonstrates the use of learner voice to inform practical changes to educational delivery and learner support.	The overall learner review average increased from 4.26 in 2024 to 4.29 in 2025. Tutor support increased from 4.70 to 4.79, while the rating for courses meeting learner expectations increased from 3.76 to 4.13. Within Level 2 provision, however, the average learner review rating declined from 4.42 to 4.02. The Level 2 rating for wellbeing needs being met declined from 4.87 to 3.88, while achievement of intended goals declined from 4.37 to 3.63. These findings were considered alongside learners' own explanations of their progress, including motivation, attendance, distractions and personal circumstances. Graduate survey participation had previously improved to more than 80%, providing an additional source of feedback about longer-term learner outcomes and progression. **Evaluation** Learner voice is implemented effectively through multiple formal and informal channels. The 2025 review demonstrates that the organisation is increasingly using disaggregated learner feedback to identify emerging needs and inform programme development. Further improvement is required in systematically documenting learner feedback, the actions taken in response and how those actions are communicated back to learners. The School will continue to evaluate accessible and appropriate methods of collective learner representation, recognising the limited interest previously expressed in formal student representative structures.

Wellbeing and safety practices for all tertiary providers

	Summary of performance based on gathered information (i.e. how effectively is your organisation doing what it needs to be doing?)	**How do you know?** (i.e. note supporting evidence with analysis to make sense of what it means)
Outcome 3: Safe, inclusive, supportive, and accessible physical and digital learning environments	The Design School provides purpose-designed creative learning environments that support individual development, collaboration, inclusion and learner wellbeing. The mixed-level, mixed-discipline studio model creates opportunities for learners to interact with peers of different abilities and experience levels, observe advanced creative practice and develop confidence within a supportive learning community. The individualised project-based teaching approach enables learners to work towards their own goals while meeting programme and assessment requirements. The School recognises the importance of the learning environment in supporting participation and educational success. During 2025, significant investment was made in both physical and digital learning infrastructure. All student computer systems across the Palmerston North and Whangārei campuses were replaced with custom-built computers capable of supporting current and emerging requirements of industry-standard creative software. The investment supports increasingly demanding industry level software applications and provides additional capacity for future development in animation, video and other digital creative disciplines. The School also strengthened its Microsoft Entra and cloud-based computing environment, enabling learners to access their individual digital work and relevant learning resources beyond the physical studio. Fluorescent lighting was replaced with LED lighting throughout the teaching spaces, improving the physical learning environment while reducing energy consumption and maintenance requirements.	The 2025 organisational review documents the replacement of all 32 student computers, the transition to modern cloud-based access and the completion of teaching-space LED lighting upgrades. Learner surveys continued to show strong satisfaction with the overall educational experience and tutor support. The 2025 review of Youth Guarantee achievement identified the importance of considering the learning environment and cohort composition rather than attributing lower achievement solely to individual learner characteristics. In response, the School developed stronger induction processes, more frequent project feedback, structured group meetings and greater use of short design sprints. These approaches seek to support engagement while retaining the flexibility and independence central to the School's educational model. **Evaluation** Physical and digital learning environments are well implemented and continue to receive significant investment. The 2025 review demonstrates a broader understanding of accessibility that includes not only physical facilities and digital resources, but also the social, cognitive and behavioural conditions that enable learners to participate successfully. The effectiveness of the revised studio approaches will continue to be evaluated during 2026.

	Management also reviewed the influence of learner age, group composition, social interaction and classroom structure on engagement and achievement. This work has informed the continuing development of the studio learning environment, with particular attention to the balance between supportive structure, learner independence and creative freedom.	
Outcome 4: Learners are safe and well	The Design School maintains a proactive approach to supporting learners' physical, mental, emotional, social and cultural wellbeing. Staff work closely with learners to identify individual needs and respond to issues that may affect safety, attendance, engagement or educational achievement. Support includes regular individual contact, accessible teaching staff, monitoring of attendance and progress, individual learning plans, practical assistance and connections with professional and community services. The School recognises the significance of mental health, personal circumstances, financial hardship and social wellbeing for learners who may have experienced previous educational disadvantage. The organisation also recognises the importance of cultural identity and belonging in supporting wellbeing and educational success. Its approach incorporates Māori cultural perspectives, including the holistic understanding of wellbeing reflected in Te Whare Tapa Whā, and provides opportunities for learners to draw on their own cultural knowledge and identities within creative practice. The achievement of Māori educational parity during 2025 represents an important positive outcome for the School's broader commitment to equity and responsive support. The 2025 self-review also identified areas for improvement. In particular, some younger learners experienced difficulties developing the personal organisation, social behaviours, confidence and	Learner survey results demonstrate consistently strong satisfaction with tutor support. There were no recorded complaints, appeals or serious incidents during 2025. Māori qualification and course completion rates exceeded the overall learner rates in 2025, demonstrating achievement parity and positive progress towards equitable educational outcomes. The 2025 annual review also identified lower wellbeing and goal-achievement ratings among Level 2 learners, highlighting the importance of continuing to develop support appropriate to the characteristics and needs of the learner population. The organisation's review of Youth Guarantee outcomes identified emerging challenges with learner engagement and self-management and led to targeted programme and teaching changes. **Evaluation** The School's systems for supporting learner safety and wellbeing are well implemented. The 2025 evidence demonstrates both strong pastoral support and a willingness to critically examine areas where learner outcomes fall below expectations. Continued improvement will focus on strengthening the relationship between wellbeing, engagement, belonging, self-management and

	independent learning habits needed to participate successfully within an open creative studio. Management responded by developing approaches that provide greater structure and support during the initial stages of enrolment, with the intention of progressively increasing learner independence. These approaches include strengthened induction, time-management and stress-management activities, structured project planning, regular progress discussions and shorter cycles of learning and feedback.	educational achievement, while maintaining high expectations and equitable access for all learners. From the 2022 NZQA EER Report, "*Māori and Te Whare Tapa Whā indigenous principles and other cultural and community perspectives enable students to extend their learning into cultural spaces and embrace the tikanga which gives greater connections between people in workplaces and the wider community.*"

Findings from gap analysis of compliance with key required processes

Organisational structures to support a whole-of-provider approach to learner wellbeing and safety

	Identified gaps in compliance with key required processes
Outcome 1: A learner wellbeing and safety system	No compliance gaps were recorded in the 2025 self-review. The organisation has established and documented processes for pastoral care, learner wellbeing, safety, learner support, complaints and organisational review. The 2025 Annual Organisational Review demonstrated the effectiveness of these systems in identifying emerging learner needs and supporting targeted programme improvements. **Opportunity for improvement:** Further formalise the connection between pastoral care monitoring, learner engagement indicators, educational achievement and management review. Continue reviewing the Pastoral Care Plan and associated procedures to ensure they remain responsive to changing learner needs.
Outcome 2: Learner voice	Established informal and formal learner voice processes are operating effectively. The analysis of 2025 learner survey results demonstrated the value of disaggregating feedback by learner group and programme level. **Opportunity for improvement:** Strengthen the systematic recording of learner feedback, decisions made in response and communication of improvements to learners. Continue evaluating accessible learner representation approaches that reflect the School's learner population and studio model.

Wellbeing and safety practices for all tertiary providers

	Identified gaps in compliance with key required processes
Outcome 3: Safe, inclusive, supportive, and accessible physical and digital learning environments	No compliance gaps were recorded in the 2025 self-review. Major improvements to digital systems, computer equipment and studio lighting were completed during 2025. **Opportunity for improvement:** Continue evaluating whether the structure and operation of studio environments meet the developmental, social and learning needs of different learner cohorts. Further strengthen opportunities for learners to use te reo Māori and reflect Māori knowledge, identity and cultural perspectives in their creative work. Review the accessibility and effectiveness of cloud-based learning resources as learner needs and technologies evolve.
Outcome 4: Learners are safe and well	No compliance gaps were recorded in the 2025 self-review. The absence of recorded complaints, appeals and serious incidents, together with strong learner-support ratings, provides positive evidence about the functioning of the learner support environment, while not eliminating the need for ongoing monitoring. **Opportunity for improvement:** Strengthen preventative approaches to learner disengagement, particularly where mental health, personal circumstances, limited self-management skills or social difficulties affect participation. Continue developing early identification and appropriate support processes, while monitoring their effectiveness through learner feedback and engagement outcomes.

Summary of action plan

Include information on how actions will be monitored for implementation and success.

Organisational structures to support a whole-of-provider approach to learner wellbeing and safety

	Action/s to be taken	Owner	Due date	Plan for monitoring implementation	Measures of success
Outcome 1: A learner wellbeing and safety system	Continue annual review of the Pastoral Care Plan and associated procedures.	Management	Annual – October 2027	Annual management review of policies, pastoral care records, learner feedback and emerging needs. Record actions and follow-up in management meeting minutes.	Policies remain current, responsive and effective. Identified improvements are completed.
	Integrate attendance, progression, wellbeing and pastoral care observations into management review.	Management and tutors	Ongoing	Review learner attendance and achievement data during regular staff meetings. Track identified concerns, interventions and subsequent learner progress.	Learners requiring additional support are identified early and appropriate interventions are implemented.
	Maintain practical assistance and access to community support services.	Management and tutors	Ongoing	Review availability of practical resources and referral pathways. Monitor the effectiveness of support provided, respecting learner confidentiality.	Learners experiencing hardship can access timely and appropriate assistance.

	Action/s to be taken	Owner	Due date	Plan for monitoring implementation	Measures of success
Outcome 2: Learner voice	Strengthen systematic recording and analysis of formal and informal learner feedback.	Management and tutors	2026–2027	Review feedback collected through surveys, individual learning plans, tutor discussions and digital communication tools during management meetings.	Learner feedback is recorded, analysed and demonstrably informs organisational improvements.
	Introduce a documented process for communicating improvements back to learners.	Management and tutors	2027	Review records of learner feedback, resulting decisions and communication to learners during staff and management meetings.	Learners can identify how their feedback has contributed to improvements.
	Maintain learner and graduate survey participation.	Management	Ongoing	Monitor survey response rates, compare annual results and review trends across programmes and learner groups.	Strong participation is maintained and results inform ongoing improvement.

Wellbeing and safety practices for all tertiary providers

	Action/s to be taken	Owner	Due date	Plan for monitoring implementation	Measures of success
Outcome 3: Safe, inclusive, supportive, and accessible physical and digital learning environments	Evaluate the effectiveness of physical and digital environment improvements completed during 2025.	Management and staff	2026–2027	Review learner and staff feedback, digital accessibility, resource availability and maintenance requirements through regular management meetings.	Physical and digital environments continue to meet learner and programme needs.
	Refine studio structures, induction, design sprints and individual learning approaches.	Management and tutors	2026–2027	Monitor attendance, learner engagement, project progression and achievement. Review effectiveness through tutor meetings, learner feedback and programme evaluations.	Improved learner engagement, independence, project completion and achievement.
	Continue strengthening culturally responsive teaching and opportunities for te reo Māori.	Management and tutors	Ongoing	Review curriculum and project activities, learner work and feedback to identify opportunities for cultural expression and inclusion.	Learners have meaningful opportunities to incorporate their cultural identities, knowledge and language into creative learning.

	Action/s to be taken	Owner	Due date	Plan for monitoring implementation	Measures of success
Outcome 4: Learners are safe and well	Strengthen early identification of engagement, wellbeing and self-management barriers.	Management and tutors	Ongoing	Monitor attendance, learner progress and wellbeing concerns during regular tutor and management meetings. Review interventions and their effectiveness.	Earlier identification and response to barriers, contributing to improved learner engagement and wellbeing.
	Review Level 2 wellbeing and goal-achievement survey results.	Management	Each formal review cycle	Compare learner survey results against 2025 baselines and analyse findings alongside attendance, achievement and pastoral care information.	Improvement from 2025 baselines of 3.88/5 for wellbeing needs and 3.63/5 for intended goals.
	Continue monitoring Māori achievement parity and equity of learner outcomes.	Management	Annually	Analyse TEC educational performance data by ethnicity, programme and level. Review findings through annual organisational self-review and management planning.	Māori qualification and course completion remain at or above overall rates, with progression differences monitored and addressed.
	Evaluate the effectiveness of revised project delivery and early learner support.	Management and tutors	2026–2027	Review attendance, learner feedback, project progression, assessment achievement and tutor observations at programme review meetings. Compare findings with previous cohorts.	Evidence of improved learner engagement, achievement and wellbeing, particularly within Level 2 and Youth Guarantee provision.