



Quality Area

3

Introduction

Quality Area 3 - Physical environment

Take a moment to consider the type of environments you like to live in, work in, or be surrounded by. These may look different to different people, however we all would like the environments we engage with to be welcoming, inviting, and safe.

While we are often constrained by the physical design of the building or spaces, it is what we place in these environments and how we use them that influences how we feel.



Now reflect on the type of environment you would like to work in. Does it look similar to the type of environment you like to live in? It may look different physically, but do you believe it should have the same 'feel'? Is it welcoming and inviting?

Ask your educators, families and children about the type of environments they feel comfortable in. For FDC educators their home is their workplace, so discover how they ensure their environment provides a diverse range of meaningful learning experiences while maintaining a welcoming homely environment for children (Guide to the NQF, p.190).

Quality Area 3 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) invites you and your educators to look at how you can use your service's physical environments, both indoors and outdoors, to create welcoming, inviting, inclusive and safe spaces for children to feel comfortable and competent to explore, learn, create and be.

You are invited to think about how the **design** of your environment is fit for purpose so that it is appropriate, suitable, safe and clean, and how you **use** it to support every child's participation and engagement in quality experiences in both the built and natural environments.

Being **fit for purpose** does not mean that the service needs to be purpose-built for education and care. This is particularly relevant in those services which operate from school or community halls, classrooms, libraries or other multi-purpose facilities.

When thinking about whether the design is appropriate in such services, consider things such as:

- the accessibility of the premises for all children and community members
- the design and location of toileting for children and adults
- how to manage the supervision of children when accessing all areas of the site.

The **use of your spaces** is an opportunity to engage with the variety of ways that learning environments can support educators' and children's wellbeing and development. In particular, ensuring that learning environments are adaptable for learning through creative play, provides children with opportunities for exploration.

The resources that you choose to bring into your spaces should be a reflection of the individual needs, interests, cultures and abilities of the children and families.

In addition, consider how the resources can support what your service's philosophy says about children's learning. Your philosophy may also reference environmental responsibility and you could consider including resources that have multiple uses, are sourced locally and suit various age groups. Also look at existing natural components of your outdoor space that can facilitate learning indoors.

It is important to gather the **perspectives of the children** to inform any changes to the environment, especially in OSHC. Depending on children's ages, this could include:

- Noticing babies' and toddlers' responses and experiences when in a space, such as:
 - what areas they regularly access
 - how they arrange resources and equipment (e.g. do they regularly move them to somewhere else in the room?)
 - their changing temperaments and routines.
- Involving older children in a collaborative way in reflecting on and planning for spaces, such as:
 - noticing movement pathways between the spaces and how children interact with and transition through the space
 - discussions with them about their ideas and vision for spaces, as well as their feelings when in the various spaces.

Consider how you can capture this information in a way that is child-centred and responsive.

National Quality Standard

Concept		Descriptor
QA3		Physical environment
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service.
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.
3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.
3.2.1	Inclusive environment	Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
3.2.2	Resources support play-based learning	Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

What does meeting the NQS look like in QA3?

This Quality Area of the NQS focuses on the physical environment and on ensuring that it is safe and suitable, as well as providing a rich and diverse range of experiences that promote children's learning and development.

What does a quality physical environment look like?

A quality environment may mean different things to all those involved in your service. Consider what might be important to your team when defining what a quality environment might look like.

While their responses may differ, there are some characteristics of the **design and use** of an environment that are important to consider in supporting the participation and learning of all children in your service.

Quality physical environments are critical to:

- contributing to children's wellbeing, creativity and developing independence
- providing a diverse range of experiences that promote children's learning and development
- keeping children safe (Guide to the NQF, p.176)
- providing children with the opportunity to challenge themselves and to take safe risks.

Here's a snapshot of how services' ratings in QA3 compare across Australia:

www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/national-quality-framework-snapshots





Give careful consideration to how your service can create engaging, inviting and welcoming environments that encourage all to participate. (Elements 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.2.1)

Quality indoor and outdoor environments invite all children to participate at a level they are comfortable participating in, whilst also introducing an element of challenge to scaffold their learning and build confidence in their abilities. (Elements 3.2.1, 3.2.2)



Engaging outdoor and indoor environments encourage children of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to be actively involved in making decisions, thinking creatively, displaying a sense of agency and building relationships. (Elements 3.2.1, 3.2.2)



Children learn to become environmentally responsible when they are included in daily sustainable practices, both indoors and outdoors. (Elements 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3)

Include open-ended resources in your learning environments that can be used in many different ways for different purposes. (Elements 3.2.2, 3.2.3)





Sustainable practices are meaningful when they are consistent, embedded into practice and communicated to families. (Element 3.2.3)