



Establishing a Centre-Based Education and Care Service: A Facilities Guide

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This fact sheet contains information to assist approved providers, planners, architects, draftspersons and building certifiers with meeting the relevant facilities requirements for establishing a new centre-based education and care service.

New or existing building

There are different options for setting up a new education and care service such as building a new purpose built premises or refurbishing an existing building to convert into an education and care service. With either option, the building must meet certain requirements of the National Construction Code including the Building Code of Australia (BCA) for a class 9b building and meet requirements of the Education and Care Services National Law (South Australia) (the National Law) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations (the National Regulations). Please refer to the fact sheet Building, Planning and Development Processes for New Centre-Based Education and Care Buildings for more information on the development approval process and building code requirements.

It is recommended that prospective applicants intending to establish a new education and care service consider designing and building a new centre-based education and care premises as this alleviates the potential difficulties and constraints that occur when working with existing buildings. Limitations such as existing plumbing, structural walls, window sill heights, natural light, room sizes, room configurations and sometimes the location of buildings on a site, can all impact on the ability to effectively meet the requirements and can disadvantage options to facilitate good design. Certification is required to be submitted to the Board clearly stating that the premises comply with building code requirements, in particular for convenient access to toilets, hand washing, nappy change and bath facilities, natural light and window requirements.

The location

It is important to consider the suitability of a location for a new education and care service. Careful planning and research is vital to understand the demand for an education and care service in a particular area. Each local government area would have its own planning controls and approval processes. Liaising with local councils will assist in an understanding of the demographic of a particular area.

It is also important to consider and seek information about the history of a particular site to ensure that there is no contamination evident that may cause an unacceptable risk to the health of children. As part of the service approval application, an applicant may need to conduct soil testing to confirm suitability in relation to this matter or may need to provide a statement stating that to the best of the applicant's knowledge the site does not indicate it is likely to be contaminated in a way that poses an unacceptable risk to children. In Australia, there is a national guidance document for the assessment of site contamination called the [National Environment Protection \(Assessment of Site Contamination\) Measure 1999](#) that outlines the process for the assessment of site contamination. Further information and advice about conducting soil assessments can be obtained from the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

Concept design

Prior to submitting an Application for Service Approval, it is recommended that a concept or preliminary plan is provided to the Board so an informal assessment can be undertaken and feedback provided regarding the design and suitability of the premises prior to formal plans being prepared for council approval. This process is useful in identifying issues before any building work commences.

Facilities and physical environment

Regulation 25 of the National Regulations provides detail on the information required in relation to the physical premises that must be provided to the Board to support an Application for Service Approval. This includes but is not limited to:

- site and floor plans prepared by a building practitioner showing the location of all buildings (including entries and exits), structures, outdoor play areas, shaded areas and boundary fencing, gates and elevation plans of the premises
- detailed floor plan indicating all encumbrances and facilities provided such as toilet and hand washing facilities, nappy changing bench and bath, food preparation areas, including details of how the rooms will be used
- calculations carried out by a building practitioner of the unencumbered indoor and outdoor space
- plans of the outdoor learning environment specifying the landscaping and natural environments that will be provided.

The relationship of rooms and the interaction between the indoor and outdoor environments is an important factor with the design of a new centre-based education and care service. The design of the building should facilitate effective supervision, allow children to easily move between spaces and enable convenient access to toilet and hand washing facilities. In developing the design and location of the premises, consideration must be given to the physical environment elements and standards found in Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Standard as they can impact on the delivery of the education and care program.

Regulations 103 to 115 prescribe matters relating to the physical environment. An approved provider must demonstrate how the premises comply with these requirements prior to a service approval being granted.

The Pre-Approval Inspection

Prior to a service approval being granted, the Board will conduct a pre-approval visit to the service premises to assess compliance with the National Law and Regulations and to determine whether the premises is safe for the education and care of children. This facilitates the approved provider's obligation to take every reasonable precaution to protect children being educated and cared for by the service from any harm and hazard likely to cause injury. At this stage of the approval process, the education and care service should be ready to commence operation. All building works, fit out and development of outdoor play spaces should be finalised prior to the pre-approval visit. The following physical items relating to health and safety are inspected during a pre-approval visit:

Indoors

Door Finger Guards

Door finger guards are to be fitted to all doors or gates throughout the centre that are located in areas accessible to children. This includes both sides of the door or gate if each side is accessible to children. For example common rooms where door finger guards are applicable include doors to children's activity rooms, toilet areas, front entrance doors, offices, store rooms, staff preparation rooms, laundries, and staff rooms. This also includes children's toilet cubicle doors, doors or gates to kitchens and reception areas. In some cases these doors may lead directly from children's activity rooms or they may lead from corridors or passageways.

Cushioning Devices

All doors throughout the centre that are either accessible to children, or are required to prevent free access to children, as noted above, are to be fitted with cushioning devices. Cushioning devices alleviate crush injuries and the self-closing and self-latching function ensures children do not have an opportunity to access unintended areas. These devices are to be adjusted to provide 'soft closure' and secure effectively.

Bi-fold Doors and Foldable Walls

Room dividers such as bi-fold doors or foldable walls should be effectively secured for adult operation only.

Secure Doors in Open Position

For those doors located in high traffic areas for children, it is recommended the doors are able to be secured in an open position, when required. For example internal and external toilet doors and doors leading from children's activity rooms to outside play spaces. The recommended securing position is preferably out of children's reach if possible. For example, a high cabin hook at 1500mm may be used.

For high traffic areas, in particular to toilet and hand washing areas and to outside play spaces, it is recommended that the door handles are located at children's height to provide easy access, avoid reliance on adult assistance and to foster children's independence when managing toileting and hand washing requirements.

It is also recommended that all sliding doors throughout the centre are able to be secured in an open position and fitted with devices that prevent crushing of fingers.

Door Handles

Door handles are to be fitted at approximately 1500mm from the finished floor level, to doors leading from corridor areas to children's activity rooms and to areas not to be accessed by children. For example doors leading to offices, staff rooms, storerooms, kitchens, staff preparation rooms, staff toilets (except disabled), laundries and front entrance doors.

Trip Hazards

No trip hazards are to be presented where different flooring surfaces meet.

Hot Water

To ensure children's safety, hot water delivered in areas accessible to children must be tempered to not exceed 45°C maximum, with a recommended setting at approximately 40-42°C. For example, hand wash basins, bath taps, sinks, troughs and showers.

Glazing

As per the Building Code, any glazing less than 1 metre above floor height must be of safety glass standard in all areas accessible to children. Note that for existing glazing, a qualified glazier may apply an approved film to achieve the same purpose.

Power Points

In children's areas, it is recommended that all unused power points are covered with safety plugs at all times. Residual Current Device (RCD) protection must also be installed and connected to all power points as per Building Code requirements.

Stairs and Stairways

Stairs to nappy change benches are to be secured in a manner that is not accessible by children. The stair treads are to be non-slip and it is recommended that hand rails are provided for children where possible, to assist with children's access. The Building Code of Australia may specify appropriate stair dimensions.

Additionally, stairways should be fitted with a childproof gate to prevent free access by children to upper levels.

Children's Hygiene

Soap dispensers and appropriate hygienic hand drying facilities are to be provided in children's toilet areas. Foaming type dispensers are recommended as their use presents less of a slip hazard than other liquid type dispensers that often drip.

Appropriate hygienic facilities are required to be provided for nappy changing. If a service accommodates children younger than 3 years, a properly constructed nappy change bench is required with a bench type baby bath and separate adult hand washing facilities located within 1 metre.

Emergency Evacuation Plan

Emergency evacuation plans with clear and concise procedures are to be displayed in each children's activity room adjacent to the exits that show the specific location and emergency evacuation routes to be taken to the nominated assembly point.

Blind Cords

Blind cords pose a strangulation hazard and must be made inaccessible to children at all times. Cords should be secured in a position that is out of children's reach which ordinarily is at approximately 1500mm above floor level, but may be higher if adjacent to cots or other play equipment.

Unobstructed viewing windows

Unobstructed viewing windows are to be provided to children's toilet areas, nappy change areas and sleep rooms to assist staff with effective supervision.

Fridges

Fridges accessible to children are to have childproof latches provided. Freezers are generally not placed in areas accessible to children.

Indoor space

Regulation 107 prescribes that for each child being educated and cared for by the service there must be at least 3.25 square metres of unencumbered indoor space.

When calculating unencumbered indoor space the following areas are excluded:

- any passageway or thoroughfare (including door swings)
- any toilet and hygiene facilities
- any nappy changing area or area for preparing bottles
- any area permanently set aside for the use or storage of cots
- any area permanently set aside for storage
- any area or room for staff or administration
- any other space that is not suitable for children.

The area of a kitchen is also to be excluded unless the kitchen is primarily to be used by children as part of the educational program of the service.

An area of a verandah may be included in calculating the area of indoor space with written approval of the Board. If a verandah area is approved by the Board to be counted as indoor space it cannot be included in the calculation for outdoor space. Please see the fact sheet titled Verandah areas counted as indoor space for further information.

Thoroughfare areas

Passageway or thoroughfare areas, including door swings, are not included as countable play spaces for capacity purposes as they are not considered to be usable unencumbered space for children. These areas are determined to be used for the purposes of ingress and egress and therefore must allow for the safe movement of children and adults.

In these circumstances, 1 square metre for a single thoroughfare opening and 2 square metres for a double thoroughfare opening is deducted in each

countable room along with the appropriate square metre deductions for built-in cupboards, sinks etc. that also present as encumbrances. This applies to all thoroughfare areas in and between children's rooms regardless of where the thoroughfare areas are located or how doors are configured.

The resultant total unencumbered play space as advised by the building practitioner is used to calculate the maximum number of children permitted at the service, with consideration given to the amount of unencumbered outdoor space provided and number of children's toilets and hand wash basins available.

Outdoors

Fences and Gates

Fences and gates are to be of a suitable height and design that prevent children preschool age or under from going under, over or through. It is important to ensure effective fence heights are maintained at all times by not locating objects or structures close by. A minimum 1.2 metre clearance should be provided. Any gaps in fences or gates are not to exceed 100mm, including gaps under or adjacent to structures or between vertical bars.

Self-closing and self-latching mechanisms on all perimeter gates should also be operating effectively. This can be tested by opening the gate to a variety of positions such as approximately 25mm open, half open and full open positions. In all circumstances, upon release, the gate should subsequently close and latch properly.

If kept locked, emergency access gates must have a key readily available and accessible to all staff for use in the event of an emergency.

Carparks and Double Gates for Vehicle Access

If a service has a double gate to allow for vehicle access, the double gate must be effectively secured at all times children are in attendance with no gaps greater than 100mm.

Where carparks are near main entrances, a suitably sized fenced holding area is recommended with self-closing, self-latching mechanisms fitted to gates.

Stormwater Grates/Drains

The diameter of grate holes of stormwater drainage should not be between 5-25mm as it poses a finger entrapment hazard.

Impact Attenuating Surfaces and Fall Zone Areas

A suitable impact attenuating surface must be provided in the impact (fall zone) area where free height of fall is 600mm or greater to meet current Australian Standards. For example if wood chips are used, a minimum depth of 300mm is to be maintained

at all times (installed at 400mm). A suitable impact attenuating surface must also be provided for fall heights less than 600mm where equipment causes a forced movement on the body of the user. For example swings, slides and rocking equipment.

An appropriate fall space clearance is also required. To meet current Australian Standards, the impact area clearances provided around play equipment require a minimum impact zone of 1.5 metres. For example a fall height of 600mm requires a minimum impact attenuating zone of 1.5 metres. This can increase proportionally as the free height of fall height increases, noting that the maximum fall height for an education and care service is 1.8 metres. For such a height the fall zone area must be a minimum of 1.7 metres.

The maximum free height of fall for moveable play equipment is limited to 1.5 metres.

It is not recommended to include woodchip softfall in outdoor play areas for children under 2 years of age, as this is a potential choking hazard.

If a rubber impact attenuating surface is used, attention must be given to the temperature of the surface on hot days as this product absorbs heat readily and can cause burns to children.

To ensure suitability of any play equipment with regard to free height of fall, impact attenuating surfaces and minimum impact area clearances for early childhood settings please refer to current Australian Standards.

Sharp Corners, Edges and Rocks

Sharp corners and sharp edges on rocks and timbers are to be made well rounded and smooth. For example on garden beds and borders, decking and boardwalks, balancing beams and sandpits.

Timbers on structures, posts, equipment and garden beds may require sanding to make them smooth as they can be rough and are likely to contain splinters.

Timbers used in the outside play areas are to be certified safe and free from any Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) products.

Any large rocks that may be unstable are to be secured. Any stones located in the under 2 outside play area are not to be too small as they may present a choking hazard to children.

Protruding small branches with sharp ends are to be only above children's head height.

Swings and Fixed Play Structures

Swings and fixed play structures must be suitable for the ages of children, meet current Australian Standards and be installed strictly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Hot Water Services and Air Conditioning Units

Hot water services and air conditioning units are to be inaccessible to children at all times.

Tripping Hazards

Tripping hazards in the outdoor play environment should not be evident, in particular on walkways and paved areas. However, the natural environment should include an element of supervised risk to promote a level of challenge and controlled risk taking.

Outdoor Supervision

The design and configuration of the outdoor play area should ensure that children can be adequately supervised at all times. Children should not have free access to areas behind structures such as storage sheds, cubby houses and water tanks.

Adequate Outdoor Shade

Adequate shade must be provided in all children's outdoor play areas. This can be achieved through the use of suitable shade structures, verandahs and effective plantings such as trees and large shrubs.

Outdoor space

Regulation 108 prescribes that for each child being educated and cared for by the service there must be at least 7 square metres of unencumbered outdoor space.

When calculating unencumbered outdoor space the following areas are excluded:

- any pathway or thoroughfare, except where used by children as part of the education and care program
- any car parking area
- any storage shed or other storage area
- any other space that is not suitable for children.

Similar to the calculation of indoor play space either 1 square metre or 2 square metres is deducted per single or double thoroughfare opening to determine the total unencumbered play space. For example gates, doors leading from indoor areas and storage sheds etc. are considered as encumbrances.

Service approval

The Board will not ordinarily approve an application for service approval for a centre-based service until a site inspection has been conducted to verify that all the physical environment requirements have been met and that the premises is considered to be safe and suitable for children. At the time of the inspection, all building work must be fully completed.

Please note that a service approval will only be granted once the Board is satisfied that all other matters as outlined in the National Law and Regulations in determining an application for service approval have been addressed.

Contact details

Early Childhood Services

Phone: 08 8226 0077 or 1800 882 413

Website: www.esb.sa.gov.au

Email: EducationStandardsBoard@sa.gov.au