

**Building a
Neuroinclusive
School**

Your Neuroinclusive Classroom Year Planner



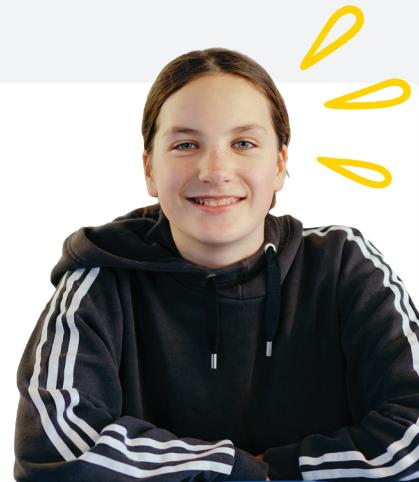
**Neurodiversity
in Education
Project**



Building a Neuroinclusive School

"No brain is the same.
No brain is the best.
Each brain finds its own
special way."

Dr. Ned Hallowell



Every one of your students has a unique brain that experiences the world, processes information, and communicates differently. This is called **neurodiversity**—an amazing part of being human!

Some students have brains that are significantly different from their peers—such as those with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or multiple differences. These students are **neurodivergent**.

So, how can you ensure that every student, whether neurodivergent or neurotypical, gets the support they need to thrive in your classroom this year?



We've created a **FREE, FUN, & PRACTICAL** planner to help you make your classroom more neuroinclusive. You don't need any prior knowledge of neurodiversity or extra study—the planner makes it easy to **learn by doing**, with simple changes that make a big difference.

How to use the resource

Each term, you'll have a focus area to work on, with one big idea to explore and one or two activities. Want to dive deeper? There'll be optional resources for further learning.

Here's what we'll cover:

Term One:	Setting Up Your Sensory-Friendly Classroom
Term Two:	Talking About Brains
Term Three:	Supporting Strengths
Term Four:	Celebrating And Planning

Neuroinclusion starts with you!

“Don’t underestimate the power you have just by caring. You are shaping these young minds in such a personal, impactful way. Teaching is more than just a job—that’s what makes it so special and incredible.”

Katie-Rose Pemberton, Young Neurodiversity Champion and 2024 GirlBoss Trailblazer Award Winner



Our current learning support system



One in five of your students this year is likely to be neurodivergent.

Some will have a formal diagnosis, and one or two may receive additional support, such as an ORS-funded teacher aide or help from the RTLB service. Some might have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Your SENCO or Learning Support Coordinator will guide you in working with these students

If you're struggling with a particular undiagnosed and/ or unsupported learner, your SENCO or Learning Support Coordinator can advise on any support available publicly and, if appropriate, help you discuss private options with the

whānau. For the majority of neurodivergent students, however, you are unlikely to be able to help them access a diagnosis or extra support due to the current under-resourced learning support system.

You are still able to make a huge difference for your neurodivergent learners though by what you do every day in your classroom - creating a neuroinclusive environment and culture, spotting strengths, adapting your teaching for different brains, and building strong relationships.

How you treat each student shapes how they see themselves and how they are seen by others, often throughout their lives.

Having a teacher who “gets” you, believes in you, and helps you learn in a way that works for you is life-changing—especially for a child who feels different.

● TERM ONE ●

Setting Up Your Sensory-Friendly Classroom

Neurodivergent learners often say that sensory-friendly spaces make a huge difference to their learning.

New Zealand primary classrooms are typically bright, buzzing, and busy—but is that the best environment for all learners, all the time?

Neurodiversity means that each of your students' brains takes in, processes, and responds to sensory information differently. Some students are much more sensitive to things like lighting, background noise, visual clutter, furniture textures, and even smells.

If students are receiving too much, too little, or the wrong type of sensory input without relief, it can be difficult for them to regulate. This affects their ability to engage, pay attention, and learn, potentially leading to discomfort or even meltdowns.

Here are two activities you can try this term to create a sensory-friendly environment where everyone feels comfortable to participate and learn.

Think about times when light, noise, smells, or touch were overwhelming for you. Could you have learned and participated in that environment? Now imagine experiencing that all day, every day.



TERM ONE

1. Co-design your classroom

Working together to design your classroom environment is a great way to start the year! It helps students learn about each other, appreciate differences, collaborate, and feel valued as part of the community.

For younger students, this might mean making small tweaks to a space you've mostly set up. Older students could take on more of the design work with you.

Remember, testing and improving is part of the design process! Focus on a few ideas and experiment with them throughout the term.

Our **Co-Design Your Classroom** resource uses a simple three-step process:

1. Talk about everyone's different sensory needs.
2. Undertake a sensory audit of your classroom.
3. Generate, implement, and adjust your ideas.

Ideas you could try:

- ★ A cosy, comfy corner with books
- ★ A quiet work table
- ★ A big basket of headphones
- ★ Alternating talking and quiet time
- ★ Minimising visual clutter
- ★ Fixing buzzing lights



Scan the QR code to explore the **Co-Design Your Classroom** resource.

2. Create a low-sensory space

It's not just neurodivergent learners who benefit from a sensory break! Any student can be dealing with issues - emotional, physical, social - that from time to time limit their sensory resilience. A dark, quiet, comfortable space can be a game-changer in your classroom.



Keen to try it out? Our **Setting Up a Sensory-Friendly Space** resource shows you how - and keeps it quick, cheap and easy. Scan the QR code to access it.

TERM TWO

Talking About Brains

Building awareness of how different brains work—and what each student's brain needs to thrive—is key to creating a neuroinclusive classroom.

When you embrace and celebrate these differences, you open the door to positive conversations about:

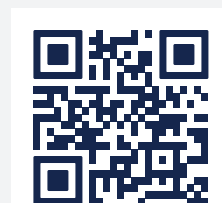
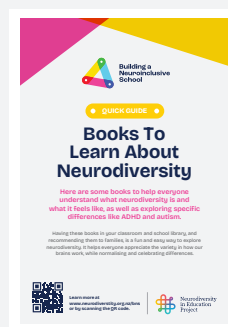
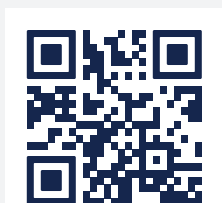
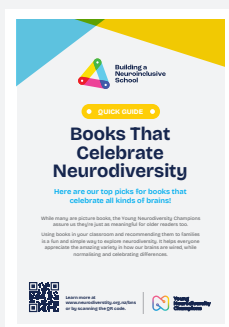
- **Understanding** why people are good at different things or find them easy or hard
- **Asking** for help when needed
- **Feeling** confident to do things in your own way—whether it's schoolwork, communication, socialising or relaxing
- **Noticing and supporting** others' sensory, physical, emotional, and learning needs
- **Appreciating** everyone's unique contributions to the classroom

Ready to get started? Here are some fun tools to help you explore the amazing world of brains!

1. Brilliant books

Using books is an easy and fun way to explore neurodiversity in the classroom! Our handpicked selection is packed with memorable characters, stunning illustrations, fun facts, and creative ideas that meet your students where they are—and build their understanding without them even realising!

We've created two resources with quick descriptions of a range of awesome books—picture books and chapter books, fiction and non-fiction, single books and book series. Be warned—you'll want to add them all to your collection! Scan the QR codes to explore these resources.



TERM TWO

2. The brain game

Welcome to My Brain is an exciting card game that gets students talking about their amazing brains in a way that's fun, meaningful, and engaging.

With beautiful artwork, students share how their brains feel when they're 'in the zone' and when they're stressed, exploring what situations affect them most.

Welcome to My Brain comes with ready-to-use lesson plans for different ages, plus plenty of ideas to support individual learners and small groups.

Use the QR code below to grab your copy or order a class set!



Welcome to My Brain



I learnt so much about my class in five short minutes ... And they learnt so much about each other. Can't wait to keep playing!

Teacher, Wellington



TERM THREE

Supporting Strengths

By now, you're getting a good feel for your students and how their brains are wired.

You're probably seeing real strengths shine through—as well as a few sticking points. Often, these are two sides of the same coin. For example, a creative, out-of-the-box thinker might struggle to switch to analytical thinking.

Focusing on strengths is a fantastic way to

engage all learners, especially neurodivergent students who might find it tough to stay on track in a traditional classroom environment.

This term, we have three exciting resources to help you build on strengths and troubleshoot sticking points.

1. Brainspotting

Our **Neurodivergent Learner Characteristics Tool** is an easy-to-use guide that helps you notice, recognise, and respond to common traits of neurodivergent learners.

We focus on 10 key areas—from thinking and learning styles to organisation and peer interactions—highlighting behaviours as strengths, sticking points, or often, both. You'll also get strategies to try out.

You don't need all the answers—this is a journey you'll take alongside your learner and their whānau. What matters most is the relationship you're building. Show them you're listening, that you care, respect their differences, and are willing to try new approaches to meet their needs.

Find the **Neurodivergent Learner Characteristics Tool** at the back of this planner on pages XX-XX.

2. Learning Strengths Inventory

By the time your students—especially older ones—reach your classroom, they've likely spent years in a neurotypical-focused education system. Many will have internalised negative messages about which skills matter and how they measure up.

Support your students in re-evaluating their strengths with a **Learning Strengths Inventory**—use the QR code below to access our simple version. Build on the understanding from Term 2 of how different brains work to identify their unique strengths. Highlight how these abilities are crucial for future jobs. Ensure your classroom values and recognises these diverse strengths, even if they aren't traditionally emphasized in your school or education system.



Scan the QR code to access the **Learning Strengths Inventory** resource.

TERM THREE

3. Clubs

Introducing **Clubs**, a FREE online platform where passionate Year 2-10 kids from across New Zealand connect with others who share their interests!

Clubs is a brilliant way to harness your neurodivergent learners' strengths while helping them build skills to overcome sticking points, like engagement, organisation, and peer connection.

This versatile programme offers high-quality activities across ten different interest areas—from ancient Greece to astronauts to architecture. **Clubs** can be used in-class, as

homework, or as part of your school's extension programme—whatever works for you!

Learn more and sign up your students at www.neurodiversity.org.nz/clubs



Where passionate kids connect with like minds

Brilliant - just the thing for our sparky kids! They come together for an hour a week with me and work on activities in their own Clubs. They're so self-motivated! They love the options and the range.

Primary school teacher, Northland



Want more?

We're developing a FREE, FUN & PRACTICAL online tutorial on **Teaching with Strengths**. You'll be able to find it at www.neurodiversity.org.nz/bns. If you join our **Building a Neuroinclusive School Community**, we can let you know when it's ready! Scan the QR code to sign-up.



Notes

Select 3-5 students you'd like to focus on this term.

For each one, write down some strengths and sticking points you are noticing. Then, write down some strategies you'd like to try with each of them this term.

Name:

Strengths:

Sticking points:

Strategies:

Name:

Strengths:

Sticking points:

Strategies:

Name:

Strengths:

Sticking points:

Strategies:

Name:

Strengths:

Sticking points:

Strategies:

Name:

Strengths:

Sticking points:

Strategies:


 TERM FOUR

Celebrating & Planning

Term 4 is a special – and busy – time!
It's the perfect moment to reflect on what you've learned, celebrate your students and yourself, and plan for the future.

Let's wrap up the year by focusing on:

- **Reflecting** on your progress in building a neuroinclusive classroom.
- **Celebrating** your learners and what you've achieved together.
- **Planning** how to continue growing your neuroinclusive teaching skills and how you can influence your school and community.

And we're here to help with all of it!

1. Reflect & consolidate

You've made incredible strides this year, growing your understanding of neurodiversity and creating a more inclusive classroom.

Our **Neuroinclusive Year Reflection Tool** can help you take a moment to reflect on what you've learned and what you'd like to try next. Use it anytime, save your progress, and share it with a colleague or mentor for professional development. Your reflections help us all learn more about what works for neurodivergent learners—and what extra support teachers need. Thank you for being part of this journey!



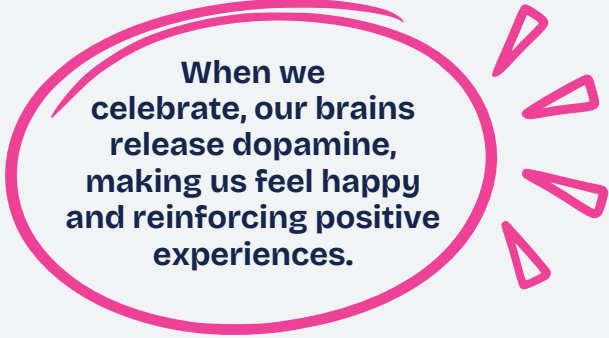
Scan the QR code to explore the **Neuroinclusive Year Reflection Tool**.

2. Celebrate!

Celebrating achievements has a huge impact on learning. When we celebrate, our brains release dopamine, making us feel happy and reinforcing positive experiences. Celebrating together also boosts serotonin and oxytocin, strengthening group bonds.

But traditional school celebrations don't always work for every student. Loud, busy environments, or being overlooked, can trigger stress and discomfort instead of joy.

Our **Neurodiversity-Friendly Celebrations Guide** can help you design celebrations that work for all your students. We'd love to hear what creative ideas you come up with!



When we celebrate, our brains release dopamine, making us feel happy and reinforcing positive experiences.



Scan the QR code to explore the **Neurodiversity-Friendly Celebrations Guide**.

TERM FOUR

3. Look forward

And don't forget to celebrate yourself! This year, you've shown real dedication to your students and your own learning. Take a moment to reflect on what's next for you.

Opportunities to consider

- **Support your colleagues:** Share what you've learned with your school. Consider leading a session at a PLD day, mentoring others, or forming a learning group with interested colleagues.
- **Keep learning:** Join our **Building a Neuroinclusive School Community** to stay up-to-date and deepen your knowledge. It's FREE, with access to FUN and PRACTICAL tools, guides, and online learning. We also offer regular Community Cafés, workshops, and an annual symposium with international speakers.
- **Have us over:** We offer FREE PLD workshops and small group chats at schools and with groups across NZ. Contact us at hello@neurodiversity.org.nz to schedule a visit.

We also proudly support the **Young Neurodiversity Champions**, a group of young leaders working to change how we think about neurodiversity. They run workshops, deliver keynotes, and create sensory spaces at events. Learn more at www.neurodiversity.org.nz/ync.



Scan the QR code to join our **Building a Neuroinclusive School Community**.



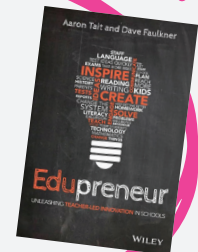
Scan the QR code to check out the **Neuroinclusive School Code**.

From your classroom to the whole school

You've learned a lot this year, and now you might have ideas for making your entire school more neuroinclusive. Start by checking out our **Neuroinclusive School Code** for inspiration. What's a quick win you can suggest? Or maybe a longer-term project with big impact?

If you're ready to lead change, reach out to someone in your school leadership with practical, high-impact ideas. Keep the conversation going with staff, Kahui Ako members, RTLBs, and others to build support.

Interested in growing as a changemaker? Check out *Edupreneur: Unleashing Teacher-Led Innovation in Schools* on Amazon.



Print out your Neuroinclusive Year Reflection Tool and add it to this booklet to make a complete record of your year.

Congratulations and happy holidays!





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This resource is provided by the Neurodiversity in Education Project as part of its Building A Neuroinclusive School programme. Learn more at www.neurodiversity.org.nz/bns



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