

Early Childhood Education and Care Facilities Design Standards



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

OFFICIAL



Early Childhood Education and Care Facilities – Design Standards

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Early Childhood Education and Care Facilities - Design Standards

This is a mandated standard under the [asset management policy](#).

Overview

The Early Childhood Education and Care Facilities - Design Standards (ECEC Design Standards) have been developed to create high quality learning environments for children from birth to school age. They support the effective delivery of connected, continuous programs and services, and ensure all children are thriving and learning.

The ECEC Design Standards reflect the state government's commitment to a holistic, integrated and culturally responsive approach to service provision for children and families and draws on the expertise of early childhood practitioners and policy makers across government, and have been developed in collaboration with the Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT).

Comprising of 4 parts the ECEC Design Standards outline the principles and department standards (ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation, standards and the National Construction Code) for the planning, design and construction of new facilities, major upgrades, refurbishment and maintenance of existing facilities, as well as providing reference information for the development of project briefs, and detailed planning and technical information:

- **[Part 1: Strategic Design](#)** – vision and goals for ECEC facilities to guide design that is aligned with department, state and commonwealth strategies, and pedagogy principles. Includes *Appendix A – Alignment with frameworks and strategies*.
- **[Part 2: Design Principles \(Master planning, Architectural and Landscape\)](#)** – department requirements for the planning, design and construction of world-leading, equitable, inclusive and sustainable early childhood education and care facilities. Includes *Appendix B – Design Checklist*.
- **[Part 3: Generic Functional Briefs](#)** – exist for each functional unit (as outlined in the Planning Standards) and provide a clear statement of functional requirements to support learning and care, teaching, administration and management.
- **[Part 4: Technical Specifications](#)** – department performance standards for the building fabric and finishes, building and site services, services and utilities, structural and civil works, acoustic performance, security, information and communications technology and ecologically sustainable design.

Must be read in conjunction with the [Education Facilities Design Standards](#) for the full context of the department's education and care facilities design requirements.

The department recognises the Aboriginal peoples of South Australia as the first people and cultural authority of our State. Respectful and culturally sensitive consultation with the traditional owners and custodians of the land must be undertaken to embed Aboriginal voice and perspectives into the development of these facilities. Partnering with the local Aboriginal Cultural Authority and community will ensure local knowledge, language and perspectives are embedded within the design of these facilities.

Scope

The ECEC Design Standards are not retrospective. They provide department requirements for all new facilities, major upgrades, refurbishment and maintenance of existing ECEC facilities (including site funded projects).

Facilities for birth to school age children must comply with the ECEC Design Standards and the [Education Facilities Design Standards](#) where relevant.

It does not apply to Family Day Care, Guardianship Family Day Care services or the Respite Care Program operated by the department.

Conformity

Where products are selected and used, it is the responsibility of the manufacturer, design teams, contractors and facilities management providers to ensure the products are:

- fit for purpose
- compliant to all relevant Australian Standards
- robust to suit their environment
- selected to minimise ongoing service and maintenance and offer value for money.

In line with the requirements of the Industry Advocate, the preference is to use local products and services before selection of foreign products.

Design and construction must also comply with all requirements set by local, state and any other authority which has jurisdiction over the site, buildings and facilities and all recommendations, warranty conditions and similar set by the manufacturer of any material, product, fitment or fixture being used.

Where an International, Regional or National Standard is referenced in these documents, designs are required to comply with the referenced standard and all other associated and related standards. Standards will only include a reference to the number, with reference to a specific version being excluded. Designs must comply with the most current version in use at the time that detailed planning commences. Should a referenced standard become redundant designs must comply with any replacement standard(s).

The department may specify to a higher standard where it is mandatory to comply with specific details for safety, security, maintenance or performance reasons. Mandatory requirements are identified by the word 'must'. Where a requirement or performance standard exceeds those specified in any relevant act, regulation, standards or the National Construction Code (NCC) the designs must comply with the higher requirement or performance standard.

Governance

All product changes or departures from the ECEC Design Standards made during the design, tender and construction process must be approved in writing by the department in accordance with Department for Infrastructure and Transport ([DIT Guidenote Design Reviews \(G29\)](#) and [DIT Departures Schedule Template \(367\)](#)). This will be amended once an updated internal process is finalised and approved.

DIT Guidenotes and Drawings

DIT Guidenotes and Drawings are referred to throughout and can be accessed through the DIT Building Project Information Management System [bpims library](#). To search for Guidenotes and Drawings, use the referenced identifier (such as G190) to search for the document or drawing. For a full list of DIT Standard

Drawings please search for DG04 – DIT Standard Drawing index.

Supplementary documents to the ECEC Design Standards

- **Planning Standards** including the ECEC Functional Directory and ECEC Interactive Area Schedule
- **Project Brief** - for new facilities or major upgrades and refurbishments a project brief will be developed by the department to inform the project
- **Education Security Design Standards** – will be incorporated into this suite of documents as part of an upcoming review to create a single set of Design Standards for all Education and Care Facilities
- **Education Facilities Design Standards** – will be incorporated into this suite of documents as part of an upcoming review to create a single set of Design Standards for all Education and Care Facilities.

Related legislation

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)

[Education and Children’s Services Act 2019](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011](#)

[Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)

[Environment Protection Act 1993](#)

[National Construction Code \(NCC\)](#) (Class 9b buildings and other areas as applicable)

[National Quality Framework](#)

[Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016](#)

[Urban Design Charter](#)

[Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#)

[Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012](#)

Related documents

[Australian Standards](#)

[Education Facilities Design Standards](#)

[Outdoor learning environments standard](#)

[Energy and water efficiency guideline](#)

[Recycled water connections procedure](#)

[Disability Access Provisions Procedure](#)

[Nature Play SA](#)

[Kidsafe information sheets](#)

[Play Australia](#)

Glossary

This glossary contains terms found throughout the entire suite of the ECEC Design Standard documents.

Aboriginal peoples	The department recognises that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a great diversity of cultures, histories, and values. For the sake of readability, and in recognition that the term Indigenous is a sensitive one for many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, in line with the Culturally Responsive Framework, the term 'Aboriginal', which includes Torres Strait Islander people has been used.
Access for all	Ensures equitable access provisions for all people regardless of their physical, perceptual, social and cognitive abilities.
Accessible area	The Education Standards Board refers to 'accessible areas' and relates to areas where children regularly have access that they can reach, enter, use or get to on their own.
Accessible toilets	Are specifically designed to provide enough space to accommodate wheelchair access and assistance when transferring from wheelchair to toilet and may include features such as showers and hydraulic lift change tables.
Ambulant toilets	Are specifically designed for those with ambulant disabilities that do not require the extra space that is provided by accessible toilets. They are for those with sensory loss, arthritis or require the use of walking aids (frames/crutches).
Area Schedules	Detail the area allocation for the internal and external functional zones, sub-zones and units for Early Childhood Education and Care facilities, to provide adequate allocations to align to building codes and standards, legislative requirements (including the national regulations), curriculum delivery, cross-jurisdictional comparisons and department priorities.
Cultural responsiveness	Is learning from and relating respectfully to develop meaningful and collaborative place-based relationships with people from diverse language groups and communities.
Cultural safety	Is an environment which is spiritually, socially, emotionally and physically safe for people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.
Encumbered area	Is unusable floor area that is being used for functions other than for children's use. This area includes circulation/passageways, door swings and circulation at doorways (door swings and circulation space either side of sliding door openings), thoroughfares, fixed joinery, toilets, kitchen and administration areas.
Free height of fall (FHOF)	The distance measured from the greatest vertical distance between the intended body support (eg hands if hanging, feet if standing) and the impact area below the equipment (playground) or natural elements (tree, log or rock).
Functional Directory	Lists the internal and external functional zones, sub-zones and units that are standard for Early Childhood Education and Care facilities, and assist the department to achieve its pedagogy principles and curriculum delivery.
Functional zone	Defines the high-level areas required to support learning and care, teaching, administration and management.
Functional sub-zone	Outline the macro spaces required within the Functional zones.

Functional unit	Outline the micro spaces required for effective operation within the functional sub-zones.
Impact area	The falling space that surrounds a piece of playground equipment or natural element.
Inclusive	An inclusive learning and care environment considers the physical, academic, behavioural and social aspects of learning for all learners including Aboriginal people, cultural and linguistically diverse people, age, disability, gender, and LGBTIQ+.
Integrated service hubs	Tailored sites offering a range of services that meet the needs of the local community. They should offer a core provision of a preschool program, wrap around care, child and family health services and family support.
Learning Environment Opportunity Study (LEOS)	Provides logical and cost-effective guidance on improvements to learning environments. The architectural report contains scalable recommended options such as micro-sized student-led projects, small or no-cost projects, site funded medium projects in partnership with the service delivery lead, larger site-funded projects managed by the service delivery lead and high-level advice on larger scale projects when funding becomes available.
Must, shall, should	Indicates that a process is a legislative, Australian Standard or an education requirement.
Parent	<p>For the purposes of these documents, the term ‘parent’ refers to all persons responsible for the child. A person responsible for the child means a person who is the child’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biological parent, adoptive parent or other person recognised as a parent if the child was conceived following a fertilisation procedure or under a surrogacy arrangement • guardian • person standing in loco parentis. <p>This does not include a person who has had their legal custody, guardianship or responsibility for the child removed by a Court, Act or Law. As an example, a biological parent who has had their custody, guardianship or parental responsibility for the child removed by a parenting order made under Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) is not a person responsible for the child.</p>
Planning Standards	Determine the area allocated for internal and external spaces for new facilities, provide reference points for major upgrades of existing facilities, and provide a basis for determining the enrolment capacity of existing facilities. They consist of Functional Directories and Area Schedules.
Retrospective	The law does not require structures to retrospectively adhere to every change that is brought out in the regularly updated Australian Standards. However, if a building does not currently comply to today’s Standards, but alterations to it are proposed, the engineer must ensure that not only the alteration is to be in accord to current standards but that the supporting structure is retrospectively compliant to current standards as well.
Risk benefit assessment	Risk is measured in terms of a combination of the consequence or impact and the likelihood of a positive or negative impact balanced against the benefits (learning outcomes). Refer to the risk benefit assessment template in supporting information.
Sustainable	Refers to infrastructure designed, constructed and operated in alignment with

	social, economic, environmental and governance principles ¹ .
Site leader	Any person who has the responsibility, management or control of a workplace or work unit or personnel officially assigned as a nominated delegate by that person to adopt that responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to executive directors, education directors, directors, assistant directors, principals, preschool directors, managers and supervisors.
Trained person	Any person who has achieved the nationally recognised unit of competency 'AHCPGD206 Conduct visual inspection of park facilities'. This unit of competency describes the skills and knowledge required to carry out routine visual inspections of park and recreational facilities to identify visible hazards and existing and potential risks.
Unencumbered area	Usable floor area which is directly accessible for children's use. This area excludes circulation/passageways, door swings and circulation at doorways (door swings and circulation space either side of sliding door openings), thoroughfares, fixed joinery, toilets, kitchen and administration areas.
Universal design	The design of buildings, products, services and/or environments to make them accessible and inclusive for people, regardless of age, disability and/or neurodivergence or other factors. It is a design process that addresses common barriers to participation.
Whole-of-lifecycle (lifecycle)	All stages of an asset from creation to end-of-life including planning, acquiring, operating, maintaining and disposing.

Revision record

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¹ [Australian Government Sustainability Principles: Infrastructure Australia's approach to sustainability](#)