

Part 1: Strategic Design

Education and Care Facilities
Design Standards

**Public education is for
every child and
young person
in South Australia.**



Government of South Australia
Department for Education



Part 1: Strategic Design

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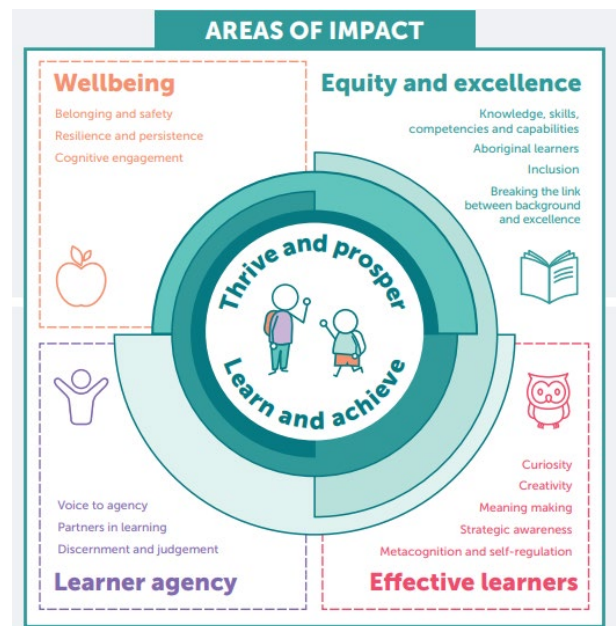
Purpose of public education in South Australia

“Our preschools and schools are the heart of local communities. They are safe, inclusive, and collaborative – a place where every child and young person is encouraged to contribute, develops positive relationships, has a say in their learning, and where their needs, interests, languages and cultures are recognised and supported.”¹

Public education² in South Australia exists to nurture, develop and empower every child and young person with the capabilities and dispositions they need to thrive—as fulfilled individuals, as lifelong learners, and as active, compassionate citizens. This purpose is realised through strong partnerships with families and communities, and underpins all aspects of educational planning, design, and delivery.

The department focuses its efforts on four key areas of impact: **wellbeing**, **learner agency**, **effective learners**, and **equity and excellence** (figure 1). These interrelated priorities reflect a commitment to developing the whole learner—not only in terms of academic achievement, but in readiness for life beyond school. The areas of impact hold intrinsic value and are known to have the greatest impact on learner success.

Figure 1: Strategy for Public Education – outlines the areas of impact that we will prioritise and resource to successfully deliver on our purpose.



This holistic view of education emphasises that schooling is not simply preparation for work or further study, but a foundation for lifelong growth, participation and contribution.

For those shaping and maintaining the physical and social environments of public education—architects, planners, designers, developers, builders and facilities managers—this purpose invites approaches that go beyond functionality. It calls for the creation of learning environments that are safe, inclusive, adaptable, sustainable, and connected to community; environments that promote wellbeing, inspire curiosity, and reflect the cultural and ecological context of each place—enabling every learner to thrive.

Educational infrastructure, when aligned to this purpose, becomes a powerful enabler of equity and opportunity. It supports the vision of a system where every learner is known, valued and supported to succeed.

The department’s education infrastructure (Education and Care Facilities) consists of:

- Early Childhood Education and Care Facilities (ECEC)
 - Preschool Programs
 - Care Services
 - Family and Community Services and Health Programs
- Schools
 - Primary Schools
 - Secondary Schools
 - Combined R-12 Schools
 - Specialist Schools and Colleges

¹ Department for Education - Strategy for Public Education (pg 6) <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/purpose-media/Public-Education-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

² Public education is for every child and young person in every community across our state. Strategy for Public Education <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/purpose-media/Public-Education-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

In South Australia there is a history of investment and innovation in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The State recognises the importance of [the first 1000 days](#) of a child's life as a critical period for shaping their long-term health and development, viewing this as a unique window of opportunity to impact a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as their overall well-being³. Across the State the development of ECEC facilities has seen parents, children and a range of professionals in child development come together in the interest of growing healthy children, families and communities.

Most children attending ECEC facilities will be within the age range of birth to 6 years. These settings can bring together care and education, health, community development activities and family services and may include:

- preschool
- long day care (LDC)
- occasional care
- inclusive preschool programs (IPP)
- targeted parent and community programs
- health services
- community support services and programs.

This early learning model enhances holistic education and care benefits and seamlessly links to early years of formal schooling. An environment where community, educators, specialists and families collaborate in the provision of family and child services to support highly effective development and learning.

Services are provided in direct response to the needs of the individual communities and incorporate local cultural and community members' agency into decision making.

The early years learning environment and planned curriculum are guided by the [National Quality Framework \(NQF\)](#) and [Early Years Learning Framework](#) which provide a national approach to [regulation](#), assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services across Australia.

The NQF includes National Law and Regulations and [National Quality Standard \(NQS\)](#), providing assessment and quality rating processes and national learning frameworks. The NQF is administered by the [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \(ACECQA\)](#), an independent national authority.

The [Education Standards Board \(ESB\)](#) is the state regulatory authority that administers the NQF in South Australia. They are responsible for granting approvals (including provider approvals and service approvals) and assessing and rating services against each of the quality areas of the NQS and providing an overall rating based on these results. The department's planning and design standards aim to support an [exceeding rating](#).

Schools

South Australia is committed to ensuring our schools are safe, inclusive and act as collaborative hearts of our local communities, preparing every learner for lifelong growth, participation and contribution.

Schools in South Australia include:

- primary
- secondary
- combined (R-12)
- specialist schools and colleges

³ Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care <https://www.royalcommissionecec.sa.gov.au/>

School attendance is compulsory for students between the ages of 6 and 16 years, and prepares them for their future with a combination of core content knowledge and high-level skills. In their 13 years of schooling (Reception to Year 12), our learners should be equipped with a broad range of knowledge, skills, and attributes to help them succeed in further education, employment, and their wider lives as active, informed citizens.

These capabilities are embedded in the curriculum and are recognised internationally as essential skills. They are realised through the department's approach to learning and teaching (the [Teaching for Effective Learning Framework](#)), the curricula ([SA Curriculum](#), [Australian Curriculum](#), and the [South Australian Certificate of Education](#)), and the deliberate design of school facilities.

Schools also provide a range of programs and services, implemented to support the needs and requirements of their local community, including but not limited to:

- out of school hours care (OSHC)
- special classes and disability units
- tailored learning provision
- specialist education programs
- technical colleges.

Birth to Year 6 (B-6) and Birth to Year 12 (B – 12)

B-6 or B-12 facilities offer families a seamless provision of education and care services and provide a continuous learning pathway from the earliest years through to primary and secondary education, they incorporate both facilities (early childhood education and care and school) functional spaces and curricula.

Pedagogy principles

“Educators and staff work in partnership with families and communities to nurture, develop and empower all South Australian children and young people with the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to become fulfilled individuals, active, compassionate citizens and lifelong learners.”⁴

Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when we work in partnership, appreciate diversity and foster relationships that respond to the collective and individual needs of learners and families. A ‘one size fits all’ approach will not work and responsive educators prioritise personalising the learning experience to meet the capacities, needs and interest of each learner throughout an individual’s educational development.

The department’s approach to pedagogy acknowledges that we are all learners (professionals, families, children and young people) and are continually engaged in learning. Accordingly, the pedagogy frameworks are based on learning with and from each other (reflective practice) – improving practice through professional collaboration and reflection against clearly defined frameworks.

ECEC

From birth, children are connected to family, communities, culture and place and a child’s early learning, development and wellbeing influences their life chances. Children’s learning is dynamic, complex and holistic, meaning the physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning and culture are all intricately interwoven and interrelated⁵.

The [Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming](#) (EYLF) has a specific emphasis on play-based learning which provides both a context (a place or space where children play) and a process (a way of learning and teaching) where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play-based learning environments (both indoor and outdoor) should promote and support different types of play for children’s active engagement, agency, problem solving, curiosity, creativity and exploration.

⁴ Strategy for Public Education (pg 6) <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/purpose-media/Public-Education-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁵ Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming (pg 8) <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf>

Centered around children’s learning, development, and wellbeing are the principles, practices and learning outcomes needed to support *belonging, being and becoming* – Figure 2.

VISION		
BELONGING, BEING AND BECOMING		
PRINCIPLES	PRACTICES	LEARNING OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships Partnerships Respect for diversity Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives Equity, inclusion and high expectations Sustainability Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning Collaborative leadership and teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic, integrated and interconnected approaches Responsiveness to children Play-based learning and intentionality Learning environments Cultural responsiveness Continuity of learning and transitions Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have a strong sense of identity Children are connected with and contribute to their world Children have a strong sense of wellbeing Children are confident and involved learners Children are effective communicators

Figure 2: [Early Years Learning Framework](#) – This diagram illustrates the principles, practices and learning outcomes required to achieve the vision of the Framework and support all children’s belonging, being and becoming.

School

Schools are committed to supporting all students to develop a sense of agency and self-worth, the capacity to learn and thrive throughout their lives, and aims to empower students to manage their wellbeing and gain satisfaction through contributions to their communities.

The [SA Curriculum](#), adapts the [Australian Curriculum \(Reception to Year 10\)](#) (see Figure 3), to reflect the department’s purpose for public education in South Australia outlined in the [Strategy](#), making explicit the learning that supports learner cognition, social, emotional and physical development.



Figure 3: Three dimensions of the [Australian Curriculum](#) 8 learning areas, 7 general capabilities and 3 cross-curriculum priorities. Alternative curriculums such as the [International Baccalaureate](#) (IB), [Montessori](#) and [Steiner](#) curriculum frameworks, have been formally recognised as meeting the requirements of the Australian Curriculum by the ‘Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Alternative Curriculum Recognition Committee’, and may be implemented at some department schools.

The SA Curriculum (see Figure 4):

- organises the Australian Curriculum (AC) content descriptions under conceptual understandings and capabilities
- outlines dispositions in each learning area that are crucial for living well and learning well
- demonstrates how the AC general capabilities are developed through learning areas
- includes Learning Standards that focus on what learners can be, do and understand, demonstrating that dispositions, capabilities and knowledge are valued
- links to the AC elaborations and embeds the cross-curriculum priorities within learning areas⁶.



Figure 4: The [SA Curriculum](https://www.sacurriculum.sa.edu.au/sa-curriculum) framework - the explicit integration of dispositions, capabilities and knowledge enables deep understanding and the ability to transfer and apply learning in a range of contexts.

The [Teaching for Effective Learning Framework](#) is based on reflective practice and identifies the characteristics of effective teaching and learning that lead to improved student engagement and achievement.

Schools will prioritise ‘effective learning’ as an active process characterised by critical enquiry, discovery, collaboration, research, application of knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship. Learners will participate in goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, critical reflection, demonstrating their learning and evaluating progress. Their active engagement in assessment will be central to all negotiated learning experiences.

Schools will foster ‘learner agency’ empowering students with voice and choice, promoting partnerships in learning, and nurturing discernment and judgement. The focus will be on developing ‘effective learners’ who demonstrate curiosity, creativity, meaning making, strategic awareness, metacognition and self-regulation.

The [South Australian Certificate of Education \(SACE\) for Years 11 and 12](#) is a 2 year internationally recognised senior secondary education qualification that ‘*develops a thriving learner with the capability to open doors, stretch minds, strengthen ownership, embrace perspectives and share success*’⁷. It provides learners with the flexibility to choose subjects that reflect their interests, skills, and career goals, using a combination of SACE subjects aligned to the Australian Curriculum, [Vocational Education and Training](#) (VET), community learning, university, and TAFE studies.

SACE and VET drive transitions to skilled careers and to better meet the needs of industry for underpinning strong economic growth.

- VET – enables students to acquire skills and knowledge for work through a nationally recognised industry-developed training package or accredited course. VET is delivered, assessed, and certified by Registered Training Organisations with qualifications in a diverse range of industries, including business administration, veterinary nursing, aged care, or sport and recreation.
- Australian School Based Apprenticeships - are a flexible study option allowing students to start working on an apprenticeship or traineeship from year 10 providing students with a head start on a qualification and fast-tracking progress towards a rewarding career.

⁶ SA Curriculum <https://www.sacurriculum.sa.edu.au/sa-curriculum>

⁷ SACE Board Strategic Plan (pg 3) <https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/about/what-we-do/strategic-plan>

South Australia now has a number of [Technical Colleges](#) throughout the state, designed to equip years 10, 11 and 12 students with workplace skills and qualifications in specialist facilities offering dedicated industry pathways that support regional skill needs.

Learning environments

ECEC learning environments

The quality of learning environments has a profound influence on the engagement, confidence, wellbeing, health and safety of children. The design of ECEC facilities must support children to feel a sense of belonging, safety, and security, which promotes wellbeing for learning.

The design should create a strong sense of connectivity between indoor and outdoor learning and play areas allowing children to move easily and freely between them, enable efficient operation and maximising supervision and duty of care abilities across the facility.

To meet the requirements of NQS Quality Area 3 – Physical Environment, which aims to ensure the physical environment is safe, suitable and provides a rich and diverse range of experience that promote children’s learning and development, ECEC facilities must ensure the concepts outlined in Figure 5 are met.

Concept		Descriptor
QA3		Physical environment
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service.
3.1.1	Fit for purpose	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child.
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.
3.2.1	Inclusive environment	Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
3.2.2	Resources support play-based learning	Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

Figure 5: [ACECQA – Quality Area 3 Introduction](#) outlining the National Quality Standards' requirements for the physical environment.

Play-based learning environments (both indoor and outdoor) should promote and support different types of play for children’s active engagement, agency, problem solving, curiosity, creativity and exploration. Children learn through play when it is:

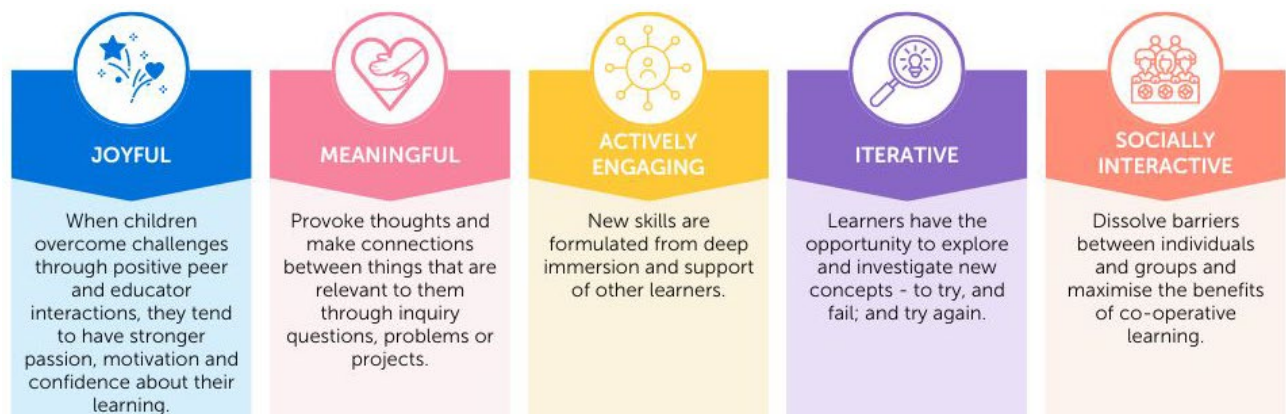


Figure 6: Adapted from [Learning through play: a review of the evidence](#) – learning through play happens when the activity (1) is experienced as joyful, (2) helps children find meaning in what they are doing or learning, (3) involves active, engaged, minds-on thinking, (4) as well as iterative thinking (experimentation, hypothesis testing, etc), and (5) social interaction.

Active learning environments ‘encourage children to explore and interact with the environment to construct meaning and knowledge through their experiences, social interactions and negotiations with others’⁸. They should:

- provide children with a choice of activities and experiences, supporting their decisions, autonomy, initiative, and active participation
- ensure access to outdoor learning environments, including opportunities for nature play
- use real-life, relevant experiences and versatile resources (informational, manipulative, interactive, and natural open-ended materials) to co-construct understanding with children
- offer opportunities for shared, collaborative activities in a supportive social environment
- encourage and support authentic experimentation, creative risk-taking, and multiple forms of creative expression
- foster self-regulation, self-awareness, and value children’s finished products and creative outputs
- respect children's individual needs, including their choice to retreat, observe, or play alone
- address and respectfully challenge socially diverse behaviours and attitudes.

School learning environments

SA Government schools will cultivate world-leading inclusive learning environments, where the physical setting actively supports the learning process. Learners will belong to smaller, more personalised learning communities and neighbourhoods within the broader school setting.

At the site level, school design will create a sense of journey for educators, learners and visitors as they move between internal and external settings of various scale and purpose, crafted to foster community, encourage engagement and use, and spark curiosity about the learning activities taking place through the schools’ educational programs:

- intent on fostering students as innovative and creative learners with the capability to express these qualities as they progress beyond the school into further education or employment
- intentionally designed to draw on the rich array of natural settings and municipal facilities in close physical proximity to the school, while visibly modelling sustainability measures in action
- based on the belief that young people have a range of experiences, thoughts, ideas and perspectives that can enrich decision making processes and outcomes
- infused with the agility afforded by mobile, digital technology in a seamless ‘blended learning’ environment.

At the macro design level, the layout of the school buildings serves to create safe, inclusive and culturally responsive spaces that provide for:

- community gathering
- social interaction
- active and passive recreation
- subject specific and interdisciplinary outdoor learning.

At a micro design level, learning opportunities are enriched with:

- increased connectivity between formal and informal spaces
- seamless transitions between indoor and outdoor environments.

Learners and educators are organised into learning communities supported by the principles of [universal design for learning](#), empowering greater responsibility for their learning, and exercising choice and control over what, where, when, and with whom they learn.

⁸ Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming (pg 64) <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf>

These environments must support and enable:

- collaboration and meaningful discussions among learners, as well as partnership and co-design between educators for planning and teaching
- personalised, flexible learning, through flexible, responsive groupings of learners— individual work, small groups, independent study, and educator facilitated sessions
- opportunities for active, authentic, and holistic learning experiences, including real-world projects, experiential tasks, and learning beyond the classroom
- development of learner self-regulation, self-direction and self-management
- assessment embedded in authentic contexts
- strong connectedness—virtually, locally and globally—across subjects, communities, and future pathways
- seamless access to a wide array of resources including digital tools, information, materials and equipment
- learning anytime, anywhere and with anyone.

Strategic vision for our facility design

Design of education and care facilities must align to the [Strategy for Public Education](#) and:

- meet the functional requirements of the department’s ‘Planning Standards’, detailed in the Generic Functional Briefs ([ECECs](#), and [Schools](#)), enabling successful delivery of the framework and curricula supporting the department’s position on pedagogy
- with the core [Design Principles](#) - community and place, safe and secure, accessible and inclusive, responsive learning environments, and sustainable and climate ready which support education principles and contribute to targets outlined in various department, state and Australian government strategies
- meet compliance approval for ECEC facilities, enabling services to [exceed](#) during rating and assessment against the NQS by the Education Standards Board.

Supporting documents

Appendix A: Alignment with frameworks and strategies

Detailed information supporting the design of education and care facilities to align with pedagogy frameworks and department, State and Australian government strategies are available in [Appendix A](#).

Revision record

Version: v2.0 (DE20/05086)

Edits: Update includes information on education facilities (primary and secondary schools).

Approved by: Executive Director, Infrastructure

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Version: v1.0 (DE20/05086)

Edits: New document replacing the Early Childhood Facilities (birth to age 8) Design Standards & Guidelines.

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