

Inclusive Design Principles

Best Practice Reference Document

DRAFT - Version 1.0

June, 2024

schoolinfrastructure.nsw.gov.au

| Inclusive Design Principles

Purpose of this document

This document is provided as a design framework to ensure new schools and upgrades fully incorporate the principles of inclusive design.

Planning for new schools should be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders including the Department of Planning and Environment, Transport for NSW and the relevant local council and community, as appropriate.

This document is intended for use by a range of stakeholders including internal SINSW teams, urban planners and designers, developers, other government agencies and local councils.

It is important to note that this document is not intended to be used as a benchmark by which existing schools are assessed. This document provides insights and guidance on key design considerations for Inclusivity.

Version	Date	Name of Approver(s)	Notes
1.0	03/06/2024	Refer to consultation schedule	Draft - for consultation

How to use this document

This document provides a process and decision-making framework for Inclusive Design.

The following document provides a definition of Inclusive Design, insights and provides an outline of key design criteria and design principles to be embedded in design processes, to ensure infrastructure aligns with the inclusive expectation of the Department.

Related documents

Legal and Government

[International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)

NSW [Education Act 1990](#)

NSW [Disability Inclusion Act 2014](#)

Section 22 (education) and 23 (Access to Premises) of [the Disability Discrimination Act](#) (DDA)

The [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)

[Disability \(Access to Premises\) Standards 2010](#)

[Building Code of Australia](#)

[Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#)

United Nations [Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities Article 24 – Education](#)

UNESCO [Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action](#)

[National Disability Agreement](#)

[Child Safe Standards](#)

[Australia's Disability Strategy](#) 2021 – 2031

[NSW Disability Inclusion Plan](#)

[NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#)

[2016 Parliamentary Enquiry](#)

Department of Education

[DoE Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#) 2021 - 2025

[Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#)

[Disability Strategy 2019](#)

[Inclusive Education Statement for Students with disability](#)

[Inclusive Education for students with disability](#) Policy

[Student Behavior Policy](#)

[Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy](#)

[Staff Wellbeing Strategy 2024 – 2027](#)

This document forms part of the Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines (EFSG) suite and is to be read in conjunction with:

[EFSG Accessibility Checklist](#)

[Our Commitment to Sustainability – Goals to 2030](#)

[Standardised Design Principles](#)

[DoE Pattern Book](#)

[Green Star Accreditation, GBCA](#)

Inclusive Design Principles

Document Intent

This document is intended to be reviewed, updated and improved regularly as additional information becomes available and as our design thinking matures.

Disability runs across race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation. Different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping and unique forms of discrimination, disadvantage and marginalisation.

Inclusivity, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also considers the following protected characteristics:

- Race
- Sex
- Disability
- Age
- Colour
- Language
- Religion
- Political or other opinion
- National or social origin
- Property
- Birth
- Nationality
- Marital status
- Place of residence within a country; or
- Sexual orientation

Inclusive education means all students, regardless of disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or faith, can access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs. Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices¹.

This document, in its introductory form, focuses on disability, however, will be broadened in future iterations, to explore and include other areas of inclusivity.

Disclaimer

These Guidelines help design teams easily access information and share successful project methodologies to ensure compliance with Inclusive Design principles.

Following these principles does not irrevocably replace any project obligations to deliver against Educational Facilities Standards and Guideline requirements.

The information within this document once downloaded/ printed/ exported will be classed as an uncontrolled copy. Its currency must be checked by visiting the EFSG website prior to using the information for any purposes.

List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DRC	Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
EFSG	Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
DSE	Disability Standards for Education
SSP	Schools for Specific Purposes
SINSW	School Infrastructure NSW
GBCA	Green Building Council Australia

¹ [Inclusive Education Statement for students with](#)

[disability](#)

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Inclusive Design Principles

1.0 Vision for Inclusive Design

The Department's Disability Strategy sets out the Department's vision:

We aspire to build an education system in which children with disability thrive academically, develop good physical, mental and emotional health, and gain the skills to live a fulfilling, independent life post-school.

Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices. Inclusion means education environments that adapt the design and physical structures, teaching methods, and curriculum as well as the culture, policy and practice of education environments so that they are accessible to all students without discrimination².

In alignment with the Department's Disability Strategy and Inclusive Education Statement for students with disability, the vision for SINSW is:

To design and build schools that enable inclusivity, equity and dignity, supporting the operationalisation of inclusive practices.

It is widely understood that inclusive schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes³. Every student should be given the opportunity to meet their full potential academically, emotionally and socially.

Our three strategic directions, which will enable our vision are:

Inclusivity	Equity	Dignity
The process of providing equal access to opportunities and resources	Removing bias and recognising past imbalances, reducing the effects of previous discrimination	All people are recognised for their inherent humanity and treated ethically

Fig. 1 SINSW Strategic Directions

² Inclusive Education for Students with Disability

³ Salamanca Statement 1994

2.0 Introduction to Inclusive Design

2.1 Defining Inclusive Design

Inclusive design is a design methodology focused on people. It provides a framework to understand the needs and wants of end users. It considers the widest range of human potential and experience and translates these into design requirements.

Inclusive design in schools seeks to create buildings and environments where everyone belongs and removes the physical, psychological and sensory barriers that create effort and separation. It results in everyone being able to participate equally, confidently, and independently in everyday activities.

It is important to acknowledge that Inclusive Design is the result of [an ongoing process of continuous reflection, evaluation and reform](#)⁴. As part of this process, it is key to recognise past imbalances to reduce the effects of previous discrimination and to amplify the voices of people with disability, specifically their lived experiences in education settings.

- Disability is indiscriminate
- Disability is dynamic
- Disability is constant

2.2 Who are we designing for?

The Department is committed to building an inclusive education system, one in which [every student is known, valued and cared for and receives a high-quality education that enables them to excel](#)⁵.

There are around **790,000**⁶ students within the NSW public school system, it is estimated that **206,000**⁷ students have a disability, which represents 26% of all students.

NSW Department of Education also employs 120,000 people, around 2.5% (3,000) have disability (disclosed). Government is working towards a target of 5.6% of the workforce.

The Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy outlines that [we strive for greater representation so our workplaces represent the communities we serve. We should represent those who have traditionally not had an equal seat at the table](#)⁸.

Disability is diverse, unique and multi-dimensional, broadly disabilities can be categorised in terms of underlying health condition, impairment, activity limitations, participation restrictions and environmental factors⁹:

- **Psychosocial Disability** – a disability arising from a mental health issue.
- **Developmental Delay** - child who takes longer than expected to develop physical, emotional, social, communication and/or thinking skills
- **Neurodevelopmental disorders**
 - Intellectual disability
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
 - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
 - Communication disorders – language, speech, and fluency
 - Specific learning disorder – ability to process or perceive information.
 - Motor disorder – coordination and



⁴ [Inclusive Education for students with disability](#)

⁵ [Inclusive Education for students with disability](#)

⁶ [Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023](#)

⁷ [More support classes in mainstream schools](#)

⁸ [Diversity, Belonging and Inclusion Strategy](#)

⁹ [NDS Disability types and descriptions](#)

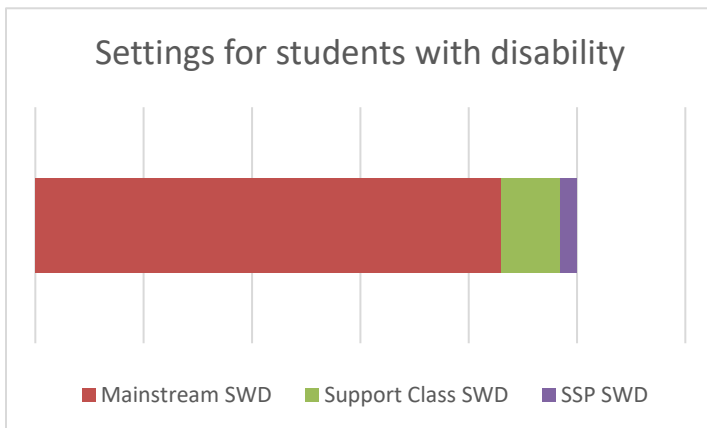
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movement

- **Physical Disability** – mobility and dexterity
- **Acquired brain injury** - e.g. cerebral palsy or neurological disease
- **Neurological Disability** – nervous system and / or spinal cord
- **Vision Impairment** - can be mild impairment or total blindness
- **Hearing impairment** – impairment, loss of deafness, partial or total inability to hear speech and sounds.
- **Deafblind (dual sensory)** – combined vision and hearing impairments
- **Speech Language Impairment** – speech, sounds or understanding language.

This large, diverse and growing group of people access and use SINSW facilities every day.

Inclusivity is critical across all sites and buildings, not just support settings. 86% of students with disability are learning in a mainstream classroom in a mainstream school¹⁰. Approximately 2.5 -3% of our staff also share they have a disability.

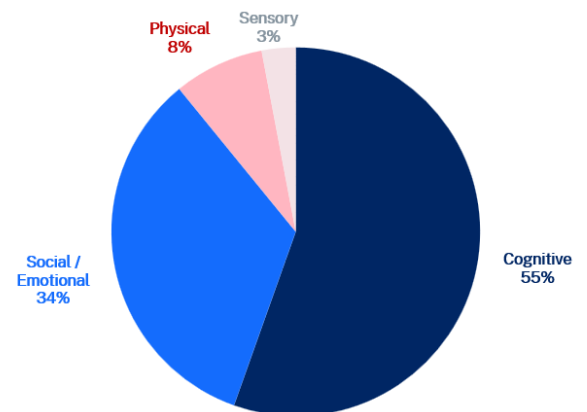


Fix. 2 Setting types for students with disability

1.3 Current limitations

There are accessibility requirements within the Building Code of Australia (BCA), and referenced Australian Standards, however there are only provisions for **physical** and **sensory** disability, which does not represent the needs of **89%** of our students with disability, including cognitive (55%), social, and emotional (34%) disability.

This highlights the need to establish an Inclusive Design Framework, which underpins a design process and decision-making strategy to ensure we meet the departmental intent of inclusivity, by successfully translating policy into design.



Fix. 3 Breakdown of student disability type in NSW schools

¹⁰ [More support classes in mainstream schools](#)

3.0 Key Design Requirements

The Plan for NSW public education requires school infrastructure **that meets the needs of a growing population and supports improved student outcomes**¹¹. It acknowledges that **driving equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences for all learners and staff is critical to the development of an outstanding education system**, there is also a focus on ensuring students feel **safe, included and supported**.

SINSW builds and manages one of the largest property portfolios in Australia, therefore we have an opportunity to contribute to positively influencing outcomes for people with disability in NSW, who navigate to through and from schools every day.

Inclusive Design ensures we achieve balance between operational requirements and user functional needs. Inclusive solutions should be functional, innovative and cost effective. This Inclusive Design Framework is focused on allowing participation on the same basis for everyone.

3.1 Principles of Inclusive Design in NSW schools

The following principles apply to all new buildings and upgrades.

1. **New and upgraded infrastructure is fit for purpose**
Students and School Staff are able to choose and remain in schools of their choice, regardless of disability and are not required to make changes based on infrastructure limitations.
2. **Reduced reliance on integration funding over time**
The provision of more inclusive infrastructure over time will reduce the need for integration projects to address infrastructure limitations

in the future as buildings age, by considering longevity and potential future needs of occupants.

3. **Everyone feels they belong within their local school community of choice**
Students feel confident, safe and emotionally connected to their built environment and are not impeded or excluded by the infrastructure
4. **Students with disability are best able to meet their full potential**
Infrastructure provision enables equity, dignity and independence for all users, providing occupants with the infrastructure supports needed to participate in learning equally.
5. **SINSW work as effective and meaningful allies**
Responsibility for increasing awareness of bias and implementing inclusive design is shared by all employees and demonstrated through building well considered, functional, innovative and inclusive infrastructure.

3.2 Barriers to Success

There are some key factors that might prevent the successful implementation of Inclusive Design. Project teams should ensure barriers are considered at early project stages, and solutions are established and maintained throughout the project lifecycle, to ensure at construction, infrastructure still meets the requirements of this framework.

Decision-making should consider the following barriers to inclusive outcomes:

- **Scope**
Ensure students with disability have been considered in decisions around project scoping, i.e. where there is a significant upgrade, has inclusive design been considered across the site and have support unit upgrades been included to ensure all student benefit from updated facilities aligned with and accessible to

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mainstream provision.

- **BCA compliance**

Compliance with the accessibility requirements of the Building Code of Australia is not synonymous with an inclusive outcome - compliance is a minimum regulatory and legal requirement and should be considered as such.

- **Project Constraints**

Projects to be mindful of the impact on occupants with disability when projects face constraints. Reducing inclusivity provisions should be due to exceptional circumstances only, with transparent decision-making which documents a full understanding of the impact on occupants with disability, with well-considered mitigation measures.

- **Policy**

Inclusive infrastructure is a requirement, not an aspiration. It recognises and responds to the diverse needs of building users. By implementing inclusive design requirements, we ensure we are meeting departmental objectives to make inclusive education real¹².

- **Practice & Culture**

Inclusive design is a process that requires us to act in the pursuit of equity throughout the design process. This involves meaningful engagement with people with disability, amplifying voices of people with lived experience and being an effective ally.

¹² [Inclusive Education for students with disability](#)

4.0 Inclusive Design Methodology and Process

Design requirements should be developed using evidence-based practices. This framework identifies an inclusive design methodology and process to ensure technical requirements consider evolving and changing policy, legal requirements, research, data and our values.

4.1 Methodology for developing inclusive standards

This methodology will be used to develop future strategic requirements, design principles, design requirements, technical requirements and standardised approaches, which will be incorporated within the Educational Facilities, Standards and Guidelines (EFSG). This approach will ensure our design requirements are functional, innovative, progressive and cost effective.

Research

The research phase is the development of an evidence base for design recommendations. This will guide decisions around inclusivity. It is key within the research phase to provide recognition to the voices and experiences of people with disability. This phase includes, but is not limited to:

- Review of relevant strategy, policy, and legal requirements
- Benchmarking of international best practice
- Stakeholder engagement process to develop and agree strategic requirements and key objectives
- Visits to relevant settings to observe, collect data and speak to building users.
- Ideation workshops, to develop new approaches and check understanding of key issues
- Surveys to gather key data

Review

The review phase allows for analysis, interpretation and development of high level design principles (the 'why') which describe how the strategic requirements will be achieved. This phase includes, but is not limited to:

- Development of design principles, based on strategic requirements.
- Analysis and amalgamation of policy, strategic requirements, interview and site visit data, surveys and workshop outputs
- Evaluation and comparison of international best practice

Embed

This phase provides the foundation for the implementation of new standards or technical requirements. This phase includes, but is not limited to:

- Engagement of internal and external project teams, to ensure there is an understanding of inclusive practices and familiarise with objectives and design principles
- Representation of ideas across departmental and external teams, seek feedback to incorporate into technical solutions

Design

At design phase, design requirements (the 'what') and technical solutions (the 'how') are developed, tested and implemented into the project design process. This phase includes, but is not limited to:

- Test ideas with project teams
- Collation of all data and feedback
- Development of design solutions, technical standards, and standardized approaches, which offer design solutions for meeting strategic requirements and design principles
- Implement early and effective design interventions.

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Evaluate

An Inclusive Design process requires regular reflective practices and continuous improvement, this phase involves:

- Critical and ongoing analysis of design principles, requirements, design requirements and technical solutions
- Identification of areas of improvement
- Incorporation of feedback from internal and external stakeholders on implementation
- Feedback from building occupants, including staff and students with disability
- Impact assessment of any changes in legislation or policies
- 'Pulse check' of implementation on live projects
- Identify and propose research required



Fig. 4 Inclusive Design Process

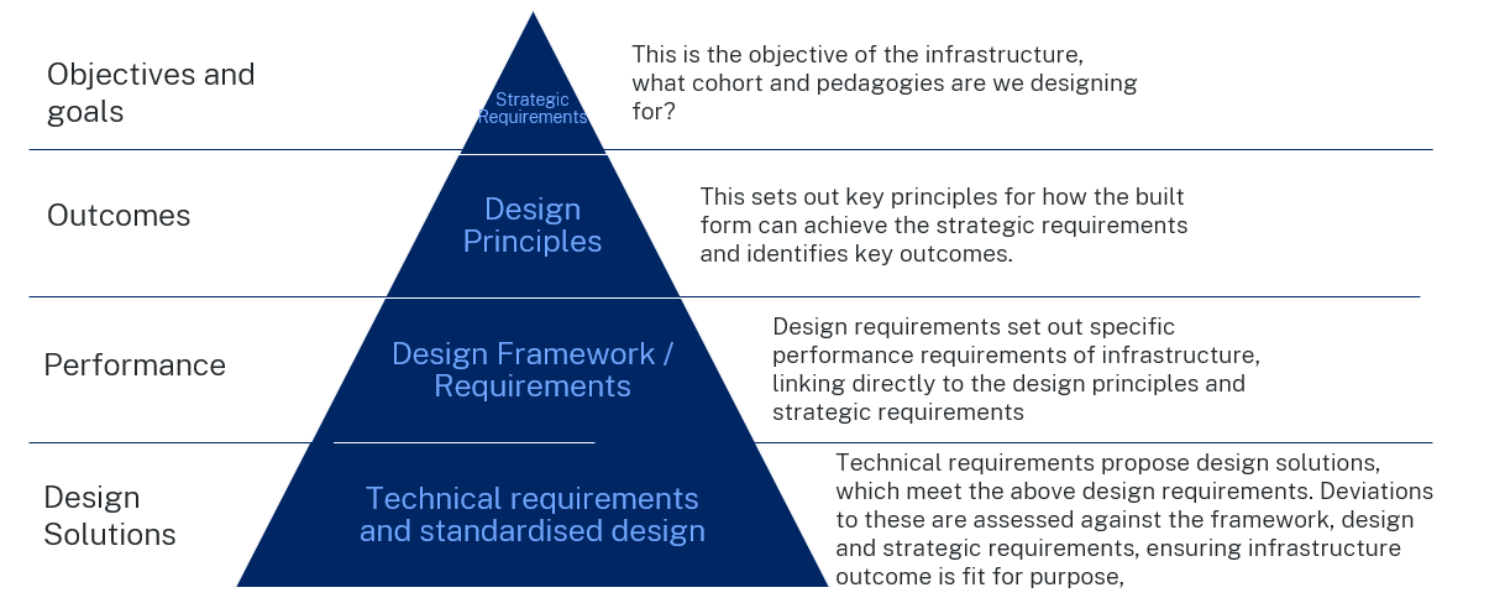


Fig. 5 Design Framework information hierarchy for project decision-making

5.0 Support Units

5.1 Design Intent of Support Units

Support Units and classes provide specialist and intensive support for eligible students with a diagnosed intellectual or physical disability, autism spectrum disorder, mental health diagnosis, sensory processing disorder or behavior disorders. Approximately 11% of NSW students with disability attend support classes¹³

Students in support classes are afforded the same opportunity as students in mainstream classes to participate in the schools and community activities, such as school sports and assemblies. There is flexibility for support students to undertake some learning in mainstream classes.

Support units need to be flexible, to accommodate diverse and changing needs of occupants over the lifetime of the building.

5.2 Design Principles for Support Units

The following principles apply to all new and upgraded support classes, units and hubs:

1. Design reinforces students are full participating members of the student cohort

Reinforced connection to mainstream, to support sense of belonging and reduce opportunities for segregation.

2. Design to reflect mainstream settings

Supporting transition to and from support units to mainstream, providing familiarity and equity in provision

3. Support equitable, dignified and safe transitions to, from and on site

Provide choice and flexibility in master planning and design to accommodate a variety of needs and preferences

4. Provide opportunity for integrated play and social activity

Encourage development of social skills and interaction with mainstream peers to avoid negative social impacts of segregation

5. Provide convenient, independent and dignified access to a variety of sanitary facilities

considering needs of a wide range of occupants to ensure appropriate sanitary facilities are not a barrier to school attendance.

5.3 Methodology for developing design future requirements and technical standards

Design requirements are currently embedded within the standardised support unit design.

[INSERT UPDATED LINK TO STANDARDISED SUPPRT UNIT / PATTERN BOOK]

design requirements and technical standards are under development. Standards will be developed in line with the Inclusive Design methodology and process.

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6.0 Schools for Specific Purposes

Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) are schools that support eligible students with a diagnosed intellectual or physical disability, autism, mental health considerations, sensory processing disorder or behaviour disorders. Approximately 3% of NSW students with disability attend SSPs¹⁴

SSPs provide intensive levels of support in a specialised setting and a range of support services, depending on the needs of the students. They also have smaller class sizes due to the student's higher needs, and they support students from Kindergarten to Year 12.

SSPs review the placement of each of their students annually or when required. These reviews consider all aspects of a student's personalised learning and support, including whether or not the current placement is best meeting their learning and support needs.

6.1 Design Principles for SSPs

The following principles apply to all new buildings and upgrades.



Demonstrate inclusive design practices at all stages

All needs and strengths are included and welcomed.



Focus on achieving outcomes

Learning growth, wellbeing, and independence are fostered in all school spaces.



Reflect any other school

Eliminate isolated and unique design, demonstrate likeness to other schools.



Reflect the 'cohort'

Adapt to the needs and strengths of the student group, and allow for change.



Embed Safety in Design

Provide key safety in learning spaces to all students and staff that balances user requirements and operations.



Promotes Staff Wellbeing

Design enables staff to effectively undertake their work, and provides supportive spaces to allow staff to rest and recover and positively promote wellbeing

6.2 Methodology for developing design future requirements, technical standards and standardised design

design requirements, technical standards and a standardized design for SSPs' are currently under development.

Standards have been developed in line with the Inclusive Design methodology and process.

The SSP design guide is expected to be issued in early 2025.

¹⁴ [More support classes in mainstream schools](#)

7.0 Process of engagement

7.1 Process of Engagement

The following stakeholders have been engaged, as part of the development of this document.

[Remove Once stakeholder engagement complete]

Stakeholders include:

Team Name	Representative	Consultation	Key comments
Inclusion & Wellbeing	Laura Milkins	1. Sent for review 19/06	
SINSW Heritage	Duncan Jones, Manager Heritage		
SINSW Design Studio	Megan Boazman, Director SI Design Studio / DaIS	Sent for review 19/06	
SINSW Sustainability	Meg Lupton, Director, Sustainability Danielle Fogarty, A/Director, Sustainability	Sent for review 19/06	
Inclusive Education	Louise Farrell, Director Inclusive Education	Sent for review 19/06	
Behavior and Student participation	Trisha Ladogna Director Behaviour and Student Participation Todd Douglass, Senior Policy Officer	Sent for review 19/06	
Disability Strategy	Beth Flatley Sarah Hanson Director, Disability Strategy	Sent for review 19/06	
Disability Learning and Support	Robert Goodman, Leader Disability Learning and Support	Sent for review 19/06	
Student Health and Mental Wellbeing	Karen Hodge, Director, Student Health & Mental Wellbeing	Sent for review 19/06	
Culture, Diversity & Talent, Disability & DIAP	Chris Meaney, Disability and DIAP lead	Sent for review 19/06	

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Document Control

Instruction for author: [Please list all pertinent codes and standards this principle relates to]

The design principle is a living document and will be reviewed regularly along side with:

- National Construction Code (every 3 years)
-
-

Superseded documents

This design principles supersedes the below design frameworks:

Design Framework name – Version 1.0 June 2023

Design Framework name – Version 1.4 October 2020

For more information on Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines, Technical Standards and a glossary, please visit:
education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/efsg

Appendix and Related Documents

[REFER TO SEPARATE DOCUMENT / TABLE]



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