

# SPACE TO GROW AND THRIVE

Design guidance for early learning  
and childcare and school age  
childcare settings





**Keeping The Promise at  
the heart of what we do**

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# Foreword

**I am pleased to present *Space to Grow and Thrive*, which aims to support the delivery of high-quality physical environments for children attending early learning and school aged childcare in Scotland.**

In 2016, the Scottish Government asked the Care Inspectorate to work with stakeholders to develop design guidance for daycare of children's services including school age childcare. On 30 June 2017, the Scottish Government published *Space to Grow: Design guidance for early learning and childcare and out of school care settings*.

Since the launch of *Space to Grow*, developments have impacted how early learning and childcare, and school age childcare are delivered. As part of the early learning and childcare expansion programme, children spend more time in their childcare settings. During the expansion programme, the Care Inspectorate supported innovative approaches to delivering early learning and childcare, and school aged childcare. We developed additional guidance to support the sector to deliver high-quality outcomes for children. That guidance is incorporated into this resource, which I hope you will find helpful.

This resource reflects lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, which posed both challenges and opportunities for the early learning and school aged childcare sector. The sector adapted to the pandemic to make changes that demanded flexibility, creativity and collaboration from all stakeholders. Research confirms that environment plays a key role in shaping children's development and learning. In Scotland, we want to create the best conditions for children to thrive and get the best from their childcare experience, and for Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up. Childcare environments must positively support children to access play and learning opportunities that benefit their development, health, wellbeing and happiness.

I am delighted the Scottish Government asked us to work with stakeholders to update *Space to Grow* and to adopt ongoing responsibility for its quality, relevance and accessibility. I am confident this resource will prove a valuable tool for childcare practitioners, managers and providers, and for families looking to understand what high-quality should look like for childcare environments. I thank all those who helped develop this guidance, especially the children who shared their views and experiences with us. I look forward to seeing the positive impacts of this resource on the sector and the lives of children in Scotland.



**Jackie Irvine**  
Chief Executive  
Care Inspectorate



## Ministerial foreword

High quality childcare that is flexible, accessible and affordable plays a critical role in our society. It is vital to giving children the best possible start in life, to supporting families to thrive, and to ensuring that parents and carers can work, train or study. As set out in our Strategic Childcare Plan, we want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up in.

Space to Grow and Thrive contributes to our overall vision by setting out how early learning and school age childcare providers can create high-quality environments that support children’s wellbeing, health, learning, play and development.

I welcome the streamlining and updating of the guidance, the ‘key principles’, self-evaluation questions and real-life examples of practice from across Scotland. I hope that you find this useful when considering the further development or design of your settings.

I would like to thank the Care Inspectorate and the stakeholder working group for their work in shaping this guidance, and also the settings featured within the document for sharing their experience and solutions to inspire others.

### **Natalie Don MSP**

Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise



# Introduction

On 30 June 2017 the Scottish Government published *Space to Grow: Design guidance for early learning and childcare and out of school care settings*. The main purpose of the resource was to support the expansion of early learning and childcare (ELC) as it was acknowledged that children would be spending more time in these settings and the environment needed to be of a high quality to support positive outcomes for children.

Since the resource was launched there have been several developments which have impacted on how ELC and school age childcare (SACC) are delivered. To support innovative approaches and good quality outcomes for children during the expansion, the Care Inspectorate also developed additional guidance related to indoor/outdoor settings. The Covid-19 pandemic had a direct impact on how the environment was used and highlighted the need for flexibility to meet the needs of children, families and staff.

This resource is a document that builds on the previous *Space to Grow* resource and incorporates the lessons learned from the expansion programme along with the pandemic. It incorporates the guidance and practice notes about indoor/outdoor settings, delivering high quality play and learning environments outdoors and relevant sections of the hand hygiene and nappy changing guidance. Some updates include 'think about' sections for self evaluation, photographs and examples of good practice, reference to vaping and smoking and links to the national health protection guidance for children and young people and other relevant current resources.



## Why is this resource important?

Children deserve to enjoy their childhood and explore their potential. They also have a right to play and learn. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) recognises the importance of providing children with opportunities to rest, play and engage in cultural and recreational activities that suit their age and interests. Children spend a significant amount of time in settings which should be of high quality to promote their wellbeing and development.

The environment plays a crucial role in fostering child development and enhancing learning outcomes. Loris Malzguzzi, a pioneer of early childhood education, proposed that children have three teachers: adults, peers, and their physical surroundings. He called the physical environment the 'third teacher'. The Scottish Government's policy and commitments are to give children the best possible start in life. It is essential to provide them with an environment that supports their quality of play and learning opportunities, which will affect their development, health, wellbeing and happiness.

## Who is this guide for?

This resource relates to day care of children settings that are premises based. This resource is not relevant to childminding settings.

It is designed to support providers, potential providers, planners and architects who are involved in creating or improving ELC and SACC settings. The resource aims to enhance the quality of children's play, care and learning experiences by promoting innovative and flexible approaches to the design of the internal and external environment. It also helps providers to explore various delivery models that suit their context and needs.

The resource incorporates relevant Care Inspectorate guidance and should assist to provide a one-stop resource related to the environment.

Specific sections cover outdoor play and learning environments for children. However, it does not focus on settings that are exclusively outdoors. The definition of an outdoor setting and links to useful outdoor setting resources can be found in the definition section of this resource.

Parents, children and members of the public should find this resource helpful as it details information and standards about the environment and the positive impact this can have on children's experiences. The resource also informs the Care Inspectorate in its duty of scrutiny and improvement to support innovation and to share good practice.

Although this resource provides insights into good design, it is recognised that environments are diverse. In rural settings or older buildings there may be particular challenges and a more innovative approach may need to be considered. The resource is written with a focus on achieving positive outcomes for children and families through high-quality environments.

It is underpinned by legislation, policy and guidance, which includes, but is not restricted to:

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC 1989\)](#)

[The Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision<sup>16</sup> \(Scottish Government 2013\)](#)

[Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\) \(Scottish Government 2018\)](#)

[Health and Social Care Standards \(Scottish Government 2017\)](#)

[A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school age childcare \(Care Inspectorate 2022\)](#)

[Realising the ambition: Being me](#)

[Curriculum for Excellence \(Scottish Government 2010\)](#)

[Public Services Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)

[Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland \(Requirements for Care Services\) Regulations 2011 \(SSI 2011/210\)](#)

[School age childcare: national children's charter](#)

## Contact with regulatory bodies

As with all building design, the design of any new or refurbished early learning and childcare (ELC) or school aged childcare (SACC) premises is subject to regulation. Alongside the Care Inspectorate regulations, there are other regulations you may need to comply with. It is essential that you consult with relevant agencies early on. We advise you to contact the agencies listed below as soon as possible in the design and development process. This way, you can avoid any unexpected changes to the building and save time, effort and cost to the provider. New builds or refurbishment may also be subject to a period of consultation, whether it be statutory or not.

### Regulatory bodies

#### The Care Inspectorate

Early consultation with the Care Inspectorate about potential building design for specific types of settings is advisable and you can request a pre-application discussion. This opportunity for an early discussion is for advice only, and you will still need to submit the relevant applications. If you are considering providing a new setting, you will need to make a new registration application to the Care Inspectorate. Registration applications will be assessed and either granted or refused by the Care Inspectorate. Settings cannot operate until a registration has been granted. Information about applying for pre application advice or applying for registration can be found on the [Care Inspectorate website](#).

If you are an existing setting and want to vary the conditions of registration, which includes the premises the setting is provided from, you will need to submit a variation application through the [registration portal](#). If you are planning to improve or refurbish the premises, you may need to submit a notification through our eForms system. Information can be found on the [Care Inspectorate website](#).

### **Scottish building standards**

This information can be found in the Scottish Government's [Building standards: procedural handbook \(third edition, version 1.6\)](#).

Scottish local authorities are appointed as building standards verifiers for their geographic area. It is the verifier's responsibility to advise if a building would be subject to building regulations and if a building warrant would be required, based on the specific details of the case. There are types of work that can be done and are exempt from the building regulations, under Regulation 3, Schedule 1. There are also types of work that do not require a building warrant but must still meet the building regulations under Regulation 5, Schedule 3. The main principles of the system are that a building warrant must be obtained before work starts on site and a completion certificate is accepted by a verifier before the building becomes occupied.

The following publications have useful information and can be found on the Scottish Government website.

[Building standards: customer journey](#) explains the building standards system.

[Making a quality building warrant application: what you need to know](#) offers useful advice.

### **Environmental health**

Local authority environmental health departments are responsible for the regulation of food preparation and safety in local authority, private and third sector settings. They also regulate health and safety in private and third sector settings while the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regulates local authority settings. Please contact your local environmental health officer for details and to engage them in the design process whether it is a new setting, or you are adapting/refurbishing an existing setting. The relevant structural standard used in relation to environmental health is regulation (EC) 852/2004.

### **Planning**

The planning system makes decisions about future development and regulates the use of land in our towns, cities and countryside by granting or refusing planning permission. Decisions about your planning applications are based on the development plan for your area, which is prepared by your local council or national park authority. Contact your local planning department early in the design process for more information.

### **Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

Although not a regulatory body, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has conveyed a willingness to work with all ELC and after-school care settings to prevent fires and make communities safer. It welcomes the opportunity to consult with partners on design submissions to field questions individual settings may have by providing advice and support over how building regulations is being applied in relation to fire safety. Further information can be found on the Scottish Fire and Rescue website.

# Key Principles

Section 10 of [The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland \(Requirements for Care Services\) Regulations 2011 No 210](#) outlines the legislation related to premises. The premises must:

- be fit for the purpose of achieving the aims and objectives of the setting
- be of sound construction and kept in a good state of repair externally and internally
- have adequate and suitable ventilation, heating and lighting
- be decorated and maintained to a standard appropriate for the setting.



## Safe, secure and suitable

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that the environment for children and adults is suitable. The environment should ensure children are safe, secure and protected from harm. Children should not be able to leave the internal or external space without a staff member or their parent/carer.

The environment must be smoke and vape free. Smoking poses significant health risks, especially for children who are exposed to it. While there is no scientific evidence of secondary vaping, children who see adults vaping may think it is safe to do this. It is important for adults to be aware of the impact of their vaping on children and avoid vaping in their presence or in places where children can see them. All ELC and SACC settings must be smoke and vaping free.

The environment must be in a good state of repair and decoration. Suitable maintenance arrangements must be in place to ensure there is a system for general maintenance and that any issues within the building are addressed effectively and efficiently. Where specialist equipment is used, arrangements should be in place for maintenance and checks in line with legal requirements or best practice.

## **Natural light**

Natural light should be available within all playrooms used by children (the exception would be additional places children access, such as sensory or physical activity areas that are not included in the space standards).

## **Ventilation**

Suitable ventilation should be available in all areas used by children and adults. Ventilation should be able to be operated by those on the premises. Minimum standards for ventilation are detailed in [Building Standards regulations](#).

## **Heating**

Suitable heating should be available in all areas used by children and adults. The temperature should be able to be regulated.

## **Space standards**

The Care Inspectorate expectations are listed below.

Children under two years - a minimum of 3.7 square metres, per child

Children aged two years to under three years - a minimum of 2.8 square meters, per child

Children aged three and over - a minimum of 2.3 square meters, per child.

NB -These space standards have been derived from previous guidance and legislation. [The School Premises Regulations \(General Requirements and Standards\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 196739](#) and associated amendments are currently under review by the Scottish Government. The proposal is that reference to nursery schools and classes is removed from the amended Regulations on the understanding that they are referenced within other guidance. Therefore, it is expected the space standards as detailed above apply to all ELC and SACC settings.

## **Children's toilets and changing facilities**

Children over the age of two years should have one toilet for every 10 children. When the numbers of children increase in multiples of up to four, you do not need another toilet. However, when you have 5 children or more you need an additional toilet. For example, a service registered for 34 children, three toilets would be sufficient. In a service registered for 35 children then four toilets should be provided. There should be a minimum of one nappy changing facility for every 10 children aged under two years. This is consistent with the number of toilets for children. Guidance related to nappy changing is contained in the changing facilities section.

## **Outdoor play space**

Children should have access to suitable and safe outdoor space adjacent to and that is part of the premises-based environment.

# Types of settings

ELC and SACC settings are registered by the Care Inspectorate under [the Public Services Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) (the Act). Schedule 12 of the Act defines a 'daycare of children's service' as a setting that consists of any form of care provided for children, on premises other than domestic premises.

To support providers to consider new models of ELC and SACC, we have developed some descriptions of types of registered settings that you may find useful when considering plans for your setting. It is not an exhaustive list, but it does consider existing and emerging innovative models of ELC and SACC. We support innovation in service provision, and we are keen to engage with potential applicants at the earliest opportunity. It is intended these descriptions will support providers/applicants when considering the development of a setting or when planning a setting for children and families. To date, four different approaches for the delivery of ELC and SACC have emerged.

## Indoor setting

This is the more traditional model of provision where the number of registered places will be calculated on the play and learning space available to children in the physical indoor environment, as detailed in the indoor space for children section. These settings will have adequate and suitable outdoor space that enables children to freely access indoor and outdoor play and learning opportunities throughout the time they attend. Detail about this type of setting is included in this resource.

## Outdoor setting

This model has developed over recent years and can sometimes be referred to as a forest nursery or forest kindergarten. In these settings, children are outdoors all the time except in extreme weather conditions. Children and staff will have access to a sheltered area. This could be a permanent or temporary structure. There may also be a meeting point, premises or a base camp used to drop off and collect children.

These settings will have a comprehensive contingency plan, communicated and agreed with parents, for the rare occasions when weather prevents children from being outside. Please note that the terms forest nursery and forest kindergarten are not exclusively used for outdoor-only settings.

Guidance related to outdoor-only settings can be found on the Care Inspectorate's Hub website including:

[Out to play section 10: out of school care](#)

[Out to play section 11: practitioners supporting children with additional support needs](#)

[Out to play section 12: caring for our outdoor spaces](#)

[Out to play Practical guidance for creating outdoor](#)

### **Indoor/outdoor settings**

This model is an indoor setting where the scale and quality of the outdoor space is appropriate for enhancing the quality of children's play and learning experiences. Where there is a high-quality, natural outdoor space combined with good-quality indoor space, the registered places take account of both spaces. This model will take account of the practices of a solely outdoor or outdoor satellite setting. Both indoor and outdoor areas will be accessible to children 100 per cent of the operational time. There was an increase to the number of indoor/outdoor settings during the ELC expansion. This was because of the importance and value of outdoor experience for children, children's increased use of suitable outdoor areas and improvements to the quality of outdoor space.

### **Dispersed/satellite settings**

This model is where there is an outdoor satellite space not adjacent to the indoor environment. In other words, the outdoor space is not part of the premises. This might be a forest, park or other outdoor space and can be within walking distance of the indoor environment or accessed with the use of transport. The setting, with two locations, is provided by one provider, manager and staffed by one overall staff team.

This model involves children spending some of their time at the indoor setting and some at the outdoor setting i.e. a split their time in the setting between the indoor and outdoor locations. Parents must be aware of and in agreement with their child spending set times in dual locations and their contract with the setting must reflect this. The dual location supports children to have indoor and outdoor experiences as part of one setting unless a parent has a particular request not to. The outdoor location of this setting will be the same as an outdoor-only setting. Transport arrangements for children moving between the locations requires to be in place.

Consideration needs to be given to contingency arrangements where, on a rare occasion, children cannot access the outdoor setting. It is unlikely the indoor space would be deemed suitable as a contingency arrangement, as the maximum number of children will be attending this part of the setting. If over the sessions different staff groups are involved in the provision of the indoor and outdoor settings, the provider needs to have systems in place for the sharing of information and the development of the child's personal plan fully considering how staff would effectively liaise to share information/experiences/learning for the children/staff development and support/supervision. The indoor (premise-based) part of this setting is part of this resource. Guidance related to the outdoor satellite part can be found in the resources as listed under outdoor only settings above. Guidance on dispersed/satellite settings can be found on the [Care Inspectorate's Hub website](#).

## Location and entrance

The location of the setting is important to children and families. There are various reasons why families choose a setting. These may include the location is in the community they live, it is near where they work or access education, it may be near a family member or other carers who supports childcare, families have used the setting for another child, reputation or good quality outcomes for children or it is a specialised setting that meets their child's specific needs. It is important when planning a new setting to think about the location of setting.

### **Cala Beechwood ELC: Inverness College UHI is situated in the grounds of Inverness College**

A key factor in choosing a location for a childcare facility is the opportunity for children to interact with the local community. The community and the surrounding area can offer valuable play and learning experiences that enhance children's health and wellbeing. Community is one of the six principles of the [School age childcare: national children's charter](#). Children can visit local parks, forests, libraries, the beach, shops, or farms, and learn about nature, culture and society.



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*CALA Beechwood ELC is a spacious building, on the grounds of Inverness UHI Campus. It is easy to reach by car or bus and offers plenty of parking space. Strong partnerships with the UHI enables children to benefit from stimulating, exciting outdoor experiences through access to the beautiful campus grounds and walks, and nutritious and healthy fresh meals prepared by the UHI chefs.”*

*Manager*

Children who attend Saoghal Beag Sgoil Àraich Uibhist a' Tuath make good use of the local beach



When considering the use of existing community premises, you should not only consider vacant premises but consider sharing. One way to make use of existing community assets is to share with other organisations or groups. This could include schools, community premises or other care settings where co-location could have an intergenerational benefit to adults and children. Sharing premises can help build and enhance positive and stimulating relationships across generations.



**Doodlebugs :**  
Bridge of Earn,  
is provided from  
a converted house



**Binne Street  
Children's Centre,**  
is provided from a  
listed building



**Craighead County  
Nursery School,**  
Muchline converted  
a pig sty



**Cosmic Coppers  
Merrylee, Glasgow**  
is provided from a  
converted car  
showroom

Inside the covered pig sty



Methilhaven Nursery, Fife, is co-located with a care home.



“

*We embraced the opportunities for intergenerational learning. Positive relationships have been developed on the basis of mutual respect and trust. New friendships break down the barriers between our youngest and oldest generations, in turn providing a positive ethos built upon community spirit, positive attachment, shared interests and quality experiences which enhance the learning of all service users.”*

*Manager*

A school-based SACC setting can offer convenience and security for families who want out of school care. By staying on the school grounds, children avoid unnecessary travel and transitions, and parents can easily pick them up at the end of the day. Some children also may prefer their setting to be within the school they attend as they are familiar with this environment. The children of Macs Scotstoun, a SACC setting provided from school premises after school only told us they liked their setting being in the school as they don't need to walk far and it is near their home. However, others may prefer a different premises as they may feel they are at school even during school holidays. A SACC setting can also benefit the school by attracting more enrolments and enhancing the school's reputation. The [School age childcare: national children's charter](#) states: *"If school age childcare is in a school, it's important it feels different to school, by having no school work to do (unless we choose to do our homework), more choice, more comfortable places to relax, and more snacks."*

“

*St. Mirin's Out of School Club are integral to our school community. We work in collaboration with them daily to support the health and wellbeing of our children and their families. They have specialist training which supports us to to deliver targeted support to individuals across our school. This involves both group and one-to-one sessions. This health and wellbeing support would not be available to our children and families if we did not have access to this service, they are invaluable. The unique relationships our OSC have with our local community allows us to gather information and support families as they need. Our OSC has enhanced our learning environments making them more stimulating and engaging for our learners through funding. In fact, our woodland area is sector leading and this has given our children the opportunity to access learning in new and exciting ways. Our OSC are invaluable, and we simply could not meet the needs within our school community without their support. They are very much a part of our school identity.”*

*Depute Headteacher of St. Mirin's primary school*



Settings who operate within a school should have the space and facilities agreed by all parties involved – the provider and the local authority. At the time of registration with the Care Inspectorate, the space and facilities, as agreed by the local authority, is the space assessed as suitable. In some local authorities the head teacher can agree the use of space within school hours and the letting department out with school hours. The letting department will provide a lease agreement. A written agreement between the head teacher and the provider will help to define the space and facilities to be used by the setting.

On some occasions, the head teacher may ask the setting to use their space for a special school event. This request can be often made to SACC settings. Early discussion, consultation and negotiation is necessary to make sure this is acceptable to the setting and that they can find other suitable space within the school for the limited period.

An aesthetically pleasing entrance encourages children inside and helps them feel a sense of belonging. Even when you are not in control of what the outside of the premises looks like small adjustments to the outside of premises can help to make it welcoming and inviting. For example, plant pots and welcoming signage. Involving and consulting children in what the outside of the setting looks like helps children feel a sense of ownership.

### Oldmacher Out of School Care Clubs



Families who have a child attending a SACC setting and an ELC setting may find it useful to have both located together or in close proximity. Where an ELC setting is located within a primary school building it is helpful to locate the setting near to the early level primary classes to support transition.

Families will use public transport, walk, cycle or drive to the setting. Consideration should be given to how safe the waking route is to the setting particularly if the route is dark, or the setting is isolated. Car parking, where provided, should allow children and parents to walk safely to the setting. More information can be found in the [Building standards: procedural handbook \(third edition, version 1.6\)](#).



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*The approach to the setting should be inviting to children, as the aesthetic quality influences a child's acceptance of a new environment." (Olds, Rui Anita. (2000). Childcare Design Guide: The Ultimate Day Care Centre Design Source McGraw-Hill. New York).*

Children should not be able to leave the setting without the knowledge of a staff member or those who collect or drop them off. Staff should have a good knowledge and understanding of [SIMOA](#) and ensure that children's safety is at the heart of their practice.

There should also be systems in place to make sure people cannot access the setting without being authorised to do so. A secure entrance is essential to support safety and monitor access.

Some examples could include:

- a bell or buzzer entry system
- a glazed panel on the door or at the side of the door which allows the staff member to see who is outside
- a keypad entry
- a video security system at the main door, accessed remotely, can help staff to monitor the entrance without having to leave the childcare areas.

A good design practice for some new build settings is to have an intervening space between the main door and the reception space. This can create an additional protection and safety measure, as well as a smooth transition for visitors, children, families and staff. However, other settings have suitable secure entry systems in place.



## Think about

- How accessible is the location of the setting to those who may want to use it?
- What type of suitable and stimulating community resources are near the setting?
- How will children and families get to the setting?
- What parking arrangements are there?
- How safe is the walking route to the setting?
- How welcoming is the outside of the building, would it be a place children would want to go to?
- What measures are in place to ensure the entrance is safe? Would a child be able to leave without the knowledge of an adult? Would someone be able to enter the premises without being authorised?
- If you are a SACC setting based in a school, how have you made the environment look and feel different for children who attend the school?
- How have you adapted the space to allow school age children to choose between a range of activities?

## Indoor space for children

Children have the right to play and relax. “Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.” (UNCRC, Article 31). This is supported by the Scottish Government’s [Play Strategy](#) that states: “All children and young people should have space and time to play”.

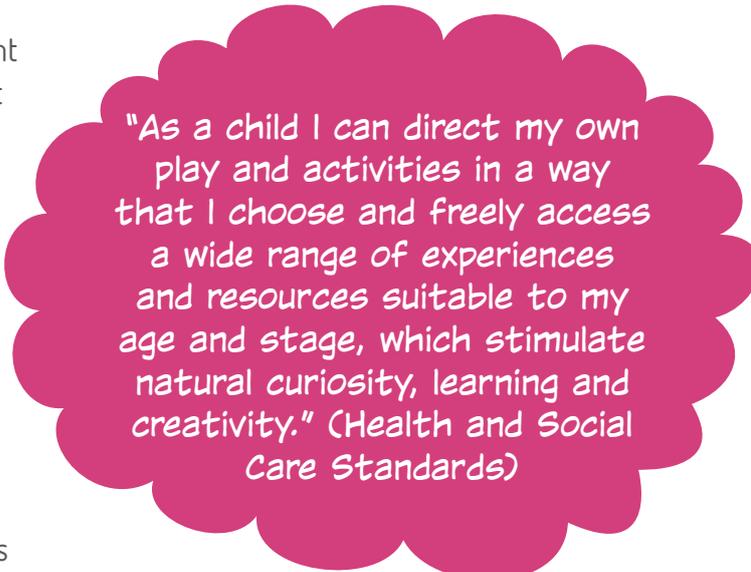
Children in settings need sufficient space to learn and develop. Minimum space standards can be found in the key principles section of this document. Space standards are a feature in most UK and international settings. The physical environment and spatial design, in addition to group size and composition, are one of many important factors contributing to children’s wellbeing, development and learning.

Research has been conducted into assessing what constitutes the best space standard, how space can affect a child’s stress levels, and how it can play an important role in developing their communication and social skills. (Olds, Rui Anita. (2000). *Childcare Design Guide: The Ultimate Day Care Centre Design Source* McGraw-Hill. New York).

We know that the first two years of life, children are absorbed in learning to crawl and walk. Having more generous space for younger children allows them to develop confidence while safely reaching their developmental milestones. The space referred to is defined as space, available at all times, for children’s play and movement. This does not include toilets, changing facilities, storage space, space taken up by set fixtures and fittings or any space identified for other use such as kitchens, staff/parents or community space. The Care Inspectorate’s primary focus will be on working flexibly and collaboratively with providers. This is to support innovation and improvement in the delivery of high-quality settings that achieves the best possible outcomes for children.

The environment should be interesting, welcoming, comfortable, nurturing, safe and children should feel protected. A nurturing environment will help promote a positive sense of wellbeing. The physical environment can make a lot of demands on children. It is important to remember what the environment feels like to a child and the negative impact this could have on their health, wellbeing, behaviour, ability to play and learn and form relationships with other children and staff.

When considering the space for children it is helpful to get down to a child’s level and see what the space looks like and feels like. When planning space, it is important to think of what a child needs to help them develop and grow and to help them direct their own play and learning. All children should be able to access appropriate space that will support their development, play, learning and social interactions.



*“As a child I can direct my own play and activities in a way that I choose and freely access a wide range of experiences and resources suitable to my age and stage, which stimulate natural curiosity, learning and creativity.” (Health and Social Care Standards)*

The height of the ceiling can not only have an impact of noise levels. It can make the room feel too big and overwhelming for children. You should consider this from a young child's view. Lower ceilings tend to promote better cooperation because they create a less intimidating and more comfortable environment. They can foster positive interactions among children. In many settings where the ceiling is high, measures are put in place to reduce this. Some settings benefit from a variety of ceiling heights giving children the opportunity and choice to be in different spaces at different times.



The number of children and staff in one space at any time is important. Some children can be overwhelmed with the size of rooms and large numbers of children and staff as it can be difficult for them to form attachments. When designing how to use space, you should carefully consider the potential repercussions in the event of an infectious outbreak. Settings with large rooms and a high occupancy of children means increased interpersonal contact. This means that a child with an infection could have many contacts. Depending on the nature of the outbreak, various measures for contacts of the infectious child may be recommended by health protection professionals overseeing the outbreak response. Settings should also consider how they would implement outbreak control measures to minimise the spread of infection. This may include organising children into smaller cohorts and enhancing cleaning and hygiene measures.

Staff moving in and out of a space can be also challenging for children. You should consider how often staff need to go through areas to get to another space. If staff or families need to continually walk through play space to get to their destination this could be disruptive to children.

At Winter Gardens Nursery Glasgow, children can see into other rooms



It can be difficult to create a homely, nurturing environment in an open large space. Different sizes of spaces, including quiet space allows children to choose where they want to be, depending on their needs and how they feel. Curved walls and smaller rooms can make space feel friendlier. The use of curves, rooms with different dimensions, shapes and space to investigate can help the environment to be more aesthetically pleasing to children. In Italy, many settings adopt the Reggio Emilia approach to the layout of the environment. This comprises of connected spaces that flow into one another. Rooms open onto a central piazza and children move freely through the space. The majority of settings have designated rooms for different age groups of children, with most settings having designated rooms for children under two years. Many have designated rooms for children two to under three years, for children three to not attending school and for school age children. Some settings have a shared space for children over two years. In these settings you should carefully consider the number of children, their different needs and stages of development when all sharing the same space. These very young children may have moved from a smaller baby room or be new to the setting and may be overwhelmed by their new environment. Smaller, quieter spaces should be available to create a nurturing space, to help children to feel safe and secure and to help with the transition.

*"You can see lots from the treehouse because it is high."*

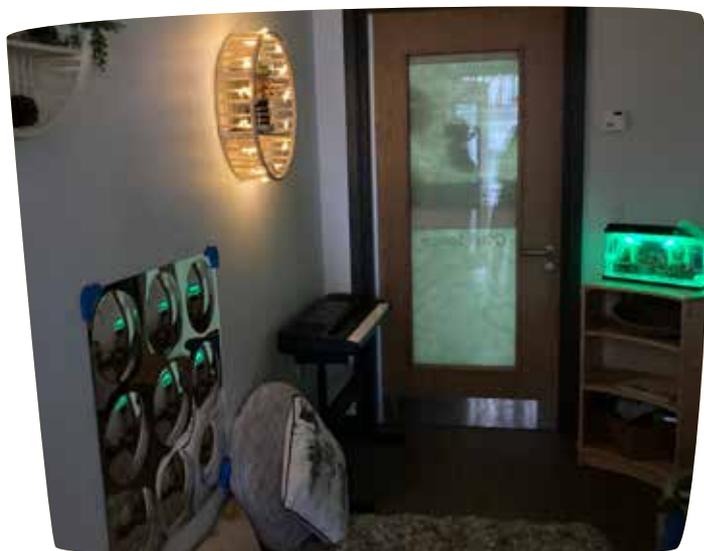




The [Scottish model for infant participation](#) encourages us to consider four key principles in relation to infant participation, one of which is space. A [report from the Sutton Trust](#) reviewed the evidence on the quality of early childhood education and care for children under three years. The report suggests for children under three years “small group sizes appropriate to age/ stage, within a calm environment which promotes individual care and attention”. The report refers to the best-available evidence which suggest groups of six to eight for children under two years and 10 to 12 for two to under three. The research identifies this as best practice and individual settings should consider the impact of the size of groupings on the health, wellbeing, learning and development of young children.

Moving between rooms should be based on the individual needs of children. However, the minimum space standards, based on age ranges, should be followed. Having a designated playroom or space for any child does not mean children are unable to spend time in other space.

Having a flexible space can be very beneficial. This can be used for a variety of purposes, for staff, parents, community and as another space to be used by the children. For example, additional space for indoor active play or to be used to provide meals at lunch time.





'It's so warm and quiet. You made it so beautiful and nice. When we do yoga my body feels nice and calm'



Children need space to be with each other in large or small groups, to make friends and build relationships and to be active. However, children also need space to be on their own, to have some quiet time and to relax.



This is particularly important for children who are neurodiverse who may need time alone during times of stress. It is beneficial for children to have access to small spaces where they can choose to spend time in. The environment must be inclusive of all children regardless of their abilities and needs. It is important that reasonable adjustments are made to reduce as many barriers to play, learning and participation as possible. Many children who are neurodiverse may find the environment particularly challenging. This is mainly due to sensory difficulties and problems with central coherence. Recent studies examine challenges for children with autism spectrum disorder in relation to the classroom, however this could be transferred to any setting for children.

*"I can choose to spend time alone."  
(Health and Social Care Standards)*



*For almost any other special need, the classroom only becomes disabling when a demand to perform a given task is made. For the child with autism, disability begins at the door.” (Hanbury, M. (2007).*

Some settings have mezzanine areas which can be useful if the height of the ceiling allows. For this space to be counted as part of the space standards children should be able to safely access the area at all times.



An on-going evaluation and review of the impact on children of the environment will ensure the environment supports the needs of all children.

With the expansion of ELC more children may attend a setting for a longer day. It may be that more children need to rest or sleep. Children should be able to rest or sleep when they need to without being disturbed. In some small playrooms, children can rest or sleep comfortably within the room, but achieving this may be more difficult in larger rooms with more children. Space to sleep should be safe and cosy and there should be sufficient space for bedding and cots. Arrangements for sleep should be planned around the family routine and the child’s developing needs. More information can be found at in [safer sleep babies guidance](#).





From birth, children are primed to explore and learn about their world. When planning space for babies, consideration needs to be given to what babies need to feel safe, happy, cosy and content. They need an environment which they can relate to: home-like, calm and comfortable and where they can move freely. It is best practice for babies to have their own identified playroom. Smaller rooms can create a homely, nurturing environment where children feel safe and secure. Babies should have space for high-quality play and learning experiences that support and nourish development, wellbeing and happiness. Across the course of the day, babies and young children need different things from us and their environment. We should ensure the environment provides spaces to be quiet and relaxed, as well as challenged and stimulated.

Settings for school age children are provided from a variety of shared accommodation with limited settings having their own. The School age childcare: national children's charter which was co-designed with children across Scotland, states that SACC settings can be provided from a range of



spaces, including school buildings, community centres and outdoor spaces. Where SACC is delivered in a school building, the Charter states that it is important that it feels different to school by having no school work to do (unless children choose to do their homework), more choice, more comfortable places to relax, and more snacks. The Charter also states that children need SACC because it is a “healthy and relaxing environment”.

During term time the children have been in school during the day, therefore many are looking to engage in active, physical play after school. They may wish to run around and release energy or have some quiet time, play with friends or play on their own. There should be space for them to do this without disturbing others. When thinking about space, you need to consider the wide and varied range of activities and opportunities they should be offered to meet their needs.

Some settings have specific rooms for different activities such as a gym/large hall and smaller rooms for quieter activities. Where different rooms are not available, you will need to consider how opportunities and experiences can be provided within one space. Children should be able to make noise without disturbing those who want to be quiet. A quiet space is as important as space for noisier activities. Children we spoke with told us that sometimes it was too noisy, and they wanted space to sit quietly and read books. Some older children enjoy having a designated room or space just for them to plan and spend time in. It is important to have an ongoing consultation with children about the space and the use of the space. This helps them feel respected, responsible and valued.



Mate školá emink, Prague - The slide was added into the building several years ago to encourage children to be more physically active when playing indoors - it also meant they climbed the stairs - and learned to do this confidently and explored the upstairs areas



## Think about

- What does the space look like and feel like from the eye level of a child? Get down to the level of the children who will be in the space, how does the space feel and look like?
- How calm, relaxed and inviting is the space?
- How nurturing is the space?
- Where will children have quiet time or just time to 'be'? How inviting is this space?
- How do you make the environment free from distractions?
- How interesting is the space? Does it encourage children to play and learn?
- Where will children be supported to crawl and walk? How suitable is this space? Is there sufficient safe space to support this stage of development?
- How does the space help to make children feel safe and protected?
- How does the space support children to form positive attachments?
- What measures have been put in place to prevent children feeling overwhelmed by the space?
- How does the space enable children to play in groups?
- How does the space support noisy activity without disturbing children who are engaged in quieter activity?
- How do you make the environment as free from distraction as possible?
- How suitable is the rest/sleep area? Does the area support children to sleep undisturbed?

## Space to eat

Provision of meals and snacks are an integral part of a care, play and learning environment, especially during children's early years. When children have positive experiences with eating and drinking, it helps them develop an appreciation that eating can be an enjoyable activity. High-quality mealtime experiences support child development and provide opportunities to develop social skills.

Understanding the role of food within social and cultural contexts has long-term health benefits. For many children, mealtimes give them the opportunity to experience food in a therapeutic and healthy way. A positive relationship with food and enjoyable eating experiences with others has the potential to build resilience and reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences. Mealtimes should be a nurturing, secure, calm dining experience and should be enjoyable for both children and staff.

Children have always had food when they are in either an ELC or SACC settings. However, this may have been limited to a snack. In many settings parents provide a packed lunch and in some also provided a snack. Therefore, space for children to enjoy food and drink should always have been available. However, the expansion of ELC and the entitlement of a meal means more children will have a meal provided by the setting. Further information about food can be found at: [Setting the Table](#). It is very important to ensure the space is suitable to support good quality mealtime experiences

Scottish Government has updated the operating guidance for [Funding follows the child](#) and the [National Standards](#) for The ELC providers in Scotland. Criteria 10 in the National Standards provides guidance for standards on Food: 'Settings must have a clear and comprehensive policy for the provision of healthy meals and snacks for children. This should be consistent with [Setting the Table](#) and should ensure that individual cultural and dietary needs are met. There should be consultation with parents and carers about how other dietary preferences might be accommodated.'



*Mealtimes should take as long as a child needs. "I can enjoy unhurried snacks and mealtime in as relaxed an atmosphere as possible."  
(Health and Social Care Standards)*



Space for children to eat should be relaxed, quiet and peaceful and allow for children and staff to sit together. Children and staff sitting together helps children to form strong attachments with key adults. Children sitting with nurturing staff who know their individual needs helps support a consistent, secure, familiar atmosphere for children. Staffing arrangements should meet children's needs, including supervision and support for children during meals.

Children often take longer to eat than adults, particularly babies and toddlers, as they try to be independent and feed themselves. Unhurried mealtimes promote healthy eating and allow children to eat at their own pace. Relaxed mealtimes provide opportunities for social interaction by allowing children to chat to their peers and staff. Similarly, children can get restless if mealtimes take too long. This often happens when children are seated at tables well before the food is available.

Some settings may find they are not in full control of how long mealtimes take, particularly lunch. This can happen when children are taken into a different space to have lunch, for example a school dining space or if lunch time is set by others. In these instances, you need to consider carefully what can be improved to ensure the positive experience for children. Could there be any negotiation about the time for lunch or where children can have lunch. Some settings have moved lunch from a school dining room where they were able to do so, to provide an improved quality experience for children. Mealtime is very important for all children and crucial for very young children. In the first year of life, babies follow individual feeding patterns which can change regularly. Therefore, the space for babies at mealtimes should be adaptable to meet their individual needs. When babies are bottle fed with formula or expressed milk it is essential to create a nurturing and bonding experience. Holding a baby close, skin to skin contact and good eye contact helps the baby feel safe and loved. There should be suitable seating to support staff to do this.

Older babies should have seating, tables, cups, cutlery, bowls and plates to suit their needs, their stage of development. In baby rooms you will usually find a selection of small tables and chairs, highchairs, and soft comfortable chairs. These should be suitable for a child's height as well as need. Take account of the individual needs of children under two years. It is unlikely they will have meals, particularly lunch, all at the same time. Therefore, space for babies at mealtimes should be adaptable to meet their individual needs.

Healthy meals, snacks and drinks for children should be provided in an adequately equipped area. Adequately equipped areas should provide healthy meals, snacks, and drinks for children. In some small settings, this may be within the playroom where there are existing tables. In other settings this may be a designated lunchroom or a designated food area within the playroom, or a combination of all. Tables and chairs suitable to the needs and size of children should be available and should provide sufficient tabletop space to support all food dishes. The use of cutlery and crockery children may use and see at home, along with the use of place settings, table covers, and a centrepiece can help create a warm, welcoming mealtime experience. Where using shared space and tables and chairs need to be moved you will need to consider where these will be stored safely. Children should feel valued and included during mealtimes. They should be able to serve and be independent. Children should be involved in making and preparing their meals and snacks where appropriate. Many settings also encourage children to grow and prepare food.



"I like choosing my lunch in the dining area and helping my friends with their water."

"If appropriate, I can choose to make my own meals, snacks and drinks, with support if I need it, and can choose to grow, cook and eat my own food where possible."  
(Health and Social Care Standards)



Whether mealtimes are at a set time or not is a decision for the setting. Many settings have a rolling snack time. Not all children are hungry at the same time. A rolling snack time fosters independence allowing children to choose when to eat and who to sit with or to have snack on their own. Some settings have successfully implemented this system at lunch time. Settings need to decide what approach works best for their children.

When children are outdoors, they can become so engaged in their play and learning that they do not want to go inside for snack. Many settings have designated food areas outdoors or create temporary areas. This enables children to enjoy food and drinks with minimal disruption to their play. Having this space enables children to enjoy having food outdoors in the fresh air.



More examples of mealtimes experiences can be found in the [Food Matters](#) resource.



Children should always have access to fresh water to keep them hydrated. Settings should consider how children can easily access water.

A supply of fresh water is a requirement within premises where members of the public have access to drinking water. Water supplies in settings need to meet this requirement. Lead can make drinking water unwholesome and exposure to significant quantities of lead can be especially harmful. You need to check the suitability of the water supply. Where a building warrant for change of use of premises is being sought, a water sample for lead should be taken. Scottish Water should be contacted to organise a water sample from the premises if it is connected to the public water mains. If the premises is on a private water supply, then you should arrange to have a sample taken of the water by contacting the Environmental Health Department at your local council.

More information about the provision of healthy meals and snacks can be found in: [Setting the Table](#)



## Think about

- How do you ensure mealtimes are a nurturing, secure, calm experience for children and staff?
- What arrangements are in place to ensure staff not only sit with children but help create a good mealtime experience?
- Why is it important for mealtimes to be unhurried? What measures have you put in place to support this?
- How will you make sure mealtimes for very young children meet their needs? Do you have suitable seating for staff to bottle feed? Are the tables and chairs comfortable and a suitable size to support the children?
- Where do children have their meals and snacks? Is this the best area to support a good quality mealtime experience? If not, what can you do to improve this?
- When do children have meals and snacks? Do you feel this meet the needs of children? Do you find some children do not enjoy mealtimes? Is there anything you can do to improve this?
- Where can children get a drink when they want to? How easy is this for them to do this?



'It makes your whole body calm. You breathe properly. It makes your brain calm.'

# Outdoor space

There is strong evidence that playing and learning outdoors benefits children in many ways. Some of the many benefits include:

- improving physical health and wellbeing
- offering opportunities to explore unstructured environments, encouraging imagination and creativity enhancing child development
- improving learning for sustainability and about the natural world
- offering different opportunities for self-directed play and learning
- providing a sense of freedom
- offering different exciting opportunities for challenge and taking risks
- helping foster independence and decision-making skills.

But most of all playing and learning outdoors are fun.

Some research about the benefits of outdoor play and learning can be found at:

[Environmental and practice factors associated with children's device-measured physical activity and sedentary time in early childhood education and care centres: a systematic review](#)

[The dynamic relationship between outdoor environments and children's play](#)

[Redesign of an Outdoor Space in a Swedish Preschool: Opportunities and Constraints for Sustainability Education](#)

Staff also benefit from spending time outdoors as it contributes to better physical and mental health and improved sleep.



"As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment."

(Health and Social Care Standards)

The Care Inspectorate [Recovery play survey report](#) told us about children's experiences. One of the key messages was the significant increase in the time children spent outdoors and how adults, created and improved access to new outdoor spaces.

Organisations and academics in Scotland have agreed a [national position statement for outdoor play and learning](#) to promote the benefits and embed outdoor play-based learning as everyday activity for children in Scotland. The Care Inspectorate is a founder signatory and fully supports the ambition of the Statement.

The Scottish Government reinforces a child's right to play outside in a natural space in the Health and Social Care Standards and the [National Standards for ELC](#): ***"Children have daily access to outdoor play, and they regularly experience outdoor play in a natural environment as part of their funded ELC offer."***



With the expansion in ELC children may spend longer in settings. Therefore, it is vitally important children can play and learn outside when they choose. Children who attend SACC settings will have been inside a school building for most of their day, therefore outdoor play may be very important to them.

"I like the mud and puddles to jump in."



Children attending MACS Scotstoun drew a picture of an outdoor space



All settings should have a safe, suitable outdoor space adjacent to the setting. A stimulating, challenging and safe outdoor space adjacent to the accommodation enables children to move easily between indoors and outdoors, encouraging independence.

One of the main factors when thinking about your outdoor area is what different opportunities and experiences will the space offer children? What the outdoor space should offer is not prescriptive. However, the space should encourage children to engage in energetic activities, explore nature and wildlife, plant, and play in natural material such as mud, sand and water. Natural outdoor space with a mix of surfaces and textures gives children more opportunity and space to experience nature, to feel the grass, to dig for worms, to climb trees and to enjoy getting dirty. Having different spaces outdoors will enable children to explore, be creative, be on their own or be with others, be energetic or relax and to have high-quality experiences outdoors.



The environment should be stimulating and safe but should also offer challenges and encourage children to take risks, giving them a sense of achievement. Although the space should be risk assessed, children should not feel over protected. The risk-benefit approach in outdoor play and learning is essential for ensuring activities are safe and appropriate for children. By considering both the potential risks and the benefits of an activity, staff can make informed decisions about how to minimise any risk to ensure the activity is safe. Outdoor play and learning provide valuable opportunities for growth, exploration, and development. Balancing the risk and the risk benefit supports children to engage in challenging experiences while maintaining their safety. Some research on risk in outdoor play can be found at: [Associations between Children's Risky Play and ECEC Outdoor Play Spaces and Materials](#)

The Care Inspectorate embraces a risk-benefit approach to risky play and launched a position statement with the support of Play Scotland in January 2016:

“

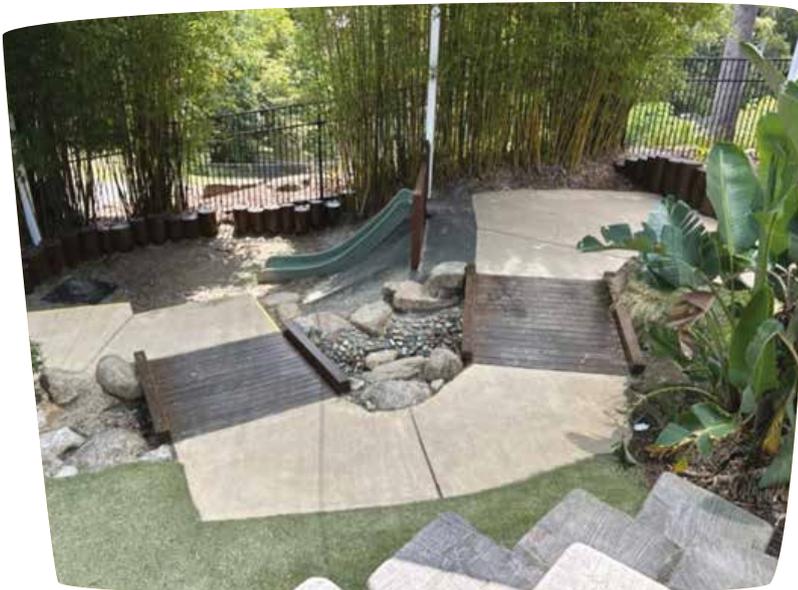
*The Care Inspectorate supports care service providers taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children. This means moving away from a traditional deficit model that takes a risk-averse approach, which can unnecessarily restrict children's experiences attending registered services, to a more holistic risk-benefit model. For example, we encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain. We do not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities.”*

Although a risk-benefit approach is encouraged for activities, the responsibility to ensure children are safe and protected, under the UNCRC the safety and protection of children remain with those who care for them. (UNCRC Articles 6 and 19).

There have been instances where children have left the outdoor space without the knowledge of staff. Please visit [The Hub](#) website for a range of resources and practice notes to help keep children safe by raising awareness of how and why children could leave a setting without a responsible adult and actions to prevent these incidents from happening.

Providing a natural outdoor environment can be challenging in some urban areas, in settings where the outdoor space is shared or there are limitations to what changes can be made. Some SACC settings will be within school premises and the outdoor space may consist of the concrete school playground only. However, imagination, creativity and innovation along with good use of natural resources and loose parts can transform these spaces. Some ELC and SACC settings, in shared premises can improve the outdoor space and utilise and improve other space adjacent to the premises. You will need to consider how children can stay outdoors when it is dark. Some outdoor lighting will help the children to feel safe, allow them to enjoy different experiences outdoors and just being outside in the dark can be exciting. The use of headlamps allows children to explore, and the creative use of lights can make the area quite magical.

Their-Care Sydney Australia - created an outdoor space on a hillside using limited space with some terracing and links between levels.



St Mirin's Out of School Club based within St Mirin's Primary School, Glasgow, improved their outdoor space by creating Woody Woodland, named by the children.



*It was a collaborative approach where 300 children designed and decided what and how the woods should be designed. Their drawings inspired our builder/landscaper to create a magical play space based upon children's views and wishes.*

*"This is a shared area between the school and out of school. Children have made this space their own. Their voices sought and acted upon. This reflects the UNCRC, Childrens Charter and Health and Social Care Standards. Play has immense benefits for children. Outdoor play offers a wider range of benefits and supports a reduction in stress, increased health & wellbeing, increased resilience and immune system. Overall, our work has improved the health and wellbeing of families and children by 35 per cent in year one and 43 per cent in year two. All of this made possible by funding, genuine partnership, collaboration, vision, change management, innovative thinking and a team of childcare professionals eager to continually develop and improve our impact for every family and child supported by our service."*

*Margaret McLelland, head of the setting*

A sheltered area enables children to stay outdoors in adverse weather. The sheltered area does not have to be a fixed structure as long as it provides shelter from the elements. Some examples of shelters can be found in the indoor/outdoor space section x.



Suitable clothing and footwear should be available including sun hats. However, that does not mean that every time a child goes outdoors, they need to change their clothing. Children experience temperature differently and it is important that they can learn how to self-regulate through considering clothing choices. Encouraging children's choices on clothing is important for their learning. Engagement with parents is essential in relation to appropriate clothing for outdoor play and learning.

In most SACC settings, where children attend before and after school, they will have the clothing and footwear they use for school. During school holidays, SACC settings need to consider suitable outdoor clothing for children and staff. Some settings provide all-weather suits and wellies for children others request families provide suitable clothing. When there are puddles to jump in or mud to play with, all-weather suits and wellies are invaluable. More information about outdoor clothing can be found in the [Out to Play](#) resource on the Care Inspectorate's Hub website.

Outdoor clothing must be suitable and easily accessible to enable children and staff to take an active part in outdoor play and learning. It can take a young child a long time to get an outdoor suit on and off. You will need to consider where outdoor clothing is stored, cleaned and dried. Some settings have a cloakroom area beside access to the outdoor space and use the laundry for drying and cleaning. Others have a boot room with drying facilities which can enable children and staff to get changed without disturbing indoor activities. More information can be found in the storage section.

Resources and materials should be as natural as possible, suitable to an outdoor learning environment and to encourage active play. Loose parts play provides children with open-ended materials they can manipulate and use in various ways which foster creativity, problem solving and imagination. This encourages exploration and allows children to follow their own interests and ideas promoting deeper engagement and learning. Information on loose parts play can be found at; Loose parts toolkit. Other outdoor materials and activities can also be used, and the setting will decide on these to meet children's health, development and learning needs.



"I love the hammock  
you have to take  
your shoes off. You  
can go in there with  
one friend."



Some more examples of outdoor play and learning can be found in the Care Inspectorate's [My World Outdoors](#) resource.



## Think about

- How natural is the outdoor space? Are there grass, trees, flowers, areas for digging and planting, water, soil, mud? If not, how can you provide these?
- What experiences and opportunities can children enjoy in the outdoor space?
- What makes the outdoor space inviting, enjoyable and exciting to children?
- How will children be able to take risks?
- What would encourage children to stay outdoors in adverse weather?
- How easy is it for children to access outdoor clothing?
- What resources can children use outdoors? How are they consistent with loose parts?
- How inviting are they to encourage children to be creative and imaginative?

## Indoor/outdoor space

An indoor/outdoor setting is a setting where the scale and quality of the outdoor space is appropriate for enhancing the quality of children's play and learning experiences. The number of registered spaces takes account of the high-quality natural, outdoor space combined with high-quality indoor space. An indoor/outdoor setting will take account of the outdoor practice of an outdoor setting and combine this with a high-quality indoor experience. Both the indoor and the outdoor area must be accessible to children 100 per cent of the operational times. For these settings, there is a condition detailed on the setting's registration certificate.

Those considering this type of setting must be clear on the reasons why this would enhance the outcomes for children. You need to think innovatively and flexibly about the design and the impact the environment can have on the quality of a child's care, development, learning, health and wellbeing. As with all settings, the quality of children's experiences and outcomes are and will remain of paramount importance.

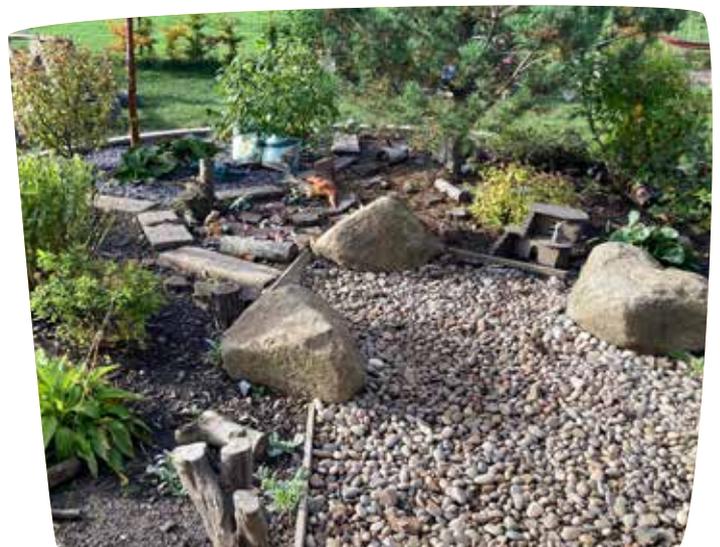
There are many important aspects of an indoor/outdoor setting that need to be considered. These include the quality of the environment, children's use of indoor and outdoor space, skills, experience and qualifications of staff and not least the quality of opportunities and play and learning experiences for children.

When considering providing an indoor/outdoor setting some of the main aspects to consider are listed below.

### Outdoor space

The outdoor space should be of a high standard. The quality of the space and range of learning experiences available to children should be similar to that of an outdoor setting as some children may choose to spend all, or the majority, of their time in the outdoors.

More information can be found in the section Outdoor space and the section Types of settings.



## Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the setting should clearly reflect both indoor and outdoor experiences. This will allow parents to choose the right setting for their child, give them the opportunity to ask questions about what this means for their child and allows both children and parents to be actively involved.

Where a setting is considering moving to this model, parents and children should be consulted to enable staff to share the positive effects on health and wellbeing of being outdoors.

## Space and capacity

There is no agreed outdoor space standard. The space should be large enough to enable all children, if they choose, to be outside at the same time and should support varied and high-quality play and learning. As a guideline, consideration can be given to a maximum increase of up to 20 per cent of the registered places for children. This would relate to the registered number of children who can independently choose to be either indoors or outdoors. This usually relates to children over two years old. This is based on observations and experience that due to their developmental stage it is difficult for children under the age of two to independently choose to be indoors or outdoors.

An example when considering an increase in capacity is if the setting is registered for nine children under two years, 10 children aged two to under three years and 20 children aged three to not attending school, the setting may have an increase of either four (up to 20 per cent of 20) or six (up to 20 per cent of 30).

In practice, if a setting has increased capacity by using the outdoor space it is not necessary for that number of children to be outdoors at any one time. Taking the above example there would be an additional four or six children. Four or six children do not need to be outside all of the time unless they choose to be. This would be contradictory to the good practice, that children can choose independently when to be outside or inside. However, the increase in capacity is dependent on the suitability of the outdoor space and how all of the space will be used to provide good outcomes for children. This maximum percentage recognises that all children may be outdoors or indoors at any one time and should enable the focus to remain on good quality experiences for children.



## Using indoor and outdoor space

Children need to be able to move freely and independently indoors and outdoors. This is sometimes known as free flow. This encourages children's independence and provides them with different opportunities and experiences. In an indoor/outdoor setting children must be able to move between spaces when they choose and without any input from staff. How easy it is for children to do this depends to a large extent on the design of the environment. Children need to be able to move outdoors without having to go through a corridor or another internal space. Children should be able to see the outdoor area from inside. They should not have to ask staff to move between areas and should be able to open any doors easily, taking account of their age and stage of development and their needs.

Some settings have installed push buttons or have a system where the door automatically opens. Most older buildings will not benefit from these new designs. Therefore, you need to consider how children can open doors. Where access is through a door designated as a fire exit, you should consult with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Fire exits should be kept clear for evacuation purposes with access and egress issues as well as all other fire safety aspects considered as part of a comprehensive fire risk assessment carried out by a competent individual. Some settings have considered the use of heavy plastic curtains sometimes referred to as butchers curtains. Where this has been chosen, you should consult environmental health.

Where the plan is to keep a playroom door open you need to consider the indoor temperature and how children will get back inside should the door close. Some settings have two different ways of accessing outdoors. In these settings one of the doors can remain open apart from in adverse weather conditions. The second door is where children go through a room designed to facilitate outdoor experiences, for example the boot room to get outside. This is not considered the same as children having to go through an internal space to access outdoors as there are two points of access. Practice would highlight if this was a barrier to children accessing outdoors.



## Shelter

Indoor/outdoor settings need to have an outdoor shelter, similar to those in outdoor based and outdoor satellite settings. The shelter will enable children to continue to enjoy the experiences a natural environment offers even when the weather is extreme. The shelter can be fixed or temporary but must be suitable for children to stay outside should they wish. The type of shelter you provide is a decision for each setting. You need to carefully consider where the shelter is positioned. Some structures may be suitable on some sites but not on others. Some shelters are substantial and have heating or are made of a material that keeps it warm, others do not have these features. Children not only enjoy using a shelter when it is raining, windy, sunny or warm but often just use it as part of their outdoor experience. How the structure is used is usually decided on by the children and often changes.





## Toilets

Children need to have easy access to suitable toilets, changing facilities and to hand hygiene. In outdoor and outdoor satellite settings these facilities are mainly provided outdoors. However, in an indoor/outdoor setting you do not have to have outdoor facilities unless you wish to or unless the indoor facilities are not easily accessible to the children.

You need to consider how long it will take children, when they are outdoors, to get to the toilet or to wash their hands. This can be quite a considerable time particularly when they are engrossed in play and if they have their all-weather suits on. Many settings have now chosen to have toilets children can access easily when outdoors. It may be that if you are increasing capacity, the number of toilets and changing facilities, may need to be increased. The environment input standards and details about toilets, changing facilities and hand hygiene are detailed in the relevant sections.

Reference should also be made to the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)



*"I can easily access a toilet from the rooms I use, and I can use this when I need to."*

*(Health and Social Care Standards)*



## Outdoor clothing and storage

Children should have easy access to suitable outdoor clothing. Indoor/outdoor settings should have suitable storage for outdoor suits, wellies and other outdoor clothes. The storage should be easily accessible to both children and staff. More information can be found in the Storage section on page 67.



## Staff

Suitably skilled, qualified and experienced staff are fundamental to high-quality experiences and outcomes for children. Many staff fully embrace outdoor play and learning and understand the different range of experiences and opportunities children can have to complement indoor experiences. Staff would be expected to have experience and training in outdoor play and learning and to confidently put this into practice.

Many training providers support continuous professional development for outdoor play and learning and many large providers offer this internally to staff. The ethos of outdoor play and learning should be embedded in staff practice. Staff need to be motivated and enthusiastic about the concept of an indoor/outdoor setting. They need to help enable children to make independent choices about where they want to be and what they want to do and learn.

## Resources

Resources should be as natural as possible using materials suitable to an outdoor learning environment and to encourage active play. Some settings have found innovative ways of creating natural spaces for children to explore. These include creating raised beds for planting, growing and digging/mud play, creating bug hotels and vertical gardens from pallets and including natural materials as small and large loose parts. Information on resources can be found at: [Loose parts toolkit](#) and [Out to Play](#).



## Think about

- Would your setting be a good indoor/outdoor play and learning environment?
- What detail is included in the aims and objectives to reflect an indoor/outdoor setting?
- How do you make sure staff are motivated and enthusiastic about outdoor play and learning?
- How do you make sure staff are suitably trained skilled and experienced?
- How will all staff be deployed effectively to make best use of staff skills and expertise?
- How can children move easily and independently between the spaces when they choose?
- Where is the outdoor clothing stored and how easy is it for children to access independently?
- How suitable is the shelter? How will this support children to feel comfortable outdoors in adverse weather?
- Where are the toilets and wash hand basins? How easy is it for children to access these when they are outdoors?

## Toilets

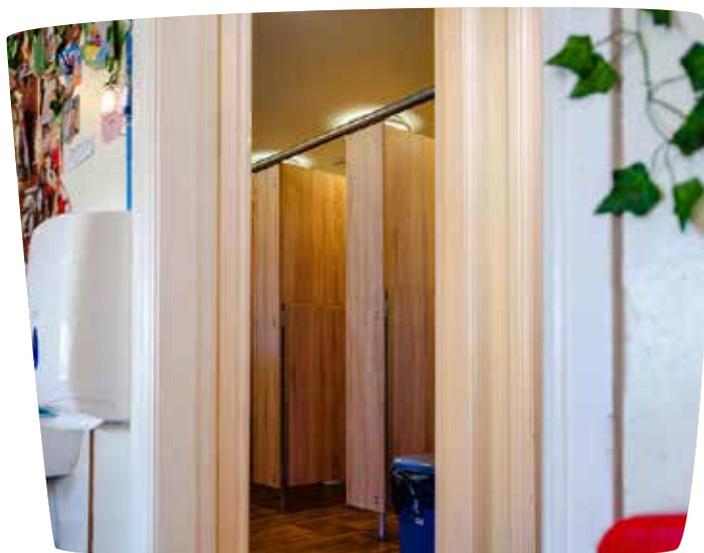
Toilets for children are an important aspect of ELC and SACC. They should be designed to meet the needs and preferences of children, as well as to promote hygiene and safety. Providing children with clean, suitable, safe toilets they can access easily is essential for ensuring children develop good bladder and bowel health habits throughout their life. It is important for children to feel safe and comfortable when going to the toilet.

Some bladder and bowel problems experienced by children can be because of their reluctance to using toilets. A delay in attaining control over their bladder and bowel activity in childhood can lead to bladder and/or bowel dysfunction in later life.

Toilets should be well ventilated, suitably heated and be in a place which is within easy reach of children to promote their independence.

Children's privacy and dignity should be respected when using toilets. Dignity and respect are central principles of the Health and Social Care Standards. Each toilet should be contained within its own individual compartment. Full height doors on cubicles and locks on doors are not recommended for ELC settings as many young children need assistance from staff. Gender specific toilets are not required in ELC settings.

SACC settings should have separate gender specific toilets, unless the environment they are based in has purpose built suitable communal facilities or the toilet and hand wash basin is provided within an individual room. These are sometimes referred to as gender neutral, individual toilets. School age children must have privacy when using the toilet with full height doors and locks that work properly. The locks must also be easy to open to avoid trapping the child in the cubicle. Facilities for the disposal of sanitary products should be easily accessible and be able to be discreetly used by school age children when needed.



Where school age children share the environment with younger children it is best practice for them to have separate toilet facilities. Where an ELC setting has a small number of children and is based within a small primary school, it may be reasonable for children to share toilets. However, the privacy and dignity of all children must be respected.

The minimum number of toilets relates to children aged two years and over. This is one toilet per 10 children or part thereof, not fewer than four. More information can be found in the Key Principles section on page 10.

The minimum number of toilets takes account of [building standards technical handbook 2020](#) and [The school premises \(general requirements and standards\) 1967](#).

Urinals can be an option for school age children, as long as there is also a toilet cubicle for their privacy and dignity. A wash hand basin should be provided for each urinal that replaces a toilet. One example may be where there are three toilets and one urinal there should be four wash hand basins. This is to ensure hygiene and sanitation standards.

Many children aged two years may be in nappies, therefore suitable changing facilities should also be available. The changing facility would be counted in the number of toilets. For example, where a setting is provided to 40 children aged two years to those not attending school, three toilets and one changing facility would be suitable. Where the setting is small, for example 10 children aged two years to those not attending school, one toilet and one changing facility should be provided. However, providers may wish to have additional facilities as appropriate. Within the toilets, one hand wash basin should be available for every 10 children. Information on wash handbasins can be found in the Hand hygiene section on page 58.

Many settings have outdoor toilets or toilets that can be accessed easily when children are engaged in play and learning outdoors. These can be included in the ratio of children's toilets. Accessible toilet facilities may be included in the ratio of children's toilets where appropriate. In these instances, the accessible toilet is not used by members of the public or staff and is not counted in the toilet ratio for adults.

The size of a toilet should be suitable for those who use it. For small children, this means having toilets that are a suitable size for their height. They should be able to sit on the toilet with their feet touching the ground. This will help them to be comfortable and enhance independence which is particularly important to children. National Resource for Health and Safety suggests that using a full-sized toilet for small children without supervision is not recommended due to the size of the toilet in comparison to the size of the child. Where a setting has a full-sized or larger toilet, an inset seat and step should be used. Children who are being toilet trained can use a potty or a toilet.

More information on potties and toilet training can be found at:

[Nappy changing for early learning and childcare settings](#)

[Potty training: how to start & best age to potty train](#)

Staff toilets should not be shared with children and should not be counted when considering the overall number of toilets available for children. All toilet facilities for staff should be provided in accordance with building regulations, health and safety and work regulations, food safety regulations and the Equality Act (2010). [Building standards](#) apply to new or converted buildings as well as to extensions or alterations to buildings which have toilet facilities.

To meet food hygiene regulations, sanitary accommodation should not open directly on to any room or space used wholly or partly for the preparation of food. Where there is a separate kitchen for food production an intervening ventilated space is required to prevent toilets leading directly into the kitchen. Where food is consumed or prepared in playrooms, it may be that only one full height toilet door is needed. This would depend on the type of ventilation within the toilets. You must contact your local environmental health department regarding this. In general, the food preparation or consumption space within a playroom should be at the furthest point from the toilets.



## Think about

- How comfortable would it be for a child to use the toilet?
- Is the height and size of toilets and wash hand basins suitable for the children attending the setting?
- What measures have been taken to respect privacy and dignity?
- How easy is it for children to access the toilets independently?
- Where young children need the assistance of staff how easy is it for this to happen?
- How does the position of where the toilets are situated meet with food safety regulations?
- How do the toilet facilities for staff comply with the relevant regulations?
- What account has been taken of the equality act particularly in terms of accessible facilities?
- What measures have been taken to make all toilets comfortable and safe?

## Changing facilities

Gastrointestinal illnesses including Norovirus, Salmonella, or E.coli O157 are highly infectious and can potentially be transmitted in the nappy changing area if good standard infection prevention and control precautions (SICPs) are not adhered to. Outcomes of these infections can be serious for those affected, with children aged under five years most susceptible. It is important to be aware that some people can be infected but do not get or show any symptoms.

Outbreaks of infections such as E. coli can cause severe illness and potentially affect the longer-term health of children. While it is not common, E. coli O157 outbreaks have been reported in Scottish ELC settings, with children and staff infected. Several of these cases were reported in 2006, 2012 and 2022 affecting children and staff some with serious and long-term consequences. One of the possible sources of transmission for E.coli O157 and other gastro-intestinal infections is the inadequate provision of nappy changing/personal care facilities, such as wash hand basins and proper hygiene practices. Outbreaks of infection, alongside Covid-19 and other potential infections, impact on the health and wellbeing of children and staff.

Children who use nappies or continence aids should have appropriate changing facilities. These facilities must provide children with a safe, clean environment and appropriate equipment while promoting privacy, dignity and for older children, independence. Suitable facilities and good infection prevention and control practices are essential for the health and wellbeing of children and staff.

Reference should also be made to the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)

There must be a minimum of one nappy changing facility for every 10 children using nappies, as detailed in the key principles section. This is consistent with the minimum number of toilets required for older children. Nappy changing facilities must be separate from, but conveniently close to playrooms so staff can easily change nappies in a timely manner. Nappy changing facilities should be designated for that use only. They should be separate from play areas, food preparation areas, serving areas and laundry areas and should not be used as cupboards to store resources. There should be space for staff and children to manoeuvre safely, clear of any obstruction. Walls, the ceiling, doors and flooring must be of a suitable material that can be easily cleaned.

There must be suitable lighting, heating and ventilation. Lighting can be natural or artificial but must be enough to allow safe practice and provide reassurance to children. Heating should be an acceptable temperature for the comfort of the child in a form that eliminates the risk of burns or scalds. Ventilation can be natural or artificial and could be a window that opens and complies with Scottish [building standards](#) and takes account of any health and safety warnings or an extractor fan that does not directly vent into another room. Where there is an extractor fan this should be on while the room is being used and should stay on for the recommended time after the room has been vacated. The extractor fan must be fit for purpose, adequate for the size of the room and maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Within the nappy changing area there must be a designated hand wash basin for hand washing only, which must be located within the nappy changing area. Further information can be found in the hand hygiene section. There should be a separate waste bin for disposable nappies. This could be a foot-operated, lined, lidded bin or a specific bin designed for used disposable nappies.

Nappy changing units must:

- be a suitable size and strength appropriate to the age and weight of the child
- conform to relevant safety standards
- have some form of separation if there are multiple units within the same area, either by a clear space or a cleanable partition between each nappy changing unit
- include a changing mat or surface that is waterproof, easy to clean and in a good state of repair so it can be cleaned and decontaminated thoroughly as required. Providers should consider staff safety when staff are lifting children on to changing units and may consider if steps to the unit would be useful.

For children aged under two years, the facilities as described, must be within a self-contained designated nappy changing room. This means a room with floor-to-ceiling walls and a full-sized door that closes securely. The room is not used for any other purpose other than nappy changing for children under two years. This is because these children are especially vulnerable to infection due to an immature and developing immune system and they are dependent on staff to meet their care needs.

For children aged over two years nappy changing can happen within a children's toilet area. For example, where there is a partitioned area within the toilets with appropriate nappy changing and hand washing facilities or sufficient space within a cubicle of a child's toilet for a suitable changing unit and a hand washing sink to be provided. Where a changing unit is within a toilet cubicle, the unit should not cover or block the toilet. In some instances, it may be suitable for changing facilities to be within an accessible toilet if the toilet is used only by children attending the setting. This means the accessible toilet is not used by staff or visitors as other facilities are provided for them.

Suitable storage space should be available within the changing facility for appropriate items. Where potties are used within a setting, facilities should be available for the use, storage and cleaning of these.

Further information can be found in:

[nappy changing for early learning and childcare settings \(excluding childminders\)](#)

[national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)



## Think about

- Children aged under two years are more susceptible to infections/diseases. How do you make sure you reduce the risk and spread of infection for these children?
- Where is the changing facility? How easy is it to get to?
- How is the privacy and dignity of children respected?
- How would the area look and feel to a child? Is it warm, comfortable, pleasant, spacious? Is there enough space for adults and children to move around?
- What facilities are there to support good infection control procedures?

*"If I require intimate personal care, there is a suitable area for this, including a sink if needed."*

*(Health and Social Care Standards)*

## Hand hygiene facilities

The setting should have suitable facilities for staff and children to wash their hands. Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent and control infection. Children should be encouraged to learn about hand hygiene. Good hand hygiene should always be promoted. As well as preventing infection, hand washing is an important part of healthy living for children and can be fun. Hand washing should be done at the right times, with the correct products, facilities and procedures.

More information can be found in the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)

Hand wash basins should be available in playrooms, kitchens, food preparation areas, toilets, utility rooms and nappy changing/personal care rooms. It is not expected that there is a wash hand basin in a playroom for SACC, unless you wish to have one. However, children and staff must have access to hand washbasins near the playroom.



Settings should have suitable hand wash basins designed to facilitate good hand washing practice and should not be used for any other activities that may contaminate them. Hand wash basins must be used for hand washing only.

Hand wash basins should be plumbed into the water supply. Mobile hand wash basins are not suitable in any new settings. There are concerns in the rise of cases of [cryptosporidium](#) which may be linked to the use of mobile hand wash basins and that temporary facilities are not conducive in relation to infection control. Currently in some settings, there may be some mobile hand wash basins. However, where a new registration or a variation has been requested the expectation will be all hand washing basins will be plumbed in. You should also consider upgrading these facilities if you are refurbishing the premises.



Hand wash basins must be large enough to avoid water being spilled or sprayed out with the sink. When putting in hand wash sinks services should consider the splash zone to reduce risk of cross contamination. The basin and taps should be accessible and safe for both children and staff. Non-hand operated taps should be considered, such as lever, elbow, automatic, paddle or push-top taps. Taps are high-touch areas and may contribute to cross contamination which often undoes the value of hand washing.

Hot and cold water must be available to facilitate hands being washed in warm running water. The temperature should be able to be regulated to avoid scalding or freezing. The hand wash basins should fit the needs and preferences of the users, with different sizes and heights available. Ideally, each playroom should have two hand washbasins, one for adults and one for children, to promote convenience and comfort. Where this is not possible, one hand wash basin would support hand washing. Where the hand wash basin is at an adult height, a suitable step would support children to use it. Where the hand wash basin is at a child's height, consideration should be given to staff health issues.

A mild liquid soap should be available, preferably in a wall-mounted unit with disposable cartridges. Wall-mounted is preferred as free-standing single-use soap dispensers often fall into the sink when used by children and can be difficult to operate. Disposable paper towels should be next to basins in wall-mounted dispensers, together with a nearby foot-operated wastepaper bin. If electric hand driers are used, care must be taken to ensure hands are thoroughly dried. Alternatively, flannels or small hand towels can be used but these are for single use only and must be provided clean prior to use and sent for laundering after use by one child. This is to prevent cross contamination.

Children should be able to wash their hands with soap and warm water and dry them thoroughly before tooth brushing. More information about toothbrushing can be found at: [Supporting healthy smiles](#).



## Think about

- Where are the hand wash basins situated? Are they situated where it makes it easy for children and staff to wash their hands?
- How does the hand wash basins help reduce the risk of and spread of infection?
- How do you make sure the designated hand wash basins are used for hand washing only?

## Kitchen and food preparation

All ELC and SACC settings which provide food, including snacks for children, should be registered as a food business. The individual local authority Environmental Health department is responsible for regulating food safety in all care settings.

Useful information about whether your setting requires to be registered as a food business can be found in the [Guide to registering your business on the Food Standard Scotland website](#). Information about food standards can also be found on the [Food Standards Scotland website](#).

The design and structural requirements for food provision in a setting are determined to an extent by the level of food provision. Early discussion with Environmental Health is strongly advised. Contact details for your local Environmental Health department can be found on your local authority website.

Children who receive a funded ELC place must be provided with a healthy meal. More information can be found at: [Funding follows the child and the national standard](#).

This meal can be either breakfast, lunch or dinner, depending on the hours of attendance. The meal should meet the nutritional standards within [setting the table](#) and cater to the dietary needs and preferences of the children.

A meal is often also provided in ELC and SACC settings, where a child does not receive a funded place. In these settings a meal can be provided, or families can provide a packed lunch for their child. Usually at least a snack is provided by the setting.

Suitable arrangements for food storage and preparation need to be available. Some settings provide very little food, especially in SACC where snack is the only food offered. In these cases, it may be acceptable to have a small kitchen area within a playroom, provided the room does not lead directly into a toilet/s. The kitchen area must be washable and not carpeted. This can be useful where children help prepare and serve their own food. Many providers do this by installing a half-wall



partition. A full wall or controlled access partition is not necessary if only cold or ambient foods are prepared. You should seek advice from your local environmental health department.

If the food is prepared by an outside catering service, a small kitchen or servery area may be suitable when the food only needs to be put into dishes for serving.

A kitchen should have enough space for the equipment and the food that will be cooked and prepared. There should be proper storage for food, utensils, equipment, cutlery and dishes.

Keeping your hands clean is essential. Every food preparation area or kitchen/kitchenette should have at least one designated hand wash basin. Hand wash basins should have a hot and cold water tap (or mixed water at a comfortable temperature), anti-bacterial hand soap and disposable hand towels. It is recommended to have non-hand operated taps (lever or automatic) for hand wash basins.

If a kitchen/kitchenette handles or prepares any open food, a wash hand basin and two separate sinks will be required. If there is a dishwasher you will need one wash hand basin and one other sink, as the dishwasher will count as one of the sinks. It would be deemed acceptable for one of the sinks to be child height to allow for children to undertake the first stage cleaning of dishes to promote independence.

Where high-risk food items brought to the setting should be stored in a refrigerator or chilled at a safe temperature. This includes packed lunches and snacks provided by families. Depending on the size and function of the kitchen, different types of refrigeration units may be needed. A kitchenette may only require a single under counter refrigerator or a fridge-freezer combo, while a larger kitchen that prepares meals regularly may need more fridge and freezer space to store perishable food safely. Proper food storage is essential to prevent food poisoning and spoilage. Information on temperature control can be found on the [Food Standards website](#).

The following are general requirements which apply to kitchens and kitchenettes.

- Kitchens and kitchenettes must be adequately lit and ventilated.
- Windows and any other openings must be constructed in a way that prevents dirt from building up
- Windows and any other openings such as doors that are likely to be opened to the outside must be fitted with insect-proof screens that can be easily removed for cleaning.
- Doors must be easy to clean and, where necessary, to disinfect.
- Where cooking takes place the installation of extract ventilation will be required.

The floors and walls should be made from materials which are smooth, hard-wearing, washable and should be kept in a good condition. They must be easy to clean and, if necessary, disinfected. Bare wood is not acceptable.

Floors should be covered with a material which reduces the risk of slipping when contaminated or wet.

Ceilings must be in good condition, smooth and easy to clean, with no flaking paint or plaster. The finish must prevent dirt from building up and reduce condensation, mould and shedding of particles.

Kitchen cupboards and worktops must be made from materials which are easy to clean and where necessary disinfect. All items, fittings and equipment that come into contact with food must be kept in good order, repair and condition.

Appropriate facilities should be available where formula milk is prepared and stored and where breast milk is stored. More information on milk for babies can be found in the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)



## Think about

- Have you consulted your local environmental health department? What have you done to address any recommendations or requirements it has made?
- How do you make sure your kitchen or food preparation meets and continues to meet the relevant regulations for food safety?
- What type of food do you provide? How do you make sure the food you provide meets nutritional standards?
- What arrangements are in place for the safe storage of food?
- What arrangements are there for hand hygiene? How suitable are they?
- How do you make sure high-risk food brought into the setting can be stored at the correct temperature?

# Laundry

**Settings will generate a certain amount of linen and clothing that need to be cleaned therefore you should consider how this will be done.**

You have the option of laundering linen or outsourcing it to an external service. The main issue regarding laundry is the prevention of infection. Linen and clothing that are dirty or soiled (contaminated with faeces) can pose a risk of cross-infection.

Where the clothing belongs to the child, it is best practice to send dirty and soiled children's clothing home to be washed. Soiled clothing should be double bagged and sealed. You need to consider where soiled personal clothing can be stored before being taken home. Fresh, clean linen should be stored in a dry area separate from any used linen.

If you choose to launder items, including soiled items, on the premises then a washing machine should be available along with a dryer, either a tumble dryer or clothes dryer. Washing machines and driers should reflect the aims and objectives of the service and the needs of children using the setting. They should have the flexibility to cope with outbreaks of infection and soiled linen. Hand sluicing of laundry is not permitted. Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be available and used by staff dealing with soiled items.



The laundry should be situated in a separate room that is not connected to the playroom or the kitchen and should not be accessible to children. The room should be well ventilated, with space to store clean laundry and to deal separately with soiled laundry. The layout of laundry must be designed to ensure that effective cleaning can be undertaken. Finishes to walls, floors, work surfaces and equipment must be capable of withstanding regular cleaning and the impact of mechanical cleaning equipment if appropriate. The room should have a wash hand basin with a supply of soap and paper towels.

In some circumstances, a washing machine may be able to be in a kitchen, kitchenette/food preparation area but only if it is used for non-soiled materials. In these circumstances there should be a strict time separation between food preparation and the use of the washing machine. There should be a two-stage process for cleaning and disinfection after laundry activities and before food-related activities. These procedures should be reflected in the settings food safety management system. Soiled clothing should never enter an area where food is prepared.

More information can be found in the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)



## Think about

- What laundry facilities are available? How suitable are they?
- What measures have been taken to reduce the risk of cross infection?
- Where is the laundry facility situated? Are they accessible to the children?
- Who will carry out laundry duties?

## Utility space

This can also sometimes be known as a dirty room or a dirty utility room. This room is used for the storage of cleaning and disinfecting chemicals and equipment and the disposal of waste.

The fabric of the environment must be able to withstand regular and effective cleaning. The design of the room must incorporate the following features.

There should be a door with a lock or keypad so that access is restricted to staff.

Sufficient space and shelves to store equipment when not in use should be available to prevent cross contamination and clutter.

There should be space for a pedal operated bin.

A designated wash-hand basin should be available with hot and cold running water supply with liquid soap and paper towels easily accessible.

There should be space to store bucket and mops when not in use and to allow airing of mop heads to dry in preparation for use.

A general purpose sink should be available for the disposal of waste and for environmental cleaning activities (for example, emptying dirty water from mop buckets or cleaning mop buckets) and can be used for washing paints or messy activity items.

More information can be found in the [national health protection guidance for children and young people in schools and childcare facilities](#)



### Think about

- What utility facilities are available? How suitable are they?
- What measures have been taken to reduce the risk of cross infection?
- Where is the utility facility situated? Is this accessible to children?
- Who will carry out cleaning duties?
- How accessible is the general-purpose utility sink?

## Storage

Suitable storage is an important aspect of any setting. In settings most play equipment and resources should be easily accessible within playrooms to enable children to self-select.

However, there are many other items both large and small that need to be safely and securely stored. Some of these items may include large equipment, prams, bedding, kitchen utensils, food, towels, soft furnishings, linen, personal care items, walking aids or any other items children require. Suitable, lockable storage should be available for medication, where appropriate. It is very important the storage space accommodates all these items without creating clutter or hazards.

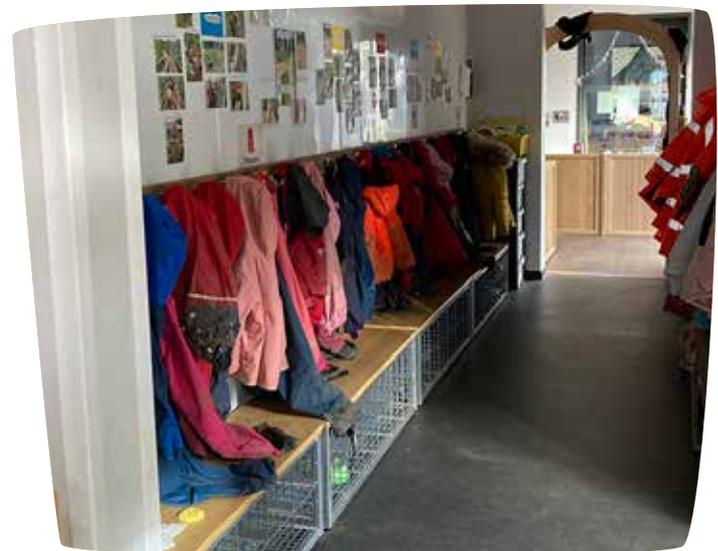
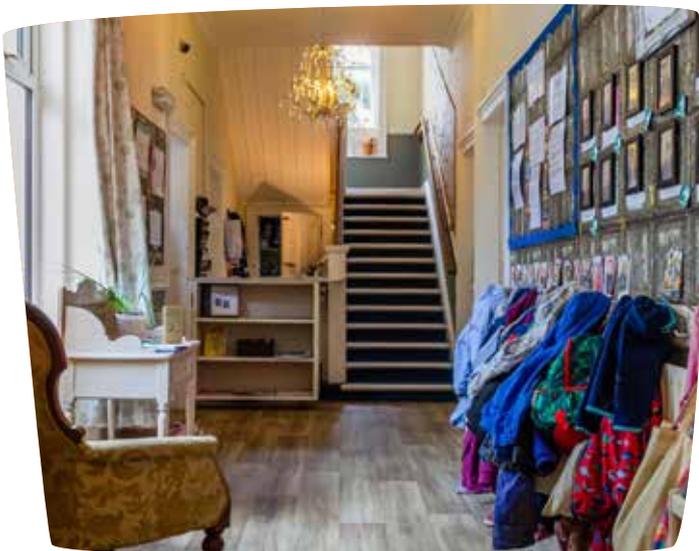
The storage space should also be well-organised and labelled to ensure easy access. The height of storage should also be considered to avoid the need for steps or staff overreaching to get to the highest part of the storage. Care should also be taken with items which may be hazardous, for example sharp items or cleaning fluids, and appropriate regulations followed for each item. Large items or outdoor items that are weather-sensitive should have a suitable storage place that can protect them from inclement weather. It can be helpful if the storage space for these items is outside, if possible, for ease of access for staff. Outdoor storage should be secure to prevent theft or vandalism.



Suitable space should be available to store children's coats and shoes. The design of the cloakroom areas should allow children and parents to access them easily and promote children's independence. The coat pegs and shoe storage should be large enough to store items securely and prevent them from falling on or being left on the floor, creating a potential hazard. The location of the cloakroom space is also important. Some settings have it in a reception area or hallway, while others have it inside the playroom, sometimes on a movable coat unit.



Wherever the cloakroom space is, the area should accommodate all the children and families who may use it at the same time. There may be more than one family member who accompanies or picks up a child. Siblings and other relatives can also be present, which can reduce the space significantly. The number of children attending the setting at any one time, the potential number of families and the different drop-off and pick-up times should be considered. Having the coat storage inside the playroom can interfere with children's play and learning, be staff resource intensive, and be a potential risk of children leaving the setting unnoticed if playroom access is not monitored effectively. Having cloakroom facilities outside the playroom can minimise this.



Children and staff enjoy being out in all weather conditions. Therefore, it is important for them to have easy access to all-weather clothing. This clothing should be stored in a convenient place where children can access it independently. A storage space should be available for extra clothing. Additionally, a drying system should be in place for wet clothing.

A place to store buggies, car seats and bicycles can be very useful for families. Some children or their siblings may come to the setting in buggies, and many may cycle. Where this storage is available it

should be well-designed. It should be safe and easy for families to use. A covered area for buggies will provide protection from the weather. If the buggy storage is inside, the area used should not be near the main entrance or near where families can gather as this may cause congestion, could be a hazard and may be a fire risk.



## Think about

- How easy is it for children to store and access their coats and shoes?
- What impact does the position of the cloakroom space have on the children, families and staff?
- How suitable is the storage place? Is it big enough, accessible, and easy to keep organised?
- Where will secure items be stored?
- How easy is it for children and staff to access all-weather clothing?
- What are the arrangements for drying clothing?
- Where can buggies be securely and safely stored?

*"The cupboard is where the toys go at night, when we are not there. If we didn't have a cupboard the toys wouldn't be safe."*



## Space for families

Settings should encourage families not only to use the setting for their child but for them to be involved, feel welcome and benefit from others.



*A warm welcoming space used for parents to relax unwind and get together'. Parent*

One way to foster this is to create a welcoming atmosphere in areas available across the setting, including playrooms where families can join their children and interact with the staff. This develops communication and helps build respectful and nurturing relationships. Positive relationships between staff and families are fundamental to build trust and cooperation between families and staff and creates a true sense of belonging for the child and family. This also demonstrates to families they are valued as partners in their child's learning.



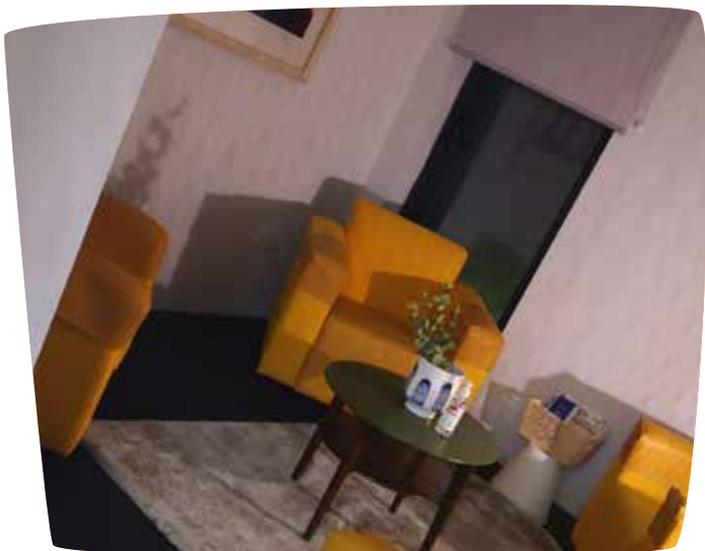
*The family room is a fantastic thing to have in the nursery. If we didn't have this then our autism support group wouldn't be able to meet up with other parents going through the same thing you are'. Parent*

Depending on the setting, you may have a separate room that can be used for families or for community use. A space like this can enable families to meet informally, provides space for families when settling children, support each other and participate in various groups or training sessions. This is a space which can be used by visiting specialists such as health visitors, social workers, speech and language therapists or psychologists, and can be extremely beneficial to children, families and staff.

These professionals can visit a setting that children and families are comfortable and familiar with to offer support. This allows for better collaboration and communication between parents, staff, children and other agencies.



*The family room for myself is a safe space to be able to speak to people in the same/similar position as myself, and get any support I need. It's always finished with mindfulness which I now use myself'. Parent*



*The family room is a great space for the parents to get together for different support groups. It's also a space you can come by yourself if you just want a breather or a tea or coffee. It's a warm, comfortable environment. Parent*



## Think about

- How welcoming and inviting is the space for families and the community?
- How does the space encourage families to take part in other activities within the setting?
- How could the space be used effectively by the community and other specialities?

## Space for staff

To protect the wellbeing of their employees, employers should provide suitable and sufficient space for staff. Staff rooms are extremely important as they provide a space for staff to relax, communicate and collaborate.



Staff need to be able to take breaks, to eat and drink away from the physical and psychological challenges of work, either individually or with their peers. Designated space for staff helps to reduce stress, improve morale, enhance teamwork and promotes staff health, safety, and wellbeing. This in turn helps enable staff to be more energised, productive, engaged at work and can lead to a decrease in sickness absence. Staff rooms can foster a positive work culture and a sense of belonging among staff. These rooms should be a suitable size to accommodate the number of staff. The rooms should be furnished appropriately and should be able to be used flexibly to accommodate other activities, including training and mentoring.

There must be space where staff can safely and securely store their personal belongings. One example of this could be locked cabinets in the staff room. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a reminder of the importance of good welfare facilities for staff working in care settings.

In accordance with building standards, there must be suitable toilets facilities for staff. These facilities must be separate from children's toilets. Details can be found in the [Building standards: procedural handbook \(third edition, version 1.6\)](#).

There should be an area/office for administrative work and for the storage of confidential records. Having an administrative area that can be seen from the entrance creates a welcoming environment and a point of contact for families and children. It also allows for better security and access control. Best practice is to have a dedicated space, a room or office, for management to conduct their work and communicate with staff and families confidentially. The location of this room should provide a balance between accessibility and confidentiality.



When settings share accommodation with others it may be challenging for dedicated space for administrative or management activities. Where dedicated space is not available, suitable arrangements should be put in place for confidential discussions. In some SACC settings, arrangements are made to use an office space or a room not used by school staff out with school hours.



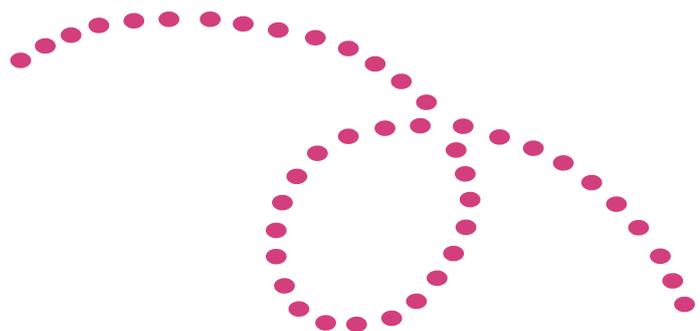
## Think about

- How suitable is the space for staff to take a break and is this big enough for the number of staff?
- Where will staff meeting and training take place and is the space suitable?
- Where will staff securely store their belongings?
- How suitable is the space for confidential discussions with families and staff?
- Where will administrative work take place and where will confidential information be securely stored?

## Heating, ventilation, light and noise

As a minimum requirement, there must be adequate and suitable heating, ventilation and light. Should your project be subject to a building warrant you require to comply with building regulations. Information on building regulations can be found in the Consultation with regulatory bodies section on page 8.

*"My environment has plenty of natural light and fresh air and the lighting, ventilation and heating can be adjusted to meet my needs and wishes."  
(Health and Social Care Standards)*

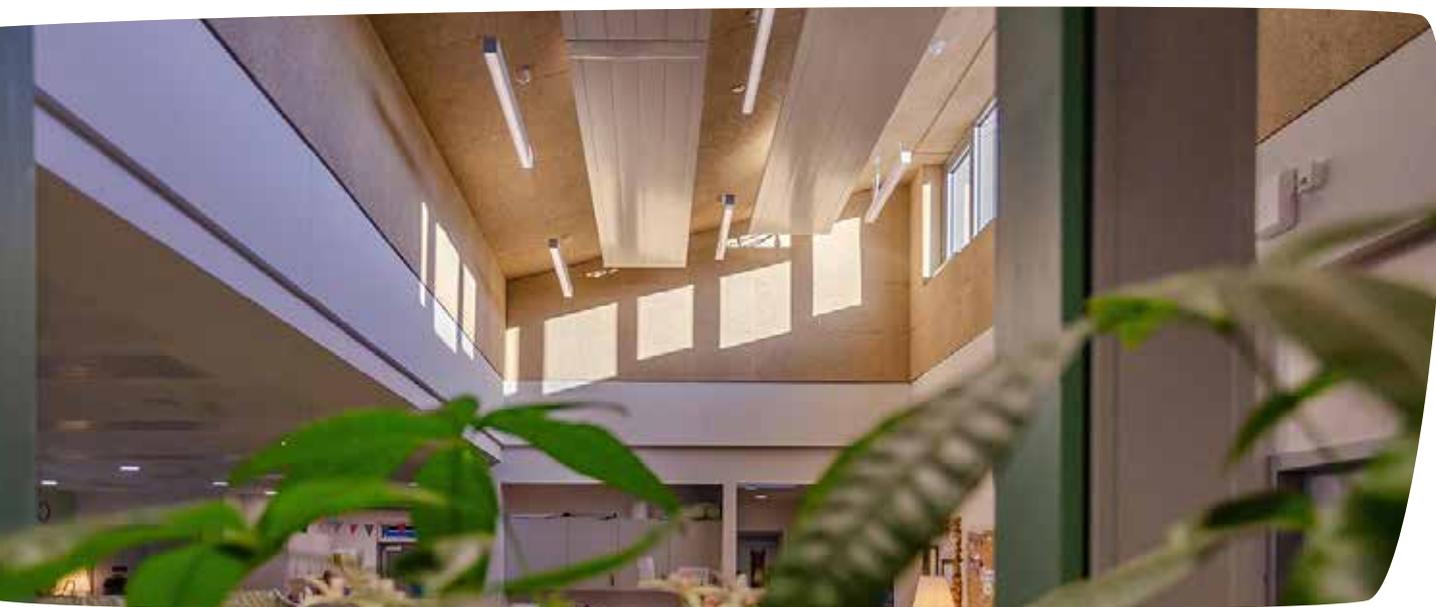


### Heating

Suitable heating should be available in all areas used by children and adults. The temperature should be able to be regulated. It is advisable to have a system that allows the temperature to be controlled from inside the building. This enables those in the setting to maintain a comfortable and appropriate level of heat and adjust it as needed.

Children are encouraged to move freely from indoors to outdoors. However, when the outdoor area is connected to a playroom, the indoor temperature may be affected by the door being open or frequently used. It should be easy for children and staff to go outdoors, however it is equally important to maintain a suitable temperature indoors.

### Lochfield Early Learning and Childcare Centre, Renfrewshire



In Drymen Nursery, Drymen, Stirling, some small doors were incorporated into the design, to help children access outdoors and to help maintain a suitable temperature indoors.



The safety of heating appliances is an important consideration in the prevention of accidents. Safety is the responsibility of those who provide and work in the setting and is a matter for them to risk assess. To reduce the risk, you may want to consider cool to touch radiators, under-floor heating or radiators that are out with the reach of children.

Lochfield Early Learning and Childcare Centre, Renfrewshire, has radiators on the ceiling that can be controlled from within the setting.

## Ventilation

Ventilation is the process of introducing fresh air into indoor spaces whilst removing stale air. Suitable ventilation should be available in all areas used by children and adults. Ventilation should be able to be operated by those on the premises. Fresh air should be available in all main rooms used by children.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us many valuable lessons, one of which is the importance of natural ventilation. Natural ventilation means bringing fresh air into indoor spaces and removing stale air, without the use of mechanical devices.

This can help reduce the risk of airborne transmission of infectious diseases, as well as improve the indoor air quality and comfort for children and staff. One of the best ways of providing natural ventilation is by opening windows, which allows natural air to circulate. This helps to create a healthier, homely, comfortable environment and enables staff to control the level of ventilation. In general, research indicates that there is a link between natural ventilation and health outcomes.

## Lighting

Natural light is essential for children's wellbeing and development. Exposure to sunlight is necessary for absorption of vitamin D which is necessary for health and wellbeing. It should be provided in all the playrooms where children spend most of their time, with the possible exception for some special areas like sensory or physical activity rooms that are not subject to the space standards.

The premises should have natural light in as many other areas as possible, to create a pleasant and healthy environment. Natural light is a minimum standard for playrooms, but it should be maximised whenever possible.

Natural light has a positive impact on psychological wellbeing, affecting mood, security and behaviour. It is especially important for neurodiverse children who may benefit from good natural light in their environment.

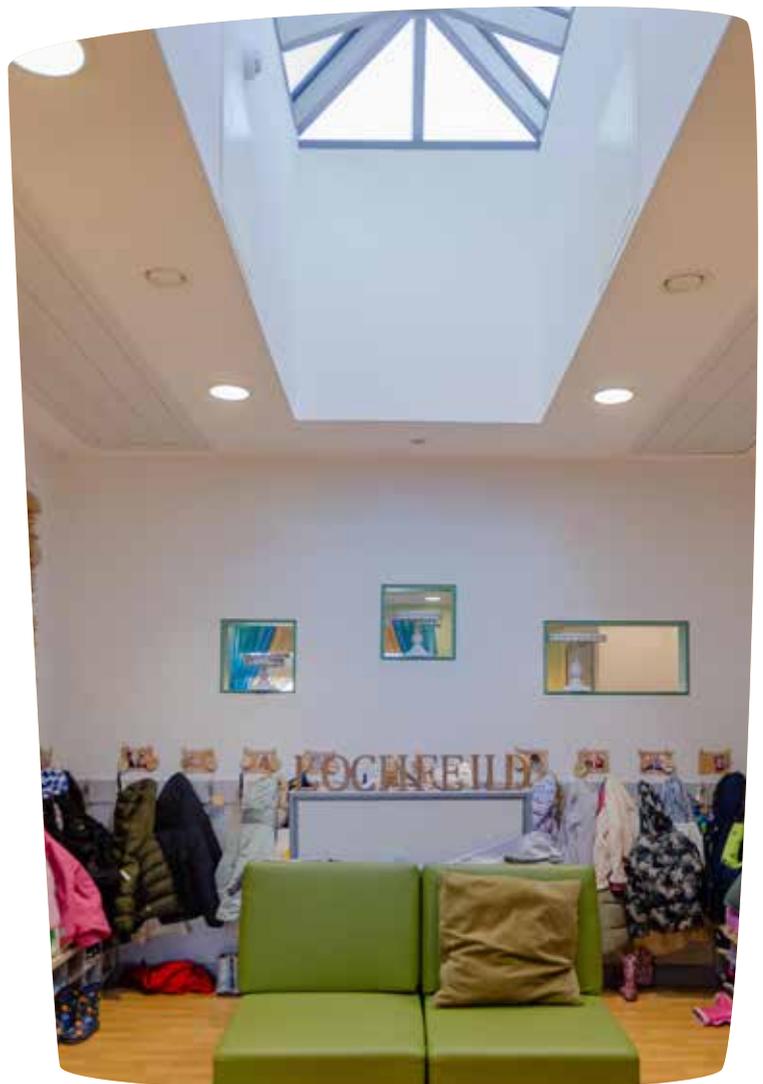
Windows are the second most effective way of ensuring access to natural light, the first being access to outdoors. Windows help to make for a more homely environment. When children can see outside it can stimulate their curiosity and imagination, as they can observe different weather conditions, seasons, animals, plants or just watch what is happening outside.

The school age children we spoke with told us it is important to be able to see out of the window to see the weather or just "to wave to someone". Floor to ceiling windows or fully glazed doors can be used to increase the amount of natural light and to enable children to see outside. Where windows are not at a child's eye level, improvements can be made to help children see outside. To help both babies and children develop and to learn about the world outside, the view from the window should be interesting. Blinds or suitable covers for windows will help to shade the room from direct sunlight and help keep the temperature comfortable.

To enhance the natural light in a room, you may want to combine windows with roof windows or light tubes. These options can create a dynamic and appealing space by offering views of the sky or by creating interesting light patterns. Some settings have made very good use of roof windows alongside the use of a mezzanine area to make children feel they are closer to the sky.



Along with natural light it is important to make good use of artificial light. Good use of artificial light and natural light can create a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment. It is important to consider the needs of neurodivergent individuals. Some research studies tell us that fluorescent lighting can interfere with the vision field of some people who are neurodiverse, causing anxiety, headaches and sensory overload, due to the flickering effect. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to the type of artificial lighting used. LED lighting can be an alternative. Artificial and natural light should be used flexibly to suit the use of the specific space.



## Noise

Noise can have a significant impact on the wellbeing and development of young children. One important task for children is learning to focus on what is relevant and ignore what is not. Some research shows how the presence of noise can have a detrimental effect on young children when they are attempting to learn new words.



Children will rarely be in a completely quiet environment, but reducing noise levels can help children learn even when there is background noise. Research tells us that for some individuals who are neurodivergent, loud noise can make them feel scared, confused, or out of control and can lead to sensory overwhelm.

Therefore, it is essential to create an environment that minimises unnecessary and disturbing noise, both from inside and outside sources. The design of the environment, such as the layout, materials and acoustics, can help to control the noise level and quality. The height of the ceilings in some settings can be quite high which can lead to increased noise levels. However, acoustic panels or absorbers can be installed to reduce sound. The use of drapes from the ceiling may also help.



*"Auditory and tactile input often overwhelmed me. Loud noise hurt my ears. When noise and sensory stimulation became too intense, I was able to shut off my hearing and retreat into my own world."* Grandin.T (1996), *Emergence: Labelled Autistic*. New York.



## Think about

- How warm and comfortable is the environment?
- If it is too hot or too cold, how can you regulate the temperature?
- What measures have been put in place to reduce the risk from heating appliances?
- How can a child see the world outside?
- How safe are the windows?
- Consider or listen to the noise levels. If the noise is loud what impact will this have on the child?
- What measures have been put in place to reduce noise levels?
- What measures have been taken to maximise natural light and natural ventilation?

# Sustainability

Sustainable development is defined as: “Development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” ([Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future](#))

The Scottish Government is committed to sustainable development in schools. In 2013, it accepted all 31 recommendations of the [Ministerial Advisory Group’s Learning for Sustainability Report](#). This applies in equal measure to an early learning and childcare service as it does to primary or secondary school.

It is imperative that any new education establishment, including early learning and childcare settings, or any extensions, incorporates sustainable development from the beginning of the design phase. Sustainability needs to become a core aspect of planning, design, development and management of schools and changes to them. In addition, ‘greener’ schools, in themselves, are a powerful learning and teaching tool.

What is clear is that all sustainable solutions must be factored in at the design stage and then revisited at each stage of the process for them to be effective. This is in order to ensure that the clear vision for sustainability that needs to be established at the outset is carried through the entire design, construction and operational phases. More information can be found at: [net zero standard scotland](#). Many settings have embraced sustainable design and development and have been awarded the [Eco Schools Green Flag](#).

Statutory requirements for new and substantially refurbished buildings encourage sustainability by setting standards which are assessed through the building warrant process. The [building technical standards](#) are periodically updated and you should check to ensure that current versions are being applied to any warrant application. In addition, stakeholders may wish to consider following the guidance of the Scottish Government’s Net Zero Public Sector Building Standard which encompasses a wide range of factors to support a journey to [net zero](#).



Winter Gardens Nursery in Glasgow was built in 2022. One of Glasgow City Council's key drivers for building the new provision was to deliver low carbon buildings working towards the GCC target to becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030. The building aims to reduce carbon emissions through the use of low and zero carbon generating technologies including air source heat pump (ASHP) and photovoltaic arrays. The ASHP provides both space heating via an underfloor heating system and domestic hot water to the building efficiently.

The Rocking Horse Nursery in Aberdeen is the first 'Passive House' nursery in Scotland. Passive House buildings are designed with quality components, high levels of insulation, and systems to recycle heat and circulate fresh air around the building. Passive buildings are extremely energy efficient, requiring significantly lower levels of energy for space heating than regular buildings.



## Think about

- What building materials can be used to provide a sustainable solution and encourage sustainable learning?
- How will the sustainable solution be implemented, realised and sustained?

# Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank those who supported the development of this resource.

Association of Directors of Education Scotland  
Care and Learning Alliance  
Connect  
Early Years Scotland  
Inspiring Scotland  
Kirktonholme Childcare  
National Day Nurseries Association  
Scottish Futures Trust  
Scottish Government  
Scottish Out of School Care Network  
The National Parent Forum of Scotland

Thank you to all providers, staff and children of settings who agreed to be included in the resources and who allowed us to visit and take photographs.

Thanks to everyone who completed the survey.

A very special thank you to the children of Glenpark Children's Centre, Greenock, and MACS in Scotstoun, Glasgow, who told us what they liked about their environment.





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This publication is available in alternative formats on request.



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