PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The physical environment can contribute to children's wellbeing, happiness, and creativity as well as promoting the development of independence. It can contribute to and make visible the quality of children's learning and involvement in experiences. The choices made in an education and care service about resources, materials, spaces, layout, air, and light in combination with access to a range of experiences in the indoor and outdoor areas, have a direct impact on the quality of learning opportunities available to children.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.1	Health	Each child's health and physical activity is supported and promoted.
2.1.1	Wellbeing and comfort	Each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child's needs for sleep, rest and relaxation.
2.1.2	Health practices and procedures	Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.
2.1.3	Healthy Lifestyles	Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2.2	Incident and emergency management	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practiced and implemented.

QUALITY AREA 3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		
3.1.1	Fit for Purpose	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child.
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
82	Tobacco, drug and alcohol -free environment
84A	Sleep and rest
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
103	Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair
104	Fencing and security
105	Furniture, materials and equipment
106	Laundry and hygiene facilities
107	Space requirements—indoor
108	Space requirements—outdoor space
109	Toilet and hygiene facilities
110	Ventilation and natural light
111	Administrative space
112	Nappy change facilities
113	Outdoor space—natural environment
114	Outdoor space—shade
115	Premises designed to facilitate supervision
123	Educator to child ratios- centre based services
156	Relationships in groups
168	Education and care service must have policies and procedures
171	Policies and procedures to be kept available

RELATED POLICIES

Adventurous (risky and nature play) Policy Animal and Pet Policy Child Safe Environment Policy Educational Program Policy Environmentally Responsible Policy Health and Safety Policy	Road Safety Policy Safe Storage of Hazardous Chemicals Policy Sleep and Rest Policy Sun Safety Policy Water Safety Policy Work Health and Safety Policy

PURPOSE

Our Service will ensure the environment is safe, stimulating, clean, and well maintained for children, families, educators, and visitors. Children's awareness of the environment and sustainable practice will be supported through daily practices, resources and interactions. The physical environment will support children's participation and engagement, development, learning, and safety, and will provide supervised access to positive experiences and inclusive relationships. Our Service provides an environment free from the use of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, educators, staff, approved provider, nominated supervisor, students, volunteers, visitors and management of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

Our Service is committed to providing an environment that promotes safety and enhances children's learning and development.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER, NOMINATED SUPERVISOR AND EDUCATORS' RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING.

ENSURE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IS DESIGNED TO:

- maximise children's engagement and positive experiences
- provide space where children can experience quality care in a safe and healthy environment
- meet licensing requirements for buildings, space requirements, fencing, light, ventilation, firefighting equipment, emergency evacuation exits and safety glass for National Regulations, the Building Code of Australia (BCA), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, local councils and regulatory authorities
- provide adequate storage to meet the needs and requirements of the service
- provide sufficient and accessible handwashing, toileting, eating, and sleeping facilities
- ensure toileting and hand-washing facilities are accessible from both the indoor and outdoor environments
- ensure adequate and appropriate hygienic facilities for nappy changing are provided, which are soundly constructed ensuring children's safety (Reg 112)
- provide appropriate areas for food preparation

- provide a separate indoor space for children who are under two years of age
- provide an area for managerial purposes, consultation with children's parents and for private conversations to occur (Reg. 111)
- incorporate natural and artificial lighting, appropriate ventilation, heating, cooling and fresh air into the building/premises (Reg. 110)
- facilitate adequate supervision of children at all times including toilets and nappy change facilities
- ensure safety and minimal disruption for children whilst playing
- ensure immediate communication is available at all times to and from parents and emergency services (Reg. 98)
- provide different types of play to occur both in the indoor and outdoor areas (e.g., quiet play areas and loud play areas)
- provide adequate shade for children in accordance with the recommendations of relevant authorities
- provide shade in the form of trees or physical shade structures
- provide a natural environment for children to explore and experience which may include plants, trees, gardens, rock, mud and/or water
- ensure all required fencing is compliant with current regulations and is maintained to ensure it is in good condition (including self-closing gates with safety locking mechanisms and boundary fencing)
- provide a variety of indoor and outdoor experiences, catering for children's interests and abilities
- provide a developmentally appropriate environment where children can explore, solve problems, create, construct and engage in critical thinking
- provide an environment that permits children to participate in activities independently or in small groups, and access resources autonomously
- ensure safety of children at all times. Non-fixed play equipment in the Service grounds must be comply with maximum free height of fall under AS-4685:2021
- impact area surrounding play equipment must comply with AS/NZS 4422- playground surfacing requirements
- play equipment must be supervised at all times by an educator
- non-fixed play equipment over 600mm must have soft fall material surrounding the fall zone
- power points not in use have safety caps, all double adaptors and power-boards are out of reach of children, and all electrical cords are secured and not dangling.

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT

- appropriately sized furniture and equipment will be provided in both the indoor and outdoor environment for the age ranges represented in the service

- children will be supported to access appropriate furniture, resources, materials, toys and equipment that encourage appropriate challenges and risk taking in accordance with their individual developmental level
- resources will be adequate in number for the number of children attending our Service and be developmentally appropriate
- specific equipment requirements of children with additional needs will be catered for to ensure an inclusive environment
- resources and equipment will be chosen to reflect the cultural diversity of the Service's community and the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia, including the incorporation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- large purchases of equipment will be the responsibility of the Approved Provider
- the Nominated Supervisor is responsible for consumables and the daily running purchases of the service
- educators will provide ideas for equipment and materials purchase based on the needs and interests of children in their particular room
- educators will complete a log for the Nominated Supervisor of equipment that needs maintenance on a prioritised basis (see *Equipment and Maintenance Record)*
- children's ideas and suggestions in planning the indoor and outdoor environments will be facilitated
- children will be encouraged to make decisions about the use of equipment and resources
- the Service will actively seek the input of parents/guardians regarding current interests of their children so as to purchase appropriate toys and equipment
- climbing equipment will be installed according to manufacturers' recommendations and compliant with Australian Safety Standards. For example, incorporating soft fall materials wherever climbing equipment is set up
- incorporate commercial, natural, recycled, homemade, and real resources that can be used in a variety of ways to encourage children's learning and creativity
- all equipment and resources including cots, highchairs, car seats, booster seats, etc. meet relevant Australian Standards and educators are trained in correct maintenance and assembly
- families are provided with the latest safety information on items such as cots, highchairs, car seats, etc
- educators discuss the safety characteristics of using toys and equipment with children
- educators will participate in on-going professional development in order to enhance children's learning and ensuring a safe and educational environment

- a maintenance log and register of toys and equipment is maintained by educators and the nominated supervisor.

LAUNDERING OF SOILED ITEMS

- laundry and hygienic facilities are located and maintained in a way that do not pose a risk to children
- adequate storage is provided
- soiled clothing will be returned to a child's home for laundering
- educators will remove soiled content and place into a plastic bag. Items will be stored with the child's bag.

REARRANGING, ADDING OR REMOVING FURNITURE

- maintain a record of any changes that are made to the physical environment of the service is maintained, to show continuous improvement [see: Record of Service Modifications]
- links between the arrangements and choice of resources and equipment, and the children's learning in the program will be documented

SLEEP/REST ENVIRONMENT

- educators and staff will strictly adhere to the *Sleep and Rest Policy* and procedures
- all cots must meet the mandatory Australian Standard for Cots- (AS/NZS 2172)
- mattresses should be in good condition- clean, firm and flat and fit the cot base with no more than 20mm gap between the mattress sides and ends
- cots and beds will be positioned to encourage a calm and relaxing environment. There will be a minimum space of 300mm between each cot to reduce the possibility of cross infection.
- cots and beds will be regularly checked to ensure all bolts and fittings are secure and safe
- bassinets will not be used or stored at the Service (Reg.84D)
- beds will be located in an area that is easy to access for all educators and other staff
- beds will be stored in a dry area
- educators will ensure to use correct manual handling techniques when moving the beds
- beds should not be placed on high shelves or in unstable or difficult to reach stacks
- light bedding will be used for cots and beds
- checks will be made to identify any hazards to ensure a safe environment
- hanging cords, strings from blinds, curtains or electrical devices will be away from cots and mattresses

ONGOING MAINTENANCE

- the Service will continuously reflect on its environment and put in place a plan to ensure that the environment reflects our ideology of providing an environment that is safe, stimulating, and engaging for all who interact within it
- frequent risk assessments of the indoor and outdoor environment will be conducted in order to minimise risk and hazards
- educators will complete an *Outdoor Environment and Playground Safety Audit* at least every six (6) months
- the Nominated Supervisor will document required maintenance in a maintenance plan/log for the Service as required. Repairs and maintenance will be conducted throughout the year according to priority including, hazard removal, safety precautions and any relevant policies.
- the council is responsible for engaging an external expert to complete a building safety checklist of the service and its grounds bi-annually and ensure any work deemed necessary is completed to Australian standards
- the approved provider/nominated supervisor stay up to date with banned/recalled products and remove these immediately from the service if required
- the Service will have regular pest inspections carried out by an accredited pest control company. Documentation of these inspections will be kept and any further recommended treatments as a result of the findings from the pest control check will be carried out in a timely manner.

GROUPING OF CHILDREN

- our Service groups the children according to their age and/or developmental stage. Within that space, there are a variety of different learning areas and opportunities for play experiences
- each age group has different legally required adult to child ratios, which are adhered to at all times in both the indoor and outdoor environment
- our indoor and outdoor environment provides opportunities for developmentally appropriate planned experiences, intentional teaching, and spontaneous play throughout the day.

DAILY SAFETY CHECKS

A daily inspection of the premises will be undertaken before children begin to arrive. The *Opening and Closing of the Building Checklist, Indoor Cleaning Checklist and Outdoor Cleaning Safety checklist* will be used as the procedure to conduct these safety checks. A record of these will be kept by the service. The Approved Provider/Nominated Supervisor will make the appropriate arrangements to have any identified repairs carried out as soon as possible. [See resources section of policy).

This inspection will include the:

- service perimeters
- fences/fence line
- gates
- paths
- buildings
- all rooms accessible by children
- fixed equipment
- sand pit
- mud pit

This must be completed in order to identify any dangerous objects in the grounds ranging from sharps to poisonous or dangerous plants and animals. In the event of a sharp object being found (for example a syringe) educators will wear gloves and use tongs to pick up the object and place it in the 'sharp object box'. This box will be disposed of as per the recommendations of our local council.

Similarly, trees in the grounds must be checked regularly for overhanging, dead, or dangerous looking branches as well as checked for any infestations.

The Approved Provider must ensure all fences and barriers that enclose outdoor spaces used by children are of a height and design that children cannot go through, over or under. (Reg. 104).

CLEANING OF BUILDINGS, PREMISES, FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT

GENERAL CLEANING

- the Service will use structured cleaning schedules to ensure that all cleaning is carried out regularly and thoroughly
- educators will clean the service at the end of each day and throughout the day as needed
- accidents and spills will be cleaned up as quickly as possible to ensure that the service always maintains a high level of cleanliness and hygiene
- educators and staff will adhere to our *Health and Safety Policy*.

WHEN PURCHASING, STORING AND/OR USING ANY DANGEROUS CHEMICALS, SUBSTANCES, MEDICINES OR EQUIPMENT, OUR SERVICE WILL:

- ensure all procedures are followed to maintain a safe environment

- adhere to the Service's *Safe Storage of Hazardous Chemicals Policy*
- adhere at all times to manufacturer's advice and instructions when using products to clean furniture and equipment at the service
- keep a register of all hazardous chemicals, substances and equipment used at the Service. Information recorded should include where they are stored, their use, any risks, and first aid instructions and the current SDS. The register will be readily accessible.

CHILDREN'S BATHROOM

- clear supervision is provided to children when in use (having regard to the need to maintain the rights and dignity of children)
- educators and other staff will encourage children to follow appropriate hygiene practices- hand washing, toileting
- bathrooms will be cleaned at least twice a day and at other times as required (see: Bathroom and Nappy Change Cleaning Checklist)
- bathroom floors will be mopped at least daily
- signage is to be used after mopping to ensure that children, educators and other staff and families are aware that the floor is wet
- educators are to ensure they follow the bathroom and toilet cleaning procedure
- educators will complete the *Bathroom Safety Audit* [every 6 months]

MAINTENANCE OF FIRE EQUIPMENT

- all fire equipment at our Service will be maintained as per the legal standards
- external agencies will be employed to assist the service with this maintenance (if no currently employed staff or educators are qualified to complete the maintenance checks)

SUN PROTECTION

- educators and staff at the Service will adhere to our *Sun Safety Policy* and procedures at all times
- a combination of sun protection measures will be implemented whenever UV Index levels reach 3 and above
- educators will continue to check the UV rating prior to going outdoors and as the heat increases throughout the day (see *Sun Safety Policy* for further information)
- temperature of outdoor equipment and surfaces will be monitored during the day to ensure the area and equipment is safe for children to play (see: *Daily Playground Surface Temperature Check*)

WATER SAFETY

To stop accidents and illnesses relating to swimming pools, wading pools, water troughs and other water situations our Service will:

- remove any items or objects that could be used to climb into the fenced area of a pool, trough, or water storage unit e.g. chairs, bins, bikes, any overhanging trees
- conduct a risk assessment to minimise the risk or hazard to children
- make sure no child swims in any water without:
    - written permission from family member to learn water safety and swimming
    - appropriate educators/child ratios in place
    - having sufficient numbers of educators present who have first aid or recognised water safety and rescue procedures
- at all times children near water are closely supervised. A child will never be left unattended near any water
- ensure that all water containers are made inaccessible to children and make sure children's play areas are safely fenced off from water hazards such as rivers, dams, creeks, lakes, irrigation channels, wells etc.
- when the children's water feature is operational it will be closely supervised at all times
- immediately empty all wading pools/water troughs etc. after every use, storage should prevent the collection of water e.g., upright/inverted, also check grounds after rain or watering and empty water that has collected in holes or containers.
- ensure wading/water trough are hygienically cleaned, disinfected and chlorinated appropriately:
    - on a daily basis remove leaves and debris, hose away surface dirt and scrub inside with disinfectant
    - wash away disinfectant before filling trough

SERVICE CLOSURE

- two educators must close the Service each night
- both educators are to check the entire premises to ensure that all children and families have departed by checking sign in and out sheets for all rooms AND physically checking all rooms and areas
- educators are to follow Service-closing procedures each night (see*: Opening and Closing of the Building Checklist)*

- In the case where a parent has omitted to sign their child out, and the educators did not witness the child leave the service, the educators must take every step to get in contact with the parent to ensure the child has safely left the Service
- if unable to contact the family, the educators are to contact other educators present on that day for confirmation that the child has been collected. The Nominated Supervisor is to then be notified before leaving the Service
- individuals visiting our Service must also sign in when they arrive at the Service, and sign out when they leave (see: Visitor sign in/sign out record)
- details of absences during the day must also be recorded.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

The *Physical Environment Policy* will be reviewed on an annual basis in conjunction with children, families, educators, staff and management.

SOURCE

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2025). *Guide to the National Quality Framework*
Cancer Council NSW: https://www.cancercouncil.com.au
Cancer Council Australia. Be SunSmart. https://www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/sun-safety/be-sunsmart
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).
Education and Care Services National Regulations. (Amended 2023).
KidSafe Australia: https://kidsafe.com.au
KidSafe (2021). Water Safety. https://kidsafe.com.au/water-safety/
National Health and Medical Research Council. (2024). *Staying Healthy: preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services* (6th Ed.). NHMRC. Canberra.
NSW Government *Kids and Traffic Early Childhood Road Safety Education Program*
Red nose Safe environment https://rednose.org.au/section/safe-environment

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED BY	Krystle Hills	Centre Manager	20/05/2025
POLICY REVIEWED	MAY 2025	NEXT REVIEW DATE	MAY 2026
MODIFICATIONS	• annual policy maintenance • National Law- deleted sections not covered in this policy • additional information re: playground equipment heights and fall zones • sources checked and updated as required		
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS		NEXT REVIEW DATE
March 2024	• annual policy maintenance • minor edits within policy as indicated • hyperlinks checked and repaired as required		February 2025