# **High quality preschool learning environments**

Participant workbook

Contents

[About this workbook 2](#_Toc157606435)

[Presentation overview 3](#_Toc157606436)

[Learning intentions and success criteria 3](#_Toc157606437)

[Alignment to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers 3](#_Toc157606438)

[Alignment to the School Excellence Framework 4](#_Toc157606439)

[Session structure 5](#_Toc157606440)

[Standard 3.1 6](#_Toc157606441)

[Standard 3.1 in practice – examples 7](#_Toc157606442)

[Activity 1 – update environment risk assessment plan 8](#_Toc157606443)

[Standard 3.2 9](#_Toc157606444)

[Standard 3.2 in practice – examples 10](#_Toc157606445)

[Activity 2 – Critically reflect to assess the preschool environment 11](#_Toc157606446)

[Where to next? 12](#_Toc157606447)

[Update preschool quality improvement plan 12](#_Toc157606448)

[References 14](#_Toc157606449)

[Recommended reading 14](#_Toc157606450)

[Recorded webinar 14](#_Toc157606451)

## About this workbook

This workbook is designed to guide your thinking, reflections and plans for future action. To help you engage with the session content, in it you will find:

* space for taking notes and recording your key take-aways and ideas
* a description of each of the activities to support you to apply the content in your preschool context
* prompting questions.

This workbook can be printed double-sided or used digitally. If you have questions about the presentation, please connect with your [Statewide staffroom](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/statewide-staffrooms) or email <earlylearning@det.nsw.edu.au>.

## Presentation overview

This presentation explores Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Standard and the Early Years Learning Framework practice of creating learning environments. You will be supported to self-assess your preschool's environment in terms of safety, inclusivity and learning potential.

### Learning intentions and success criteria

By the end of the presentation, participants will:

* consolidate your understanding of Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Standard
* understand how the learning environment can maximise and promote each child’s engagement and learning
* reflect on examples of the EYLF principles and practices in action.

To demonstrate learning, participants will:

* update the preschool’s environmental risk minimisation plan
* critically reflect to self-assess aspects of the preschool’s learning environment
* update the preschool quality improvement plan.

### Alignment to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

This professional learning session aligns with the following standards:

* 3.4.2 Select and/or create and use a range of resources, including ICT, to engage students in their learning.
* 4.1.2 Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities.
* 4.4.2 Ensure students’ wellbeing and safety within school by implementing school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.
* 7.2.2 Understand the implications of and comply with relevant legislative, administrative, organisational and professional requirements, policies and processes.

### Alignment to the School Excellence Framework

This professional learning session aligns with the following elements of the School Excellence Framework:

* Wellbeing
* Curriculum
* School resources

## Session structure

This session should take approximately 90 minutes to complete.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Item | Approximate duration |
| Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country | 5 minutes |
| 3.1.1 – fit for purpose | 5 minutes |
| 3.1.2 – upkeep | 10 minutes |
| Activity 1 – update environment risk assessment plan | 20 minutes |
| 3.2.1 – inclusive environment | 10 minutes |
| 3.2.2 – resources support play-based learning | 10 minutes |
| 3.2.3 – environmentally responsible | 10 minutes |
| Activity 2 – critically reflect to assess the preschool environment | 15 minutes |
| Conclusion | 5 minutes |

## Standard 3.1

**Focus question**

* 3.1.1 – what areas does your preschool provide for children to retreat to for independent or quiet play or to rest?
* 3.1.2 – what opportunities does your preschool learning environment provide for risky play?

| **Key points** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- |

**Summary**

The 2 key ideas that I would like to apply to my practice:

1.

2.

### Standard 3.1 in practice – examples

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exceeding theme | Description of practice example |
| Practice is embedded in service operations | Following a complaint about the cleanliness and hygiene of our sandpit, our team reviewed the sandpit advice provided by KidSafe. As a result, we have purchased a cover and edited our safety check to include a daily inspection of the sandpit. We have also edited our cleaning schedule to include monthly turning and aerating of the sand. We updated our ‘Providing a child safe environment’ procedure accordingly to ensure these practices are embedded and our sandpit is clean, safe and well maintained. |
| Practice is informed by critical reflection | Following participation in a numeracy course, our team engaged in robust discussion on children’s access to mathematical learning in our environment. As a result, we have reorganised our storage so children can access and use maths equipment outdoors. We have placed large dice and playing cards in our games area and purchased puzzles of varying levels of difficulty. The impact has been that more children are using the mathematical equipment outdoors and our educators are utilising more mathematical ‘teachable moments’. |
| Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or the community | We have recently updated our garden and grassed area. To do this we sought ideas and input from our children, families, school P&C and wider school staff. Based on the information provided, 3 different plans were developed and consolation on each was sought from these same stakeholders. As a result, our outdoor area is accessible for every child, provides diverse open-ended play experiences and is wheel-chair accessible. |

### Activity 1 – update environment risk assessment plan

1. Inspect the preschool environment, noting all hazards.
2. Confirm all identified hazards have been listed in the first column of the risk plan.
3. Review and edit the control actions or minimisation measures for each risk.
4. If needed, update relevant preschool procedures.

## Standard 3.2

**Focus questions**

* 3.2.1 – how does your preschool environment communicate to an Aboriginal child and their family that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage is respected and valued?
* 3.2.2 – what ‘loose-parts’ are children able to access themselves to use in their play?
* 3.2.3 – what opportunities are provided for children to actively engage in sustainable practices?

| **Key points** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- |

**Summary**

The 2 key ideas that I would like to apply to my practice:

1.

2.

### Standard 3.2 in practice – examples

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exceeding theme | Description of practice example |
| Practice is embedded in service operations | Our preschool philosophy says, ‘Our preschool is welcoming and a culturally safe place that respects diversity’. We have intentionally organised our learning environment to reflect and enact this statement. Our foyer includes comfortable chairs, information in English, Arabic and Vietnamese, an Acknowledgement of Country and an artwork by a member of our Aboriginal community. In the play areas, wall displays feature photos from community events and the children’s books and puzzles feature people from all over the world. |
| Practice is informed by critical reflection | Inspired by case studies shared in an ECE Connect session, our team audited the opportunities we provide for children to engage in sustainable practices. Following robust discussion, new routines were trialled, evaluated, modified and are now embedded; the children participate in our school paper recycling scheme, sort their lunch scraps and collect recyclable containers for the Return and Earn scheme. The result is that the children are becoming environmentally responsible and showing respect for the environment. |
| Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or the community | Following a parent’s suggestion, weekly in Term 4 we walk as a group to our local park for a picnic lunch and play, with an open invitation for families to join us. The park features a fenced bushy area which children can explore safely. The park’s fixed equipment provides challenge and managed risky play for those seeking it. The impact of these regular outings is children have access to an environment and play opportunities that challenge and promote their physical skills. |

### Activity 2 – Critically reflect to assess the preschool environment

1. How does the preschool environment support the access and participation of all children and families, including those with disabilities?
2. How are possible barriers to participation identified and addressed through reasonable adjustments?

## Where to next?

### Update preschool quality improvement plan

Option 1 – develop a Quality Area 3 QIP goal

Option 2 – edit your key practice/strength statements for one of the Quality Area 3 elements

#### Suggested process for updating key practice/strength statements

1. Select an element to focus on.
2. Review the advice for this element section 3 of the he Guide to the NQF.
3. Review other relevant literature or information in relation to high-quality practice for the element.
4. For each statement, consider and edit accordingly:

* Is this practice still happening?
* Is the description accurate?
* Is the practice simply a compliance matter in place to meet a regulation?
* Does the statement also refer to the impact of the practice?
* If this practice is evidence of one or more exceeding themes of practice, is this ‘flagged’ in the statement?
* Are there any statements that could be replaced with a new or higher quality practice?

#### Resources to support you to complete this task:

[How to write and review your quality improvement plan](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/inside-the-department/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/early-learning-how-to-write-and-review-your-qip.docx) [DOCX 88.7 KB] (staff only)

[Preschool QIP: Key practice statements](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/inside-the-department/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/early-learning-preschool-qip-key-practice-statements.docx) [DOCX 81.1 KB] (staff only)

[Preschool QIP: Improvement goals](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/inside-the-department/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/early-learning/early-learning-preschool-qip-improvement-goals.docx) [DOCX 81.8 KB] (staff only)

Evaluation 

We value your feedback. Please complete the [High quality preschool learning environments evaluation](https://forms.office.com/r/XrBWSxzs2s) to help us provide further support.

A qr code with a few black squares

Description automatically generated

## References

[Guide to the National Quality Framework](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/guide-nqf/section-3-national-quality-standard-and-assessment-and-rating/quality-area-3-physical-environment) (online version), Quality Area 3

[Early Years Learning Framework](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf)

### Recommended reading

ACECQA (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority). (2023). [Information sheet –](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/InformationSheet_EYLF-Learning%20environme_Practices.pdf) [Belonging, being and becoming: Learning environments](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/InformationSheet_EYLF-Learning%20environme_Practices.pdf).

ACECQA (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority). (2018). [Information sheet – Quality Area 3: The environment as the ‘third teacher’](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-02/QA3_TheEnvironmentAsTheThirdTeacher.pdf).

ACECQA (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority). (2022). [Information sheet – Quality Area 3: Inclusive environments](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/Inclusive_environments%20final.pdf).

Child Australia (2012). [Create the perfect play space: Learning environments for young children](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/CreateThePerfectPlaySpace.PDF).

ECA (Early Childhood Australia) (16 May 2023). [The Spoke Blog - A guide to the environment as the ‘third teacher’](https://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/a-guide-to-the-environment-as-the-third-teacher/).

### Recorded webinar

[Taking a planned and supported approach to risky play](https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/engagement-and-insights/insights/2022-roadshow)

This webinar presents the benefits of risky play and ideas of what supported risky play may look like in your preschool.

Outdoor area

[2020 Kidsafe National Playspace Design Awards](https://kidsafe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-Kidsafe-National-Playspace-Design-Awards-Presentation-Website_FINAL.pdf) [PPT 11 MB]

This document provides inspiring ideas for preschools looking to re-design their outdoor space or install new fixed equipment.

[KidSafe playground safety information sheets](https://www.kidsafensw.org/resources/information-sheets/playground-safety/)

These information sheets provide on the safety and maintenance of different aspects of the outdoor environment.

**© State of New South Wales (Department of Education), 2024**

The copyright material published in this resource is subject to the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth) and is owned by the NSW Department of Education or, where indicated, by a party other than the NSW Department of Education (third-party material).

Copyright material available in this resource and owned by the NSW Department of Education is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

[](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This license allows you to share and adapt the material for any purpose, even commercially.

Attribution should be given to © State of New South Wales (Department of Education), 2024.

Material in this resource not available under a Creative Commons license:

* the NSW Department of Education logo, other logos and trademark-protected material
* material owned by a third party that has been reproduced with permission. You will need to obtain permission from the third party to reuse its material.

**Links to third-party material and websites**

Please note that the provided (reading/viewing material/list/links/texts) are a suggestion only and implies no endorsement, by the New South Wales Department of Education, of any author, publisher, or book title. School principals and teachers are best placed to assess the suitability of resources that would complement the curriculum and reflect the needs and interests of their students.

If you use the links provided in this document to access a third-party's website, you acknowledge that the terms of use, including licence terms set out on the third-party's website apply to the use which may be made of the materials on that third-party website or where permitted by the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth). The department accepts no responsibility for content on third-party websites.