

These guidelines are under review by the Department of Education in line with the release of a draft Education and Child Care State Environmental Planning Policy and the announcement of the new School Infrastructure NSW unit as well as the Schools Asset Strategic Plan.

# PLANNING NEW SCHOOLS SCHOOL SAFETY AND URBAN PLANNING ADVISORY GUIDELINES



ASSET MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE

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# 1 Rationale, purpose and aim of document

Schools are vital institutions in our society. As communities continue growing, there is a corresponding need for new schools. With population predicted to increase significantly, new infrastructure will be needed to accommodate additional students.

The NSW Department of Education has over 2,200 existing Government schools in NSW which have been developed on many types of land forms, in a range of sizes and environmental contexts. The diverse nature of school sites illustrates how schools can operate successfully in many types of environmental settings. Despite this there is a range of public and private interests that need to be balanced through the application of the urban planning process for new schools and to identify safety issues. Some sites and environmental contexts become more desirable than others and a case-by-case assessment is required for each new school.

This document responds to inquiries into school road safety, including the Staysafe Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety: School Zone Safety (March 2012) and the independent inquiry into School Bus Safety in Rural and Regional NSW (October 2012), which recommended that planning for new schools include a coordinated management approach for school zone safety in areas designated for future schools, and that guidelines be prepared for when consideration is being given to new school developments.

The purpose of this document is to provide non-statutory general advice to facilitate planning of new schools. It aims to communicate the broad safety, urban planning and property related issues that may arise, or that need consideration. Planning of new schools should be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders including the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Transport NSW, the Roads and Maritime Services and the relevant local council and community as appropriate.

This document is intended for use by a range of stakeholders interested in safety and general planning issues for new schools including school providers, parents, students, community members, urban designers, urban planners, master planners, housing developers and planning authorities.

This advice has been prepared by the Department of Education in consultation with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Local Government and Shires Association, Transport NSW and Roads and Maritime Services.

**Appendix 1** includes a site scoping checklist that can be referred to when searching for and considering land for a new school.

For detailed design standards of government schools, the Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines provide information on the design of internal and external spaces and the selection of materials, fixtures and fittings. These are available on the Department's website at [www.efsg.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.efsg.det.nsw.edu.au).

## What is the planning new schools guideline 'Not'?

The NSW Department of Education currently has in excess of 2200 schools across the state, many of which were in existence prior to the creation of this guideline. The guideline is not developed to be a minimum standard or an indication of entitlement. It should therefore not be used as a benchmark by which current schools are assessed.

## 2 School demands and delivery timeframes

Predicting where and when a new school is required is complicated by the effects of a range of social, economic and land use variables, and a new school can itself affect the rate of housing development and therefore enrolment demands.

Predicting student enrolments is most accurate within a five-year horizon using youth age band statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Beyond five years and in new housing areas with limited statistics, confidence in student enrolment forecasting diminishes.

New government schools will only be funded, built and operated where there is a demonstrated need for a new school. Consideration is given to:

- compliance with the Education Act 1990;
- budget availability and competing priorities for funding of other infrastructure projects;
- enrolment forecasting and demographic profiling;
- the effect on surrounding, existing schools;
- the capacity of existing schools to take new enrolments, or be expanded to take them;
- the education model proposed;
- the property tenure options that are available;
- dwelling occupation and take-up rates;
- housing development staging;
- housing market characteristics.

The demand for a new school can be generated in new urban release areas (greenfield areas) and within or near established urban areas that are undergoing urban renewal, densification or demographic change (brownfield areas).

Demand analysis for new schools is undertaken on a case-by-case basis and involves substantial research into the demographic characteristics of the existing area, the enrolment patterns being observed, future housing plans and existing school facilities.

The NSW schooling system is also distinguished by the size of its private school sector. Australia has one of the largest private school sectors in the world. Non-government schools may draw students from a very different and much larger catchment than government schools. Factors that affect demand for non-government schools may vary from those for government schools.

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## 3 Student safety and well being

The selection of new school sites needs to ensure that student health and wellbeing are accorded the highest consideration.

The Department of Education has a policy on Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People that can be found on the Department's web site.

### 3.1 Road and Traffic Safety

Recent findings from inquiries including the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety Inquiry into School Zone Safety (March 2012) and the independent inquiry into School Bus Safety in Rural and Regional NSW (October 2012) demonstrate the need to consider the safety and welfare of students as a priority when planning new schools.

In the first instance it is desirable to avoid locating schools adjacent to major freeways and motorways. However consideration should be given to locating schools near collector roads for the purpose of bus transport and vehicular access. It is also preferable to locate schools along existing or proposed public bus routes to avoid duplication of bus traffic.

Given the nature of schools as high activity centres and the relative peak traffic generation during key AM and PM times, surrounding road and traffic conditions should allow safe and convenient access to school sites. Where there are areas of concern in relation to road safety, local road design considerations to ensure safe and accessible schools can include:

- two to three street frontages to reduce traffic concentration on one street frontage and allow multiple street frontages to manage the transport hierarchy of pass-by traffic, bus bays, parent kiss and drop zones, and school vehicle access points;
- the separation of bus and car (and other) traffic at the kerbside;
- Local roads are preferred to both collector and main roads for direct access to and from schools with consideration of traffic congestion and noise effects on nearby dwellings;
- footpath, kerb and guttering along school road frontages;
- road width and turning circles to enable safe and convenient bus and private vehicle access;

- consideration of planning local roads for traffic calming measures, including:
  - reduced speed limits
  - enforcement of road rules
  - signs
  - road paint work
  - speed humps
  - overhead pedestrian bridges (if located on high traffic roads)
  - traffic signals
  - roundabout
  - crossing
  - flashing lights.

Consideration should be given to lay-by areas adjacent to schools for picking-up and dropping-off students before and after school; and service and emergency vehicle access. Where the site characteristics allow it, provision should be made for a bus lay-by for pick-up and drop-off.

Parking for staff, students, visitors and delivery vehicles will need to have regard to pedestrian safety and minimise noise effects at nearby residences. For safety reasons, all vehicles should be able to enter and leave a site in a forward direction.

Consultation and coordinated management early in the design process with the relevant roads authority (either the local council or NSW Roads and Maritime Services), and with broader transport master plans, can potentially identify traffic issues associated with new schools so that these can be resolved early on to allow for new schools to be operated in a safe and accessible environment.



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## 3 Student safety and well being *(continued)*

During the development approval process a traffic survey and assessment by a qualified traffic engineer/planner should be undertaken. This will allow detailed local contexts and effects to be considered and accounted for prior to construction of a new school. The NSW Roads and Maritime Services' guideline Road safety issues around schools can be useful when considering school road safety.

The Department of Education has a policy on Road Safety Education, Driver Education and Training that can be found on the Department's web site.

### 3.2 Child protection

Schools accommodate vulnerable members of the community, and school security and privacy need to be considered when designing and siting school buildings.

Fencing around schools can prevent young students from wandering away from sites during free play times and prevent undesirable contact between students and members of the public. Fencing also affords protection from vandalism and unlawful entry.

Siting new schools to orientate parts of the site away from neighbouring high rise residential apartments can afford a degree of privacy to students and staff and also prevent undesirable viewing access and surveillance of sensitive areas of the school.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure promotes crime prevention through environmental design under its Safer by Design program. This encourages the implementation of positive surveillance of school premises outside of school hours, and using casual surveillance as a deterrent to crime. The guide Safer by Design can be found on the NSW Police Force web site.

### 3.3 Flood and bushfire prone land

Australia is well known for its flooding rains and bush fires. Locating schools on land prone to flooding or bush fires is not desirable for the following reasons:

- Schools communities are identified as a community group likely to require special attention in risk events (such as flooding and bushfires).
- Locating a school site on flood or bush fire land would likely prevent schools being a potential evacuation space during periods of natural disasters, which represents a loss for the whole community. Good village and town planning should allow for education facilities to be sited in areas where its uses can be of significant community value in times of distress.
- General security issues can arise if young students need to pass through or near riparian corridors, creeks and bush land during school hours or on their way to and from school.
- All schools require an Emergency Plan. School communities need to maintain and update provisions and preparation for flood and bushfire risks, safety and evacuations.

Placing school students and staff in danger of being affected by life threatening floods and bushfires is a risk that can be avoided through good land use planning. To avoid these serious potential risks, schools should be located outside of mapped bushfire prone land and outside of mapped 1:100 year flood levels. Where a significant portion of the town or village lies on a floodplain below the 1:100 average recurrence interval (ARI) contour and there is no reasonable alternative, the highest land available should be considered and clear evacuation routes provided to areas above the 1:100 ARI level.

Seeking flood level and bush fire risk information from the relevant council in the early stages of planning a new school is strongly advised.

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## 3 Student safety and well being *(continued)*

### 3.4 Telecommunication facilities, high voltage electricity lines and substations

An issue that requires consideration is locating schools in close proximity to telecommunication facilities and high voltage electricity lines, as this can cause alarm within school communities because of claims that they pose a risk to human health.

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) is the Commonwealth body charged with the responsibility for establishing standards that protect the health and safety of the community, including the Radiation Protection Standard. The relevant health standard is taken from the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency Radio Communications (Electromagnetic Radiation – Human Exposure) Standard 2003. The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency does not prescribe any distances between uses such as mobile base station locations and areas which may be considered to be sensitive, such as schools. The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency advice states:

“Public concern has also been expressed regarding the possibility of adverse health effects from mobile phone base stations that are sited on or near places where children spend large amounts of time, for example, in or outside their home, kindergartens, schools, playgrounds etc. Public exposure levels from base station antennas are very much lower than the maximum exposure from handsets. The balance of evidence does not indicate a risk to the health of people, including children, living in the vicinity of base stations where exposure levels are only small fractions of the ARPANSA Standard.” (ARPANSA Fact Sheet No. 11 ‘Mobile Phones and Children’, revised February 2012).

While there is no evidence of adverse effects of mobile phone towers and high voltage electricity lines on human health, a policy of prudent avoidance and a precautionary approach is applied by the Department of Education. The Department of Education has a policy on Mobile Telecommunications Facilities that can be found on the Department’s web site.

## 4 Schools as a community facility

Schools are valuable community assets which can be made available for community use when not required for school purposes. The Department of Education has a policy on Community Use of School Facilities that can be found on the Department's web site.

Community use of school facilities provides benefits to both schools and their communities through:

- enhanced co-operation and goodwill between the school and the community
- the provision of additional extra-curricular learning opportunities
- better access for communities and schools to state-of-the-art facilities
- opportunities for the community to become better informed about, and participate in, school operations and activities
- more effective use of valuable school facilities
- opportunities for the community to play a positive role in school security through out-of-hours use of the facilities
- increased revenue for schools, which can be used to improve school facilities and provide resources.

Opportunities to explore ways to deliver social infrastructure to the community can result in better urban planning outcomes.

### 4.1 Co-locating new schools with community ovals

Historically, ovals and outdoor recreation have been planned separately by schools, Councils and other recreation providers at significant cost to providers.

By sharing local recreational facilities significant savings can be made. The sharing of ovals and open spaces is possible because school ovals are needed during school times, but can be made accessible to the general community outside school hours. Community ovals can be used by schools during school hours and revert to community open spaces outside of school hours.

Through smarter urban planning and urban design, co-sharing opportunities can be realised. For example, school sites can be reduced in size if located

adjacent to planned community playing fields, with access granted to the school during school hours. Conversely, school ovals can be used as community playing fields out of school hours if the school is located on a large land holding.

To achieve the sharing of ovals and other outdoor recreation facilities, a high level of understanding of the potential sharing arrangements, child protection and infrastructure issues are required. This could involve a Memorandum of Understanding, Project Deed or a basic licence agreement to explore sharing opportunities between recreation providers.

The Department of Education has a policy on Community Partnerships for the Use of School Playing Fields that can be found on the Department's web site.

### 4.2 Co-locating community services with schools

There are many potential opportunities for school facilities to be used by the wider community. Available facilities may include:

- halls
- libraries
- classrooms
- games courts / sports ovals
- IT and communications infrastructure.

Appropriate community uses may include out of school hours care, community markets, community programs, after-hours adult learning, resource centres etc. Some uses such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation or other similar programs may be unsuitable.

Through smarter up-front urban planning, these opportunities can be realised. Planning with other social infrastructure providers for a community's social infrastructure needs can identify potential opportunities for the sharing of facilities.

The Department of Education has a policy on Community Use of School Facilities that can be found on the Department's web site.

### 4.3 Sharing agreements and restrictions



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## 4 Schools as a community facility (continued)

It is important that school facilities are used first and foremost for education. Prior to exploring the sharing of facilities, non-school users must agree to observe and respect school needs and policies. A written agreement covering pertinent issues, such as those outlined below, can be useful to support the sharing arrangements:

- how child protection will be maintained
- how the sharing of facilities will be managed to not interfere with teaching and student learning
- how sharing the facilities is consistent with the community values of Public Education and the school's purpose and goals
- how the sharing of facilities between schools and the community will be formalised to ensure that the rights and responsibilities are understood and documented
- mapping out a consultation program between all relevant key stakeholders prior to any agreement being signed
- identifying if certain groups and organisations may have priority in their claim on community use of school facilities
- any fees or subsidies that may apply
- additional resources or infrastructure that may be required
- terms under which suspension or termination may be required where the facilities can no longer be shared due to emerging school growth
- outlining that a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the facilities are fit for the intended purpose, the proposed use is legal and appropriate, and that potential users are suitable and that risk and child protection issues are addressed.

In the event of non-compliance with stipulated community use conditions, the agreement to use school facilities may be withdrawn.

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## 5 Community and stakeholder consultation

Early consultation with the community and key stakeholders will help identify issues that may affect the viability and completion of new schools. Identifying contentious issues early can inform decision-making and effective consultation should enable:

- clarity of the objectives of the school proposal in terms of community needs and concerns
- identification of the relationship of the school proposal to any relevant strategic plans, government policy directions or planning needs
- identification of feasible alternatives and their relative merits in terms of physical, social and economic factors
- identification of opportunities for continued community involvement
- appointing experts who can assist on technical matters
- providing information
- seeking input, and,
- resolving issues.

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## 6 Planning and building approvals

In NSW, planning and building a new school requires approvals to be obtained from the relevant planning authority such as Council, Joint Regional Planning Panel or NSW Planning Assessment Commission. In addition, depending on local environmental features, there may be a range of other related environmental approvals that may be required from other NSW Government agencies.

Changes to planning, building and environmental legislation occur frequently. Therefore understanding the latest legislative requirements is necessary. Legislative requirements are publicly available and can be found at [www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au).

Seeking early upfront advice from the relevant local council, a Certified Practising Planner or a Building Regulator can save significant time and hardship in identifying the legislative requirements to obtain approvals.

New schools in NSW are permitted with consent in residential, business and most rural and special use zones. The building of new schools is generally prohibited in industrial zones. Where the site ensures that student health and wellbeing are accorded the highest consideration yet the land zoning does not permit schools, discussions should be undertaken with the relevant council to determine whether rezoning can be achieved.

During the preparation of plans for a new school, it is advisable to discuss which planning rules apply to ensure these matters are addressed in the development application. Also, the Principal Certifying Authority whether Council or a registered private certifier, will be able to help identify what building approvals are required and how they can be obtained.

The NSW Department of Education does not have a role in assessing or regulating the design and building of new private schools.

## Appendix 1: New school site – checklist of issues

A range of issues need to be considered when identifying a site for a new school. It is important to acknowledge that sites available for new schools will more than likely exhibit characteristics that are undesirable from a range of perspectives, including that of school providers, councils, communities, neighbours and land developers. The checklist below is for guidance only and provides a non-exhaustive list of issues to consider when planning new schools.

The acquisition of a proposed site for a new school, particularly in areas where property is scarce or expensive, will always require a case-by-case assessment with consideration and balance given to factors such as environmental matters, availability, cost, need, alternative sites available, funding and feasibility of property acquisition.

General	Description of issue	Assessment & Response
<b>General</b>	Support strategic policy goals of NSW State Government as identified in the State Plan and State Infrastructure Strategy  <i>Reason: support the integrated land use and infrastructure planning processes of NSW Government.</i>	
<b>Existing Planning</b>	Consider strategic land use plans developed by planning authorities.  <i>Reason: support existing urban plans where appropriate.</i>	
<b>Land zoning</b>	Avoid being within land zones not prescribed for education under State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure).  <i>Reason: to avoid statutory rezoning.</i>	
<b>Surface Area</b>	Primary School / Special Purpose School – 1.5ha in highly urbanised areas and 2.0ha in greenfield / regional areas.  <i>Reason: optimum size to enable flexibility in eventual site layout, function and future growth.</i> <i>Note: co-locating school sites with Council playing fields and use of multi-storey buildings required.</i>	
	Secondary School – 2.5ha in highly urbanised areas and 4ha in greenfield / regional areas  <i>Reason: optimum size to enable flexibility in eventual site layout, function and future growth.</i> <i>Note: co-locating school sites with Council playing fields and use of multi-storey buildings required.</i>	

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<p><b>Shape of site</b></p>	<p>Shape of the site should be substantially rectangular</p> <p><i>Reason: optimum size to enable flexibility in eventual site layout and function and allow for recreational / sport free areas.</i></p>	
<p><b>Siting general</b></p>	<p>Located relatively central to residential catchment area</p> <p><i>Reason: to encourage students to walk to school and to minimise the costs of school student transport</i></p>	
<p><b>Siting distance</b></p>	<p>As far as possible, a primary school should be within 1.6 kms road distance of the bulk of its likely drawing area</p> <p><i>Reason: to minimise the demand for bus transport.</i></p>	
<p><b>Student Safety</b></p>	<p>The site is suitable for appropriate fencing and security and accounts for the need to protect students from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ unwanted visual surveillance that increases risks of paedophile behaviour;</li> <li>■ traffic and transport issues (speed zones, bus zones, pedestrian crossings etc.);</li> <li>■ Safer by Design guidance is considered.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Education model</b></p>	<p>Identify the type of school to be provided paying particular attention to specific community, curriculum and school operational requirements.</p> <p><i>Reason: to meet school community needs.</i></p>	
<p><b>Traffic, transport and access</b></p>	<p>The school should be located on or near a distributor or collector road for efficient access to school.</p> <p>Ensure site is easily accessible from a range of transport modes that include: walking, public transport, private vehicle and bike riding.</p> <p>Consider traffic movements in relation to nearby residences and, if adjacent, business premises.</p> <p><i>Reason: promote transit orientated development and healthy living communities. Avoid congestion and noise to existing development where possible.</i></p>	



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<p><b>Urban Design</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Two – three street frontages to enable separation and hierarchal management of bus zone, kiss and drop, pedestrian corridors and school vehicle access;</li> <li>■ Main site access should avoid being located opposite a T-Intersection;</li> <li>■ Desirable to be adjacent to a community playing field;</li> <li>■ Allows for security and privacy through visibility and appropriate surrounding development;</li> <li>■ Is not overly overshadowed by surrounding high rise development;</li> <li>■ Considers future form and structure of centres, towns and future development to anchor community uses, spaces and services in the one location and obtain urban synergies.</li> </ul> <p><i>Reason: ensure student and staff/personnel safety, and community use of schools for evacuation space during State Emergencies.</i></p>	
<p><b>Bushfire</b></p>	<p>Not located within or adjacent to land mapped as Bush Fire Prone or on a site that requires an Asset Protection Zone (APZ).</p> <p><i>Reason: ensure student and staff/personnel safety, and community use of schools for evacuation space during State Emergencies.</i></p>	
<p><b>Air Quality</b></p>	<p>Not be located adjacent to other developments that are likely to result in significant health issues associated with noxious emissions or the like.</p> <p><i>Reason: protect student and staff/personnel health</i></p>	
<p><b>Topography</b></p>	<p>Avoid land that has significant level changes or requires substantial cut and fill.</p> <p><i>Reason: consideration of AS 1428 Access to premises standards.</i></p>	

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<p><b>Land forms, geology and soils</b></p>	<p>Not located on contaminated land audited as unsuitable for school uses, avoid land with high soil erosion and/or stability concerns or mapped as high probability of Acid Sulphate Soils occurring.</p> <p><i>Reason: reduce construction and land remediation costs</i></p>	
<p><b>Ecology</b></p>	<p>Not located on land that supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ endangered Ecological Communities,</li> <li>■ threatened or endangered flora and fauna,</li> <li>■ sensitive areas (wetlands, bushlands etc).</li> </ul> <p><i>Reason: to protect ecological significance.</i></p>	
<p><b>Indigenous Heritage</b></p>	<p>Not located on land identified as a declared Aboriginal Place, a site of cultural significance or subject to a Native Title claim.</p> <p><i>Reason: to protect places of Indigenous heritage significance.</i></p>	
<p><b>European Heritage</b></p>	<p>Avoid land identified as an archaeological site. If adaptive reuse of buildings within a conservation area or which are listed as Heritage Items, reuse should be considered in consultation with the State Heritage Office for matters listed on the State register and with Council for local listings.</p> <p><i>Reason: to protect European heritage significance.</i></p>	

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<p><b>Land use</b></p>	<p>Avoid being located within or immediately adjacent to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Special uses sites such as: airports, correction centres, mobile phone towers, regulated contaminated lands, sewage treatment plants, sewage systems, high voltage electrical transmission lines, waste disposal facilities, waste, treatment or resource management facilities, waste or resource transfer stations, water recycling facilities, water supply systems, wind farms and the like;</li> <li>■ Inappropriate development such as: brothels, methadone clinics, restricted premises, sex service premises or the like;</li> <li>■ Development with potential undesirable amenity impacts or risks such as: heavy industry, hazardous or offensive developments, mining and extraction industries or the like.</li> </ul> <p>Reason: Ensure student and staff/personnel security and health are protected and maintained.</p>	
<p><b>Socio-economic</b></p>	<p>That the site is suitable to result in social inclusive outcomes (e.g. publicly accessible at suitable times, election days, community markets etc.) and as a temporary refuge, emergency shelter and/or meeting points in times of emergencies such as natural disasters.</p> <p>Reason: provide communal focus points for villages and towns and emergency evacuation space during times of natural disasters or emergencies.</p>	
<p><b>Noise and vibration</b></p>	<p>Avoid sites adjacent to high noise or vibration generating development such as heavy industry, airport flight paths, motorways, or the like</p> <p>Reason: avoid significant noise and vibration impacts</p>	
<p><b>Site services and drainage</b></p>	<p>The site is fully serviced with appropriate roads, footpaths, traffic intersections, water, electricity, sewage, gas, telecommunications etc. to appropriate capacity for education facility use,</p> <p>The site is well drained to prevent waterlogging and consequent instability (slippages).</p> <p>Reason: to reduce construction costs burden and ensure essential services are provided for.</p>	