

INFORMATION PAPER

Alternative Solution Guidelines for ‘Enclosed’ Outdoor Play Facilities

BACKGROUND

One of the objectives when moving the building and facility requirements from the *Child Care (Child Care Centres) Regulation 1991* to the Queensland Development Code (QDC) in 2002 was to provide a better process to support flexibility and innovation. This was achieved by developing the previously “prescriptive” standards into a set of **performance criteria** that set out the objectives of the *Child Care Act 2002* and support flexibility and innovation through the provision of acceptable and alternative solution provisions.

To support the intent of the *Child Care Act 2002* with reference to “safe and suitable” outdoor play facilities (Section 28 of the Act) and adequate and appropriate outdoor facilities (Section 53 of the *Child Care Regulation 2003*), additional resources have been developed. These resources benchmark the standard objectives for outdoor play facilities. Further information about the application of these resources can be found in **Policy and Procedures: Outdoor Play Facilities in Centre Based Services**.

BUILDING STANDARDS AND CHILD CARE CENTRES

Various Australian states and territories have been assisting families to access child care in high density employment areas such as Central Business Districts by incorporating flexibility into their respective child care legislation. Some States have provisions that enable exemptions from meeting legislated standards relating to outdoor play areas in special circumstances. Others allow alternative provisions such as indoor gross motor areas, or outdoor play areas that are not connected to the indoor play spaces.

In Queensland, when a developer identifies that they cannot meet the acceptable solutions for the prescribed performance criteria for outdoor play facilities, the alternative solutions process may apply. This process requires the developer to provide an application and full proposal to the Department of Communities as the concurrence agency under the Queensland Development Code, Part 22 – Child Care Centres. The information provided must adequately support the application to demonstrate that the proposal meets the intent of the *Child Care Act 2002* and relevant standards.

SUITABLE OUTDOOR PLAY FACILITIES

A wide range of literary and specialist resources are available to support playground development.

Common themes in all outdoor play facility design include the need to provide a variety of surfaces, a variety of heights, vegetation, fixed and moveable equipment, large open spaces for activities including running and kicking balls, and discrete but direct adult supervision to all areas. Developers should address all of these needs and consider the following:

Outdoor play facilities must provide children with safe access to:

- an area for active physical play and exercise;
- an area that allows enjoyment of nature; and
- an environment which provides fresh air and sunlight (Australian Early Childhood Association, 1990).

The design must reflect:

- quiet activity zones;
- creative, exploratory zones;
- play structure zones; and
- open, free play zones (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991).

Individual playground design must reflect planning for access to, and safe use of, outdoor play facilities considering local climatic and environmental conditions and relevant building and safety standards (eg cyclone rated structures, high humidity).

The most common interpretation of an outdoor area is “not indoors”. This is the preferred and encouraged interpretation for the development of outdoor play facilities. However it has become apparent, for various reasons, that in some instances this may not always be the most practicable or achievable solution.

In cases where suitable outdoor play areas are not available or where severe climatic conditions or noise and air pollution are detrimental to children as well as the demand for central business district based child care are influencing current development proposals. In response to these issues, a range of innovative concepts have been put forward including:

- indoor gross motor areas to supplement or replace outdoor play areas; and
- outdoor play facilities with varying proximity and accessibility to indoor play areas.

While these concepts do not meet traditional expectations for licensed centre based care, they can be offered as alternative solutions and determined on individual merit against the performance criteria in the Queensland Development Code, Part 22 – Child care centres and within the intent of the principles identified in the *Child Care Act 2002*.

When determining the above mentioned proposals as Alternative Solutions, additional consideration must be given to the environment being provided for children. Guidelines for additional considerations are attached.

GUIDELINES FOR ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

In addition to the standard requirements for all outdoor play facilities, alternative solution applications will be assessed taking application specific factors into consideration. These additional factors will aim to ensure that the environment of the proposed outdoor play facility provides appropriate opportunities in the interests of children’s wellbeing and development.

These additional factors include, but are not limited to:

Enclosed Space	
Issue	Consideration
Ceiling height	Ceilings are raised to allow feeling of openness. Are children able to participate in a range of traditional outdoor activities including running, jumping, climbing, swinging, kicking and throwing balls, etc?
Acoustics	Demonstrated management of noise created by play activities. How will the noise from children using the outdoor play facilities impact on other children who may be participating in indoor activity or sleeping?
Window height	There is visual stimulation for children and staff with views to the natural outdoor environment beyond the centre boundary. Can children and staff see outdoors to a natural environment?
Natural light	Windows/openings provide lighting from a natural light source to simulate a natural environment. How much natural light will be available?
Natural ventilation	Windows/openings provide opportunities for natural airflow to simulate a natural environment. How will outdoor play facilities reflect climatic and seasonal changes?
Aesthetic Environment	There is a significant definition between the indoor and outdoor play facilities. How will children and staff know which areas are indoors and which are outdoors?
Hygiene	Demonstrated ability to clean equipment and flooring. Are alternative techniques required for cleaning the outdoor play facilities? If so, what are these techniques?



Emergency Procedures	<p>Appropriate fire and emergency procedures are clearly demonstrated and are suitable for all age groups.</p> <p>What evidence of consultation with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is there and how will these recommendations be met?</p>
Space requirements	<p>Provision of a minimum of 7m² per child of unencumbered space.</p> <p>Are opportunities for a variety of activities including boisterous play provided? Will children feel that that they can play in this area similarly to a traditional outdoor area.</p>

Enclosed Space	
Issue	Consideration
Natural environment (not artificial)	<p>Access to natural materials such as plant and animal life, sand, mud and water is available.</p> <p>How will the artificial environment be minimised? How will there be a natural feel to the area?</p>
Design considerations	<p>Evidence of consultation with an independent organisation or individual with specific knowledge and experience in early childhood environments and incorporation of any recommendations.</p> <p>Have the developmental capabilities of the ages of the children to which care is to be provided been considered?</p> <p>How will the outdoor play facilities be used to meet the developmental needs of the children?</p> <p>How will the outdoor play facilities be flexible to provide a variety of experiences? Will children be able to use the outdoor play facilities in different ways?</p>

Proximity and Accessibility to Indoor Play Areas	
Issue	Consideration
Location	<p>The area is separate but linked to indoor play areas.</p> <p>What security provisions are to be in place for the area?</p>
Indoor/Outdoor transition	<p>Management of groups of children including prescribed ages.</p> <p>What is the proposed method for access to the outdoor play area? (eg ramp/ stairs)</p> <p>Is access to the outdoor play area appropriate for all age groups? eg. How would a 0-15 months group access an outdoor play area if it were not immediately accessible from indoors?</p>
Supervision (incidental staff absences/ isolation)	<p>Management of staff and supervision policies.</p> <p>How will adequate supervision of children, appropriate responses to first aid, security, emergencies, evacuations and other incidences be managed at all times?</p>
Communication	<p>Communication and access strategies in place to reduce isolation.</p> <p>Describe the techniques to be used by the staff to communicate between the outdoor play area and indoors that will both alleviate the need for staff to leave the group and allow the group outdoors to be notified of any urgent incident (eg emergencies, security concern, etc).</p>

Aesthetic Environment	The area in an alternative space from indoor with a change of physical environment and activity focus. How will the outdoor play area differ from the indoor area?
Hygiene	Must have demonstrated ability to clean equipment and flooring. Are alternative techniques required for cleaning the outdoor area? If so, what are these techniques?
Emergency Procedures	Appropriate fire and emergency procedures are clearly demonstrated and are suitable for all age groups. How will fire evacuations be safely undertaken from the area? How will the distance between indoor and outdoor play areas impact upon fire evacuation strategies and security provisions of the service? What plans are in place to meet any such impact? What evidence of consultation with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is there and how will these recommendations be met?
Natural environment (not artificial)	Access to natural materials such as plant and animal life, sand, mud and water is available. How will the artificial environment be minimised? How will there be a natural feel to the area?

To apply for an alternative solution please complete Child Care Form 21 – Application for an Alternative Solution located on the Department of Communities website.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

For further information on the Alternative Solutions Process refer to the Information Paper Building Standards and the *Child Care Act 2002* located on the departmental website www.communities.qld.gov.au/childcare or by contacting the Office for Children:

Address: Level 4, 111 George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Postal address: GPO Box 806
Brisbane QLD 4001

Telephone: (07) 3224 4225

Facsimile: (07) 3224 4755

- Australian Early Childhood Association (1990) *Cost Effective Child Caring Spaces*
- Department of Education Queensland (1991) *Planned Play Areas*
- Early Childhood Voluntary Code Working Party, *Plan It – Guidelines for Planning Early Childhood Outdoor Supervised Play Environments in New South Wales* (Manual) Child Accident Prevention Foundation Australia
- Education Department of South Australia (1989) *Learning in Early Childhood, What does it mean in practice?*
- Kidsafe QLD (2001) *Playground Safety Resource Kit*, (Information Sheets) Child Accident Prevention Foundation Australia
- Office of Child Care, *Design Considerations for Child Care Centres (Manual)*
- Walsh, Prue (1988) *Early Childhood Playgrounds Planning an Outside Learning Environment*
- Walsh, Prue and NSW Department of Community Services (1998) *Best Practice Guide in Early Childhood Physical Environments*