

Preschool outdoor learning environments

Site leaders design guide

OVERARCHING

The principles and practices and learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework drive the design and pedagogical practice of the outdoor learning environment

<http://www.earlyyears.sa.edu.au/pages/EYLF/37220/>

Design Principles	Elements to be promoted	The aim/s
Philosophy and practice of nature play http://www.natureplaysa.org.au/	Unstructured play in natural environments A space that fosters interaction, autonomy, exploration, curiosity, creativity and communication and offered as places for all children and adults to explore together Loose material is available and space for moveable play	Natural, flexible play spaces & materials Improved physical, educational, intellectual and mental wellbeing of young children Play spaces where children can have fun, learn through play in and with nature Playspaces which are accessible to all children and which enable children with disability to access on the same basis as their peers
The curriculum and the children drive the design of the environment – Children’s Voice http://old.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ChildrenSVoice.pdf	Opportunities for children to engage in risk and challenge The opportunity for children to assess risk	High level of engagement in outdoor learning Curriculum / children driving the space NOT the space driving the curriculum / children

Design Principles	Elements to be promoted	The aim/s
<p>Value authentic engagement in the design and decision making process with children, families and the local community</p> <p>http://yoursay.sa.gov.au/better-together</p>	<p>Children and the community highly engaged planning and using (and caring for) the space</p> <p>Ever changing, evolving and developing- initial construction, less is more</p>	<p>Opportunities for families to -connect together as a family with nature</p>
<p>Strengthen communities through the design of culturally appropriate environments, which are contextual to the community</p> <p>http://www.earlyyears.sa.edu.au/pages/Resources/resource/</p>	<p>Provide a wide range of possibilities for children that promote learning and development, are challenging, engender a feeling of security and wellbeing and build a sense of community and belonging (culturally appropriate)</p> <p>Cultural competence</p>	<p>Children are explorers, investigators, problem solvers, collaborators, communicators, negotiators, researchers, playful learners and resilient</p> <p>Strong connections with the broader local indigenous communities</p> <p>Positive community sentiments and sense of ownership</p>
<p>Value sustainable practices</p> <p>http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/Home</p>	<p>Planting for children not for the aesthetics of adults</p> <p>Care and respect for our natural environment</p> <p>An understanding and valuing of sustainable ways of managing resources eg water</p>	<p>Children develop a strong environmental awareness and sustainable practices – stewards for the future</p>
<p>Underpinned by National Quality Framework Principles</p> <p>http://acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/the-national-quality-standard</p>	<p>The rights and best interests of the child are paramount</p> <p>Children are successful, competent and capable learners</p> <p>The principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the National Law</p> <p>Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued</p> <p>The role of parents and families is respected and supported</p> <p>Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services</p>	<p>Environments to reflect children as citizens across communities in South Australia</p> <p>Children have strong agency within outdoor learning environments</p>

Design Principles	Elements to be promoted	The aim/s
<p>Image of the child as capable and competent</p> <p>www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/reimagining-childhood.pdf</p>	<p>Opportunities for children to express the hundred languages</p> <p>Children as citizens from birth</p>	<p>Flexible, responsive environments that engage children from birth and their families</p>
<p>UN convention on the rights of the Child (refer article 29 and 31)</p> <p>http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx</p>	<p><i>The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions or actions that affect the child or children as a group. This holds true whether decisions are made by governmental, administrative or judicial authorities, or by family members.</i></p>	<p>Every child has the right to:</p> <p>leisure, play and the opportunity to participate in cultural and artistic activities</p> <p>an education that fosters respect for the natural environment</p>

KEY ELEMENTS TO BE INCORPORATED

Element	Pedagogy	Practice
Natural Materials (eg wood, bamboo, rocks, bark)	Unstructured play	Less plastic/more nature
Sand environment	Sensory, mathematical, scientific, tactile, textures, flexible, Social development – emotional, collaboration, mixed age groups Individual and group opportunities Open ended possibilities Creativity	As large as possible away from the main entrance Interesting shape with quiet areas (ie not square) Two zones with shape to create nooks and crannies Water access Storage capacity – close by and accessible by children Dappled shade- allowing for sun and rain Varying levels (if possible)
<u>Water</u> To be supplied into the sand environment Creek Rain water tank with a viewing panel re water level Pond	Sensory play - varying textures engaging the senses Supports numeracy and literacy, scientific research and environmental considerations Messy Play	Facilitated by children Sustainability considerations – (possible solar pump) Multiple sources of water
Climbing area for loose parts that can be climbed and moved – logs, sticks, rocks	Flexibility - open ended possibilities Physical development Creativity Children as risk takers and decisions makers	Impact surface (bark chips) Fall zone consideration Connection to the earth / country
Planting trees for future shade	Natural shade	Mature trees

Element	Pedagogy	Practice
Plant trees suitable for physical challenge	Provide opportunities for upper body strength Promote risky play Nature connection	Mature trees
Create varying height across the environment	Perspective of self in space	Consider a mound – with a tunnel Multi-level mound Hedging and edges with uneven lines
Key paths only with the ability for children to create minor paths (goat tracks), concealed pathways, with varying textures, which lead children into special places	Enhances the flexibility of the space and supports the environment to be ever changing	Aesthetically pleasing Less is more
Various plantings	Intimate spaces as well as open spaces Create micro eco systems Plant for learning purposes, eat, pick, manipulate, propagate	Mature plants Local indigenous plants – bush tucker and use in traditional aboriginal ways eg grasses harvested to weave baskets (with or used by local women)
Different sized spaces – spaces for a large number of children and nooks and crannies for small gatherings of children	Promotes social interaction	
Accessibility	Inclusive spaces for all children	Consideration of accessibility for wheelchair and walking aids to facilitate access to and participation in outdoor learning

ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED

Element	Pedagogy	Practice
Slides mounted into a mound / slope	Provide children with opportunity to explore space	Double slide Utilise slope and gradients
Digging patch / dirt / mud kitchen	Varying sensory experiences Messy play that is often not available in the home environment	Water available to the area Distance from areas that need to be maintained as non- messy Avoid direction relationship / distance from building entrances
Swings	Feeling of awe and wonder – high and fast Self-regulation-Rhythmic movement (to and fro) is calming, depending on intensity Movement activities stimulate the vestibular system in the inner ear, which helps the body to know how it is moving and how fast it is moving . Movement develops proprioceptive senses-senses of position and movement of limbs and trunk, sense of effort, sense of force, and sense of heaviness	Placement for observation by educators Ensure sufficient fall zone (refer Australian Standards) Frame to be flexible to accommodate equipment other than swings, preference for double swings Inclusion of a seat (or space for a seat) nearby for observers and children waiting Placement of swings to provide children on the swing with a view of the remainder of the outdoor learning area Provision for hammocks under trees and a wheel chair swing (if required)
Fire	Learn safety and risk Connection with the five senses Often not experienced in the home environment	Safety Staff team component as risk assessors and ability to guide children Contextually appropriate

Element	Pedagogy	Practice
Grass	Sensory Play Suitability for younger children (crawling) Impact attenuating capabilities	Environmentally sustainable Large, open spaces Contextual to community
Amphitheatre (natural or wooden structure)	Connects large groups of children Performing space Dramatic play	Uprights with varying heights Space for an audience – consider circular to promote gathering of groups Natural shade
Defined Bike Tracks	Gross motor development and learning Promote for social interactions	Designed so that it doesn't dominate the space or interrupt the flow of play for other elements Manage equity issues
Music	Literacy Numeracy Creativity	Use of natural materials to make music

ELEMENTS NOT SUPPORTED / RECOMMENDED

Element	Imagery example	Pedagogy
Cementing in rocks		<p>Reduces flexibility in space and very expensive to relocate</p> <p>Rocks to be dug in for stability</p>
Culturally inappropriate items / symbols / materials		<p>Not culturally contextual, does not reflect Australia's Aboriginal people.</p>
Stand-alone slippery dips		<p>Difficult to fix for stability / safety reasons</p> <p>Lack of spatial connection</p>
Rubber Pour Impact Attenuating Surface		<p>Burning hazard for children</p> <p>Not creative / flexible</p> <p>Expensive</p> <p>Difficult to clean and prone to retaining odours</p> <p>Not aesthetically pleasing</p> <p>Promotes a false sense of injury safety – ie designed to reduce head injuries only (not broken limbs)</p>

Element	Imagery example	Pedagogy
Fixed manufactured play equipment		<p>Reduces flexibility in environment and does not offer possibilities for exploratory play opportunities</p> <p>Expensive</p> <p>Promotes repetitive play</p> <p>Children create unsafe ways to use the equipment to try and invoke challenge</p>
Artificial turf		<p>Sustainability practices</p> <p>Cleaning / maintenance issue</p> <p>Not natural</p>
Sand environments located near the verandah area		<p>Slippery on verandah and likely to blow into indoor area, difficult to clean</p>
Items that are “cute” or “brightly coloured”		<p>Imposing adults ideas about childhood</p> <p>Not child initiated</p> <p>Limited use</p> <p>Does not fit with the natural environment</p>
Items that have one purpose		<p>Not flexible</p> <p>Limits learning possibilities</p>

CONSIDERATIONS – ACCESSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Access for children with disabilities should be incorporated in the most natural and unobtrusive way possible
(Elliott S, The Outdoor Playspace Naturally for Children birth to five years, 2008, Pademelon Press)

Key considerations

- Seamless physical access into the natural play space – path systems (gently graded with a firm even surface) with a continuous path of travel, all weather use
- Front-on accessibility for wheel chairs – with sufficient knee room to sit comfortably face on (heights of between 575mm and 640mm from floor to underneath of table / bench, maximum overall height of between 715mm to 780mm) or adjustable
- Garden beds and sensory gardens at wheel chair accessible heights
- Turning circle diameter range 1500mm (small child) 2200mm (adult)
- Seating for carers – extra perches in key areas such as the sand learning environment, among some shrubs, in a cubbyhouse, near the digging patch etc
- Adequate supervision and vision (line of sight)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the process if the upgrade is classified as a **major works project**?

As from 1 July 2015, projects over \$150,000 and less than \$1.0m will be delivered through the Facilities Management Contract. DECD will engage the services of the Facilities Management Contractor (FMC) who will be responsible to manage the delivery of the project. The FMC will engage the architectural services for the project. The site leader and the Early Childhood Leader (ECL) will be a key stakeholder throughout the design phase of the project and will be required to work closely with the design team including the Facilities Manager and landscape architect.

2. What is the **minor works process for Preschool Outdoor Learning Environments projects**?

- Site leaders will liaise with their Early Childhood Leader (ECL) prior to submitting a Project Commencement Form (PCF) to the Asset Support Centre (ASC).
- Following approval of the project, the ASC will raise a FAMIS job allowing the project to proceed.
- Site leader will liaise with their Facilities Manager (FM) who will engage a landscape architect.
- As a key stakeholder within the design team, the site leader will consult with their children, families, and community to develop the scope of works for the outdoor learning project.
- In consultation with the site leader and the ECL, the Landscape Architect will develop concept plans for the outdoor learning area.

3. What is the role of the Facilities Manager

- The Facilities Manager is appointed to manage and deliver the project ensuring the budget is maintained, the project is delivered in an appropriate and timely manner and is also responsible to mitigate any risk to the project.
- Once the final design of the concept plan has been achieved and signed-off by the site leader, the FM will proceed to tender to engage a contractor for the construction of the project.
- The FM will manage and monitor the project to ensure successful delivery of the project.

4. Where can I get ideas and support to design the OLE?

Early Childhood Leader, Outdoor Learning Area Project demonstration sites, Outdoor Learning Area Project [documentary](#)

5. Who signs off on a design and when?

Once the Landscape Architect provides the final design of the concept plan, the site leader in collaboration with the Early Childhood Leader, is required to sign-off the concept plan. The Facilities Manager is then responsible to manage the tendering process to engage a construction contractor.

6. Who is responsible for quality of the work that is undertaken?

The Facilities Manager will manage and monitor the project to ensure that all DECD design standards and legislative requirements are met and the quality of the work is of an appropriate standard.