

Physical Environment Policy



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| Document Title | Physical Environment Policy | Version | 3 |
| Date Approved | April 2024 | Date for Review | April 2027 |
| Warning - Ensure you are using the latest version of this policy. | | | |
| DCC Network/All Organisation Information/DCC Policies/Quality Area 3-Physical Environment | | | |

1. Policy Statement

River Region Early Education recognises that all children and workers have the right to experience quality education and care in a safe and healthy environment, be it physical, emotional, or social. Children and workers can be protected from harm and hazard by ensuring that physical environments are sufficient, inclusive, well-maintained, and facilitate supervision.

Feedback from River Region Early Education families indicates they value a physical environment that has a variety of play and quiet spaces for their children that encourage imagination, independence and risk-taking. Families say they would like spaces that accommodate sensory needs and encourage engagement with the natural environment.

2. Rationale

Education and Care Services National Regulations require Approved Providers to ensure their premises are safe, sufficient for the needs of children and maintained so they are clean and in good repair. This includes requirements for premises, furniture and equipment, fencing, laundry, toilet, nappy change and hygiene facilities, indoor and outdoor space and outdoor shade and natural environment, ventilation and natural light, administrative space, and premises designed to facilitate supervision. Regulation also requires Approved Providers to have policies and procedures in relation to providing a child safe environment, and for these to be followed, kept available, and for families to be notified of changes.

In addition, Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Regulations require a venue management plan for mobile education and care services that are provided on premises that do not comply with these regulations. NSW Work Health and Safety Regulation requires businesses to ensure premises maintain worker health and safety.

This policy gives guidance on the design, construction, and modification of indoor and outdoor premises, and how they are to be cleaned and maintained.

This policy forms part of a series of policies that contribute to Education and Care Services National Regulation 168 h) requirement for policies regarding providing a child safe environment. These policies include:

- NQS2.24 Child Safe Supervision Policy
- NQS2.60 Child Safety and Protection Policy
- NQS4.34 Staff Training and Development Policy
- NQS4.35 Recruitment and Selection Policy
- NQS4.36 Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Policy
- NQS4.38 Staffing Arrangements Policy
- NQS7.45 Code of Conduct Policy

For more information about:

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- First aid facilities, refer to *NQS2.11 Incident Injury Illness and Trauma Policy*.
- Emergency plans and floor plans, refer to *NQS2.80 Emergency Management and Evacuation Policy*, and
- Nappy change and toileting, refer to *NQS2.13 Nappy Change and Toileting Policy*.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, including students and trainees, volunteers, and Board members.

4. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the Board as Approved Provider to ensure that:

- Premises and all equipment and furniture used in providing the education and care service are safe, clean and in good repair,
- Any outdoor space used by children at the service premises is enclosed by a fence or barrier that is of a height and design that children preschool age or under cannot go through, over or under it,
- Each child being educated and cared for by the service has access to sufficient furniture, materials and developmentally appropriate equipment suitable for the education and care of that child,
- Services have laundry facilities, or access to, for dealing with soiled clothing, nappies and linen, including hygienic facilities for storage prior to their disposal or laundering, that are adequate and appropriate for the needs of the service,
- For each child being educated and cared for by the service, the service premises has at least 3.25 square metres of unencumbered indoor space and at least 7 square metres of unencumbered outdoor space,
- Adequate, developmentally and age-appropriate toilet, washing and drying facilities are provided for use by children being educated and cared for by the service and their location and design enable safe use and convenient access by the children,
- The indoor spaces used by children at the service premises are well ventilated, have adequate natural light, and are maintained at a temperature that ensures the safety and wellbeing of children,
- Where a service educates and cares for children who wear nappies, adequate and appropriate hygienic facilities are provided for nappy changing that includes at least one properly constructed nappy changing bench for children aged under three years and hand cleansing facilities for educators in the immediate vicinity of the nappy change area,
- Outdoor spaces provided at the service premises allow children to explore and experience the natural environment and include adequate shaded areas to protect children from overexposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun,
- An adequate area or areas are available at the service premises for the purposes of conducting the administrative functions, consulting with parents of children, and conducting private conversations,
- The premises (including toilets and nappy change facilities) are designed and maintained in a way that facilitates supervision of children at all times, having regard to the need to maintain the rights and dignity of the children,
- Children being educated and cared for by the service are provided with an environment that is free from the use of tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol,

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- Venue management plans are approved that describe how the safety and well-being of children at mobile education and care service premises will be ensured despite the premises not complying with specified provisions of the Regulation,
- Reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that the design and layout of premises, equipment and learning areas enable children with disabilities to access and participate,
- An appropriate number of suitably equipped first aid kits are kept having regard to the number of children being educated and cared for by the service that are easily recognisable and readily accessible to adults,
- Copies of this policy and procedures are readily accessible to employees and volunteers, and are available for inspection by families,
- Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that employees and volunteers understand their responsibilities and follow the requirements of the policy and procedures, and
- Families are notified at least 14 days before changing the policy or procedures if the changes will affect the fees charged or the way they are collected or significantly impact the service's education and care of children or significantly impact the family's ability to utilise the service.

It is the responsibility of the General Manager to:

- Carry out or delegate the responsibilities of the Board as listed above,
- Ensure that any new premises or renovations to existing premises comply with regulations including disability discrimination law, local, state and federal building regulations and the Building Code of Australia in relation to fire, ventilation, lighting and safety glass,
- Ensure that the physical environment of premises minimises opportunities for child abuse to occur,
- Ensure that premises have appropriate and hygienic areas for food preparation,
- Ensure that premises are provided with consistently maintained fire safety measures that are compliant with law and regulation,
- Ensure that equipment and resources that may pose a risk to children meet Australian Standards,

It is the responsibility of the Business Services Manager to ensure that:

- Fire safety measures, including fire extinguishers, are checked by a third-party specialist every six months,
- Electrical equipment operated in conditions likely to cause damage is regularly checked by a competent person and a record kept, and
- A regular cleaning and maintenance schedule is created and maintained that includes pest control, garden and playground maintenance, indoor cleaning, and fire and electrical safety.

It is the responsibility of nominated supervisors and supervisors to:

- Ensure that risk assessments related to the physical environment are completed and any actions undertaken,
- Ensure that daily, quarterly, biannual, and annual safety checks and audits are completed and recorded, and any actions undertaken, including maintenance requests,
- Ensure that current Safety Data Sheets for their service are easily accessible,
- Ensure that employees are supported to safely store, use, and dispose of any chemicals and hazardous equipment in line with manufacturer's instructions and keep them inaccessible to children at all times, and

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- Ensure that first aid kits are easily accessible and reviewed regularly.

It is the responsibility of educators to:

- Create varied and flexible learning spaces that reflect the strengths, culture, languages, interests, and capabilities of children and their communities and encourage imaginative play, independence and supported risk-taking,
- Ensure learning spaces minimise opportunities for child abuse to occur and accommodate sensory needs,
- Incorporate the natural environment in the planning and organisation of outdoor learning spaces and experiences,
- Ensure that children can be adequately supervised at all times, and
- Support children to understand safety in the physical environment and care for resources.

It is the responsibility of employees to:

- Identify any hazard that poses a risk to the health and safety of children and adults in accordance with *NQS4.50 Workplace Health and Safety Policy*,
- Ensure that any chemicals and hazardous equipment are safely stored, used, and disposed of in line with manufacturer's instructions, and kept inaccessible to children at all times,
- Maintain the integrity of door and gate locks, latches and codes and notify a supervisor or the General Manager if this has been compromised, and
- Ensure the environment remains smoke-free, including from vapes and e-cigarettes.

5. Definitions

Reasonable adjustments – Changes to a policy, practice, procedure, program or environment that enables a person with disability to access and participate in the service on the same basis as others. An adjustment will be 'reasonable' unless the provider can show that making the adjustment would impose an unjustifiable hardship on them. A failure to make reasonable adjustments can result in discrimination occurring against a person with disability under the Disability Discrimination Act.

6. Guidelines

a) Design and layout of premises and learning areas

The design and layout of existing, new and renovated premises used for the provision of centre-based education and care will meet law and regulations¹, including the following:

- Any outdoor space used by children at the service premises is enclosed by a fence or barrier that is of a height and design that children preschool age or under cannot go through, over or under it,
- Services have laundry facilities, or access to, for dealing with soiled clothing, nappies and linen, including hygienic facilities for storage prior to their disposal or laundering, that are adequate and appropriate for the needs of the service,
- For each child being educated and cared for by the service, the service premises has at least 3.25 square metres of unencumbered indoor space and at least 7 square metres of unencumbered outdoor space,

¹ Mobile education and care services are allowed a service waiver under Supplementary Provisions for certain regulations related to environment. See next page for more details.

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- Adequate, developmentally and age-appropriate toilet, washing and drying facilities are provided for use by children being educated and cared for by the service and their location and design enable safe use and convenient access by the children,
- The indoor spaces used by children at the service premises are well ventilated, have adequate natural light, and are maintained at a temperature that ensures the safety and wellbeing of children,
- Where a service educates and cares for children who wear nappies, adequate and appropriate hygienic facilities are provided for nappy changing that includes at least one properly constructed nappy changing bench for children aged under three years and hand cleansing facilities for educators in the immediate vicinity of the nappy change area,
- Outdoor spaces provided at the service premises allow children to explore and experience the natural environment and include adequate shaded areas to protect children from overexposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun,
- An adequate area or areas are available at the service premises for the purposes of conducting the administrative functions, consulting with parents of children, and conducting private conversations,
- The premises (including toilets and nappy change facilities) are designed and maintained in a way that facilitates supervision of children at all times, having regard to the need to maintain the rights and dignity of the children, and
- The premises will allow equitable access for children and adults with disabilities or reasonable adjustments will be made.

Mobile Service Venue Management Plans

The Mobile Service completes a Venue Management Plan for each venue using a NSW Education template in line with Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Regulations to identify additional controls where National Law provisions cannot be met due to venues not complying with certain regulations. Venue Management Plans:

- Must be approved by the Regulatory Authority, including after any changes or modifications,
- Include consideration of regulations 80 (weekly menu), and 104-110 and 112-115 (physical environment), and
- Are reviewed annually or after an incident or change to venue premises.

Calculation of unencumbered space

The number of children used in calculating unencumbered space does not include:

- a child or 2 or more children from the same family who are being educated and cared for at a centre-based service in an emergency for a period of not more than two consecutive days on which the service operates and where this will not affect the health, safety and wellbeing of all the children attending the service as per Regulation 123.

In calculating the area of 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,

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- any other space that is not suitable for children, and
- the area of a kitchen unless the kitchen is primarily to be used by children as part of an educational program provided by the service.

The area of a verandah may be included in calculating the area of indoor space only:

- with the written approval of the Regulatory Authority, and
- if it has not been included in calculating the area of outdoor space.

In calculating the area of 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, and
- an area of verandah that has been included in the calculation for indoor space.

Natural outdoor environment

Outdoor learning spaces are set up to provide a blend of natural areas, environmental features and plants to interest children in learning about nature and its elements and foster an appreciation of the natural world.

- Natural areas may incorporate plants, trees, rocks, mud, sand, edible gardens, open spaces, and other elements from nature.
- This includes unstructured spaces and activities for creative learning and spontaneous play and elements to challenge children and encourage age and developmentally appropriate risk-taking,
- *NQS3.20F Outdoor Physical Environment Risk Assessment* and individual risk assessments for new and high-risk experiences, equipment, and learning spaces are completed to minimise risks to children,
- Controls are put in place for any outdoor equipment higher than 50cm that can be climbed by a child, such as placement over soft fall or increased supervision,
- Learning experiences make use of shade where the UV rating is 3 or higher, and
- Children have access to drinking water at all times.

Separation of high-risk areas and items

Children's access to high-risk areas, such as kitchens, unsupervised areas, and storage areas is managed by:

- Using child-safe locks and latches, including key pads requiring a set code, on gates and doors,
- Changing codes after any security breach, including an enrolled child becoming aware of a code,
- Installing door handles out of reach of children on doors that do not have a key pad and requiring these doors to remain closed at all times, and
- Having separate areas for storage of hazardous items, including chemicals, laundry, appliances, and heavy items.

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Tobacco-free environment

River Region Early Education premises are tobacco-free, as outlined in *NQS4.36 Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Policy*.

NSW Smoke-free Environment Law and Regulation:

- Requires childcare facilities to be smoke-free,
- Prohibits smoke, including from vapes or e-cigarettes, within 10 metres of children's play equipment in an outdoor public space and within 4 metres of any pedestrian access to a building, and
- Requires signage to be displayed that includes the smoking prohibited symbol, the words 'no smoking', a reference to the Act and that penalties apply, unless persons would reasonably be expected to know, by custom or otherwise, that smoking is not permitted, and in which persons do not usually smoke.

b) Identification of hazards and maintenance

Each service completes risk assessments at least annually to identify hazards in the physical environment and controls to minimise the risk to the safety and wellbeing of children and adults using the following templates or their equivalent:

- *NQS3.20E Indoor Physical Environment Risk Assessment*
- *NQS3.20F Outdoor Physical Environment Risk Assessment*

Premises, equipment and furniture are kept safe, clean and in good repair through a hazard identification, risk management and maintenance procedures as outlined in *NQS4.40 Workplace Health and Safety Policy*.

This is supported through periodic and regular safety checks and audits, including:

- Annual completion of NQS3.20B SunSmart Shade Audit,
- Bi-annual completion of NQS 3.20A Building and Equipment Audit (quarterly completion for Mobile service),
- Quarterly completion of NQS2.15B Sleep Area Audit,
- Quarterly completion of NQS3.20C Hot Water Checklist,
- Quarterly completion of NQS2.11 A8 First Aid Checklists,
- Daily completion of NQS3.20D Daily Safety Checklists

Cleaning and hygiene

The cleaning and hygiene of facilities, equipment, and resources is guided by *NQS2.10 Hygiene and Infection Control Policy*.

General maintenance schedule

Administration is responsible for a general maintenance schedule that includes:

- Mowing and garden maintenance, including gutter cleaning (monthly),
- Pest inspections and treatment (twice a year),
- Fire equipment inspections (twice a year),
- Carpet and upholstery cleaning (twice a year),
- Top up of soft fall and sand in outdoor learning environments (twice a year),
- Testing and tagging of electrical equipment (annually for medium/high-risk items), and
- Air conditioning servicing (annually).

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c) Chemicals and hazardous equipment

Chemicals and some equipment, tools, and appliances may pose a risk to the health and safety of children and adults and include:

- Cleaning products and chemicals,
- Pest control chemicals and baits,
- Medications,
- Toiletries, and
- Sharp tools and equipment.

River Region Early Education is guided by the following principles in regard to the safe storage, use and disposal of chemicals and potentially hazardous items:

- Where possible, the least hazardous substance or tool is purchased or used,
- Where possible, substances are only used where there is a child-resistant lid or cap and these are properly closed after use,
- Safety Data Sheets are available for all chemicals and instructions are followed,
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is supplied and to be worn in line with the manufacturer's instructions,
- All chemicals are:
 - kept in locked cupboards or rooms with clear signage,
 - stored in their original containers with labels intact, and
 - where not in their original container, accompanied by clear signage and key safety information,
- Dangerous substances, such as pesticides, herbicides, petroleum, kerosene, and solvents, and equipment operated by an engine or otherwise hazardous to children are kept off-site, and
- All chemicals and medications are disposed of safely and in line with government requirements and containers are never reused for a different purpose.

d) Electrical safety

Work Health and Safety law and regulation requires businesses using electrical equipment (where electricity is supplied to it via an electrical socket) to:

- Check for obvious damage before using new equipment,
- Have the equipment regularly inspected and tested by a competent person where it is exposed to operating conditions that are likely to result in damage to the equipment or a reduction in its expected life span, including conditions that involve exposure to moisture, heat, vibration, mechanical damage, corrosive chemicals, or dust, and
- Keep a record of testing that includes the date, outcome, next test date and name of tester.

River Region Early Education keeps a record of electrical equipment in an asset register and assesses the risk level of the item based on its type and usual operating conditions:

- Low risk items are those that are essentially stationary during operation, don't vibrate and don't involve water or high heat. These items are tested and tagged every three years and include most office equipment such as computers, printers, chargers and monitors, power boards, televisions and displays.

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- Medium and high-risk items are tested and tagged annually and include all kitchen and laundry equipment, cleaning appliances, electrical tools, extension leads, fish tanks and humidifiers.

e) First aid and fire safety

First aid kits are provided in each service and are:

- Accessible from each room where children are being educated and cared for with signage that is visible from the centre of the room,
- Accessible when children are outside and on excursion, and
- Checked quarterly using *NQS2.11 A8 First Aid Checklists* to ensure contents are sufficient and within expiry dates.

Fire equipment, including fire extinguishers and fire blankets, are provided in each building, are compliant with fire safety law and regulation and the Building Code, meet Australian Standards, are suitable for the premises, and are checked every six months by a third-party specialist.

Fire extinguishers:

- Are mounted on a wall with a support or bracket with clearance of at least 1000mm around the extinguisher, and
- Have a sign above them that is at least 2000mm from the floor and is clearly visible,

Where there are cooking facilities and a stove or oven, a compliant fire safety blanket is mounted on the wall in between the entrance and the cooking appliance.

7. Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Standards

| Education and Care Services National Regulation | |
|---|--|
| 89 | First aid kits |
| 103 | Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair |
| 104 | Fencing |
| 105 | Furniture, materials and equipment |
| 107 | Space requirements – indoor space |
| 108 | Space requirements – outdoor space |
| 109 | Toilet and hygiene facilities |
| 110 | Ventilation and natural light |
| 111 | Administrative space |
| 112 | Nappy change facilities |
| 113 | Outdoor space – natural environment |
| 114 | Outdoor space – shade |
| 115 | Premises designed to facilitate supervision |
| 123 | Educator to child ratios—centre-based services |

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| 168 | Education and care service must have policies and procedures - h) providing a child safe environment |
| 170 | Policies and procedures to be followed |
| 171 | Policies and procedures to be kept available |
| 172 | Notification of changes to policies and procedures |
| 249 | Declared approved services (other than declared approved family day care services) |
| 274 | Swimming pools (NSW) |
| 285 | Space requirements (NSW) |
| Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Regulation | |
| 11 | Service waivers and temporary waivers for mobile education and care services |
| 17 | Venue management plans for mobile education and care services |
| 18 | Amendments to venue management plans for mobile education and care services |
| Work Health and Safety Regulation (NSW) | |
| 40 | Duty in relation to general workplace facilities |
| 41 | Duty to provide and maintain adequate and accessible facilities |
| 42 | Duty to provide first aid |
| 150 | Inspection and testing of electrical equipment |
| 344 | Person conducting business or undertaking to obtain and give access to safety data sheets |
| National Quality Standards | |
| 2.2.1 | At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard. |
| 3.1.1 | Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child. |
| 3.1.2 | Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained. |
| 3.2.1 | 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, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning. |
| 7.1.2 | Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service. |
| Child Safe Standards | |
| 4 | Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account |

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| 7 | Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through continual education and training |
| 8 | Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur |
| 10 | Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe |
| Early Years Learning Framework Learning Outcomes | |
| | |
| Early Years Learning Framework Principles | |
| | |
| Early Years Learning Framework Practices | |
| | Responsiveness to children |
| | Play-based learning and intentionality |
| | Learning environments |
| | Cultural responsiveness |

8. Related Documents

| Doc # | Attachments |
|----------|---|
| NQS3.20A | Building and Equipment Audit |
| NQS3.20B | SunSmart Shade Audit |
| NQS3.20C | Hot Water Checklist |
| NQS3.20D | Daily Safety Checklists (individualised for services) |
| NQS3.20E | Indoor Physical Environment Risk Assessment |
| NQS3.20F | Outdoor Physical Environment Risk Assessment |

| Doc # | Intersections with other key documents |
|------------|--|
| NQS2.10 | Hygiene and Infection Control Policy |
| NQS2.11 A8 | First Aid Checklists |
| NQS2.13 | Nappy Change and Toileting Policy |
| NQS2.15B | Sleep Area Audit |
| NQS4.36 | Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Policy. |
| NQS4.50 | Workplace Health and Safety Policy |

9. Document Control

| Doc # | Doc Title | Version | Approved | Next Review |
|--------|---|---------|--------------|-------------|
| NQS3.2 | Physical Environment (Workplace Safety, Learning and Administration) Policy | 1 | March 2019 | March 2021 |
| NQS3.2 | Physical Environment (Workplace Safety, Learning and Administration) Policy | 2 | August 2020 | August 2023 |
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