



Papatoetoe Intermediate School: Creating a Central Hub of Learning and Dignity with Portacom



CLIENT
Ministry of Education



LOCATION
Papatoetoe, Auckland



NUMBER OF MODULES
9



TIMEFRAME
<6 months

The Challenge: A Growing School's Decade-Long Quest for Dignified Learning Spaces

Papatoetoe Intermediate School, established in 1953 as one of New Zealand's earliest Intermediate schools, has a proud history of serving its community in Auckland. Originally built for 600 students, the school currently educates 750 and anticipates growth to 1,000 students by 2030, underscoring a persistent need for expanded and upgraded facilities. A significant aspect of this challenge centered around its unique role as the only Auckland Intermediate School with a satellite of three Special Needs Classrooms (SNUs), embedded within and run by Mount Richmond School.

For over a decade, Papatoetoe Intermediate School had been advocating tirelessly for new and improved facilities for its SNU. The existing classrooms were in a state of disrepair, and despite a significant budget allocation for patching three years prior, the solution proved inadequate. The urgent need for replacement became undeniable after a flood and in 2024, the school finally secured the necessary budget and the opportunity to relocate these vital facilities to a more central, accessible location within the school grounds.

The SNUs, critical for providing inclusive education, require specialised spaces that extend beyond standard classrooms. These include considerations for medical support, personal hygiene, and wheelchair access, all designed to ensure the safety, dignity, and optimal learning environment for students with diverse needs. This intricate requirement meant the project involved three key stakeholders:

- The Ministry of Education (MoE), as the economic buyer and primary funder.
- Papatoetoe Intermediate School, as the infrastructure and asset owner, responsible for the built space and basic furniture/equipment to ensure safety and dignity.
- Mount Richmond School, as the specialist educators, managing the curriculum, learning, and specific equipment for student mobility, such as PWD toilets, hoists, and wheelchair ramps.



The project's complexity extended beyond just building new structures. It necessitated significant on-site logistical operations, including relocating an existing classroom and moving sports courts to free up space in the school's geographical center for the new SNU complex. Furthermore, a new, dedicated drop-off and pick-up zone for SNU students was crucial to ensure their safe and smooth arrival and departure – a vital element for fostering a positive start to their school day.

The school's Principal, deeply invested in the well-being and academic success of her students, actively participated in all meetings, consistently advocating for the highest quality and safest solution. Her standards and expectations were understandably high, reflecting the long wait and critical need for these facilities.

Portacom's Precision and Proactive Delivery

Portacom New Zealand began this multi-faceted project with a clear understanding of its significance and the high expectations. Recognising the urgency and the need to minimise disruption to term-time operations, Portacom, and a team of dedicated subcontractors and consultants, commenced work on the last day of Term Four of 2024, completing all the enabling work before commencing Term One of 2025. This involved the strategic relocation of the existing classroom and sports courts, alongside essential civil works, creating the necessary footprint for the new SNU. All parties rose to this challenge, and when school returned in 2025, all the required work had been completed and the relocated buildings were available for occupation. This enabled Stage Two to commence soon thereafter.

A key to Portacom's efficient delivery of Stage Two was its commitment to off-site manufacturing. The nine Interlink 3.0 modules, which would form the core of the new SNU, were meticulously constructed at Portacom's Auckland factory. This streamlined process ensured quality control, accelerated timelines, and significantly reduced the impact of construction activities on the active school environment.

Portacom's team demonstrated exceptional organisational skills and a proactive approach, engaging in early consultation that proved instrumental to the project's success. This foresight and meticulous planning were critical, especially as this project ran concurrently with another at Papatoetoe Intermediate School and a similar specialist classroom project at Ormiston Senior College, requiring a high level of coordination and resource management.





The Outcome: Te Whare Piki Kōtuku ō Mt Richmond: The Place of Unique Treasures of Mt Richmond—Ahead of Schedule

The project reached a resounding success, culminating in its completion two months ahead of schedule. This remarkable achievement allowed Papatoetoe Intermediate School to prepare for the full integration of the new SNU classrooms into its curriculum well in advance of the second semester of 2025.

In a poignant and culturally significant moment, the new buildings were officially christened Te Whare Piki Kōtuku ō Mt Richmond through a Māori blessing and naming ceremony, which translates to "the place of unique treasures of Mt Richmond" a fitting tribute to the students who would learn within their walls and the specialised, dignified environment created for them.

Pauline Cornwell, the Principal, lauded Portacom's "incredibly organised response and early consultation preparation had a significant positive impact on the project outcome." This feedback underscores Portacom's ability to not only deliver on technical requirements but also to foster strong, communicative partnerships that lead to exceptional results for clients and end-users.

The strategic relocation of the SNU to the school's centre represents a transformative shift. No longer relegated to the edge of the campus, these vital specialist classrooms now occupy a central, prominent position. This symbolic move reinforces the school's commitment to inclusivity and the importance of providing a safe and dignified learning environment for all students. The new facilities are expected to have a 30-year lifespan, ensuring that generations of students will benefit from exceptional learning outcomes in a purpose-built space designed for their safety and dignity.

The Papatoetoe Intermediate School case study stands as a powerful testament to Portacom's capacity to navigate complex stakeholder landscapes, execute intricate logistical challenges, and deliver high-quality modular building solutions that profoundly enhance educational outcomes. It exemplifies how strategic partnership and innovative construction can overcome long-standing challenges, creating truly unique and invaluable learning environments.



CLIENT FEEDBACK

[Portacom's] incredibly organised response and early consultation preparation, had a significant positive impact on the project outcome.

Pauline Cornwell
Principal, Papatoetoe Intermediate School