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Planning & Building Unit

Technical Guidance Document TGD-026-Addendum 1

PLANNING & DESIGN GUIDELINES

For Specialist Accommodation Provision
For
Pupils with
Special Educational Needs in

Primary Schools with 2 or more special
classes & Post Primary Schools

ADDENDUM 1

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- (a) The Department of Education and Skills (DoES) Technical Guidance Document [TGD 026 Planning & Design Guidelines Primary & Post Primary School Specialist Accommodation for Pupils with Special Educational Needs](#) came into operation on the 29th May 2012.
- (b) It provides information on space planning and design for school authorities and Design Teams on the provision of permanent accommodation for pupils with special educational needs, in their schools.
- (c) Since then a number of projects, varying in size and complexity, have been built in primary and post primary schools across the country.
- (d) Following feedback from schools and a review of a sample of completed projects, a number of common themes and points emerged which required clarification. This document, Addendum 1, brings clarity to the issues raised. The Addendum guidance should now be incorporated into all new designs which are at pre-Stage 1 or earlier, from the date of this document moving forward.
- (e) These comments apply only to the SEN accommodation unless stated otherwise.
- (f) May projects will already be in advanced stages of architectural design or construction when this addendum is published. Where this is the case, school authorities and their Design Teams should consider how any, all or some of these changes can be incorporated in a cost effective way, into their scheme.
- (g) Depending on the project delivery route, e.g. traditional, devolved, RAPID, NDFR, OPW, etc., a short report outlining the changes proposed to be incorporated, together with their projected cost, should be submitted to the DoES for consideration, and where there is no objection to their inclusion, the addition of these items can be formally dealt with by way of a request for a Brief Change.
- (h) Where projects have already proceeded to construction this addendum shall not apply unless the Design Team/Client body can confirm in writing that these recommendations can be undertaken in a cost neutral manner.
- (i) This document should be read in conjunction with DoES [TGD 026 Planning & Design Guidelines Primary & Post Primary School Specialist Accommodation for Pupils with Special Educational Needs](#).
- (j) This Addendum will, in time, be incorporated into a new revision of TGD-026 which will be published on the [DoES](#) website.
- (k) Where discrepancies arise between both documents, the Addendum should take precedence. If further clarification is required, the request should be referred to the DoES Planning & Building Unit for consideration.
- (l) As before, school authorities and Design Teams will be obliged to comply in full with the DoES [Design Team Procedures](#) and other Technical Guidance Documents which are published and updated from time to time by the DoES and are available on the [DoES](#) website.
- (m) This addendum does not purport to be definitive or exhaustive but rather is intended to assist in the planning of an appropriate response to the particular needs of individual schools.

- (n) In all cases, the DoES shall have the final say in the application of the Guidelines to projects where grant-aid is to be sanctioned.
- (o) For further advice on these or any other matter, please contact:

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2.0 DESIGN GUIDANCE

2.1 GENERAL

2.1.1 FIRE SAFETY & MANAGEMENT

- (a) Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) have particular needs and requirements which must be properly managed in the event of an emergency in the school.
- (b) In some cases these needs and requirements conflict with the fire safety strategy being developed for the design and the fire safety certificate application. A prime example of this is the use of electronic door controls as a means of providing a secure environment for certain children who have a propensity to run and leave the secure environment at the first opportunity which, in turn, can conflict with the means of escape strategies being developed for the school.
- (c) It is strongly advised that the school authority (where it already exists), works with the Design Team at the outset to develop their mission statement and their management strategy for the school including the pupils with SEN.
- (d) A meeting should be arranged at the earliest opportunity with the Fire Officer which should be attended by members of the school authority/Teaching staff involved in SEN teaching and the Design Team Architect so that all potential conflicts are resolved and that a fire safety certificate can be granted without difficulty.
- (e) Where no school authority exists, the Architect should meet with the local fire officer at the earliest opportunity to discuss the design, and using DoES TGD 026 and addendums as a basis for discussion.
- (f) Where the Architect believes there may be difficulties in securing a valid Fire Safety Certificate which embraces the requirements of DoES TGD 026 and addendums, he/she should revert to the school authority/DoES for further direction.

2.1.2 SIGNAGE

- (a) The whole school environment both internally and externally should have appropriate signage as an aid to way finding for all persons regardless of ability.
- (b) Signs should be large, clear and well positioned.
- (c) Where possible symbols should be used in place of lettering. Lettering and symbols should be embossed/tactile and Braille should be included.
- (d) Further guidance can be obtained from a number of sources including Building for Everyone, Book 4, published by the National Disability Authority, and the NCBI, the national sight loss agency.

2.2 EXTERNAL

2.2.1 SCREENING

- (a) SEN accommodation should be located and designed in a manner which facilitates discreet screening from other school users along the external areas around the school.
- (b) Users, by definition, can include other pupils, waiting parents, etc.

- (c) As a rule, people waiting outside the building should not be able to look into classrooms, observe pupils at play, etc. This is an unnecessary distraction for both pupils and teachers.
- (d) Teaching staff should not have to resort to closing blinds or the use of translucent/opaque film on windows simply to provide privacy. Privacy can easily be achieved in a number of ways including the use of simple landscaped buffer zones, etc., in the areas where privacy is required.

2.2.2 SENSORY GARDEN/PLAY AREA

- (a) Feedback from other schools indicates that integrating the hard/soft play area with the Sensory Garden (where one is being provided) does not work in practice. Some pupils with SEN have a tendency to uproot plants, mulch, etc. making the garden unworkable. Some schools have removed it altogether.
- (b) Design Teams are advised to consider integrating the essential planting and other elements of the Sensory Garden as part of the overall landscaping plan, which will be of benefit to the whole school population. Alternatively, an area beside the soft play area, fenced off, can be developed. The fence height and materials relative to the soft play area and the Sensory Garden (where it is not integrated into the landscape) should be discussed with the end users.

2.3 INTERNAL

2.3.1 CEILINGS

- (a) It is recommended that the ceilings of all teaching, ancillary and circulation spaces within the SEN accommodation to which the pupils will have normal access should have an acoustic suspended ceiling with a concealed grid. Ceilings in the toilet areas should have moisture resistant tiles in addition to the acoustic requirements.

2.3.2 STORAGE SLIDING DOORS

- (a) Storage generally should extend from floor level up to 2.2m high.
- (b) Doors should be capable of being key lockable.
- (c) Sliding doors are not recommended for built-in storage units, particularly in classrooms. The repetitive action of the constant motion of a door leaf can create sensory difficulties for some pupils.

2.3.3 WINDOWS

- (a) Flat ledges or sills internally on windows, radiators etc. in the SEN classrooms, Small Safe Place, Para-educational Room etc. can be used by pupils with SEN to stand on, during episodes of challenging behaviour. This creates Health and Safety issues for the pupil, other pupils and the staff which must be safely managed.
- (b) Architects are advised to design all flat surfaces out of the SEN accommodation where there is a risk to the child standing on or being able to access flat ledges. Where display shelves or ledges are required these should be discussed with the school authority/teaching staff and suitable alternatives proposed.

2.3.4 IRONMONGERY GENERALLY

- (a) Surface mounted door closers with projecting arms should not be specified in areas to which the pupils with SEN have access. Some pupils can pull the arms off these closers rendering them useless, and can cause injury in the process.
- (b) The Architect should consider other forms of concealed closers for all spaces within the SEN accommodation to which a pupil will have access.

2.3.5 CENTRAL ACTIVITIES AREA

- (a) The design of the Central Activities Area (where one is included in the Schedule of Accommodation) provides the school authority and Design Team with the opportunity to create a space of significance where real integration can be nurtured and developed.
- (b) This area can be used for specific special needs activities, group learning or as a social space which draws students of all abilities together for a chat, for a presentation, or something to eat etc.
- (c) The Daily Living Skills (where one is included in the Schedule of Accommodation), if it is associated with this space, and is used imaginatively, can serve, not only as a place for learning ordinary skills used on a daily basis, but equally as a place where students can serve snacks and light refreshments, turning this into a vibrant social hub within the school.
- (d) Design Teams should work with the school authority and their special needs teachers to examine ways in which these principles can be given an opportunity to develop in developing the overall design for the school.

2.3.6 STORAGE

- (a) Storage shelves for car booster seats and car seats should be provided as part of General Storage within the SEN accommodation.
- (b) It shall be based on a storage provision of 6 units per SEN class and located in a store, close to the main entrance to the SEN accommodation.

2.3.7 WALLS - GENERALLY

- (a) All internal dividing walls throughout the SNU shall be a minimum of 215mm thick, of solid construction, with a smooth plaster finish or equivalent. The form of construction used should allow for the chasing of walls and recessing of radiators etc. All internal walls in areas to which a child has normal access should be plastered. All toilet suites should be tiled floor to ceiling.

2.3.8 DOORS – GENERALLY

- (a) The door swing and direction of opening should be designed so that they cannot be barricaded shut or blocked from opening by a pupil. A typical example of this would be in small spaces to which a pupil would normally have access, and where he/she could use furniture, floor padding, or adjoining walls etc., as an assist in order to block the door.

2.3.9 EN-SUITE TOILETS - TRACK HOIST SYSTEM

- (a) Where specific needs dictate, it may be necessary to fit a ceiling/wall mounted track hoist system into the Assisted En-suite Toileting Area within the SEN accommodation.

- (b) A ceiling/wall mounted track hoist system will not normally be provided unless specifically sanctioned in writing by the DoES prior to the pre-Stage 1 meeting.
- (c) Where this has been agreed the supply and installation of the hoist will form part of the building contract. The structure must be capable of supporting the track system and a live load of 100kgs minimum.
- (d) A power supply to facilitate battery charging of the lifting cassette/charger station must be provided at high level in a convenient location as part of the contract (whether or not the track hoist system is being provided).
- (e) Concealed conduit drops for the changing bench and ceiling hoist should be coordinated to provide an economical and workable solution.
- (f) The school authority will be responsible for entering into a maintenance contract on an annual basis or as specified by the supplier of the hoist and this shall be funded from within its own resources.

2.3.10 EN-SUITE TOILETS - ADJUSTABLE CHANGING BENCH

- (a) Where specific needs dictate, it may be necessary to fit an electronically height adjustable changing bench in the Assisted WC of the SEN accommodation.
- (b) A changing bench system will not normally be provided unless specifically sanctioned in writing by the Department prior to the pre-Stage 1 meeting.
- (c) Where this has been agreed the supply and installation of the changing bench will form part of the building contract.
- (d) The typical size of the bench shall be 1600mm in length. The bench must be capable of folding up against the wall when not in use.
- (e) A power supply must be provided in a convenient location as part of the contract (whether or not the changing bench is being provided).
- (f) Concealed conduit drops for the changing bench and ceiling hoist should be coordinated to provide an economical and workable solution.
- (g) The school authority will be responsible for entering into a maintenance contract on an annual basis or as specified by the supplier of the changing bench and this shall be funded from within its own resources.

2.3.11 EN-SUITE TOILETS - IRONMONGERY

- (a) Doors into the toilet areas should be capable of being locked shut as part of the master key system.
- (b) Some pupils can have a fixation with water and staff will need the flexibility to close this area off should the need arise.

2.3.12 EN-SUITE TOILETS - COMMUNE

- (a) Some pupils may require the use of a commode for their toileting needs.
- (b) The design/location of the WC pan and cistern must facilitate the use of a commode and also allow 3 sided access in order to facilitate assisted use of the WC by a pupil and his/her carers.

2.3.13 MULTI-SENSORY ROOM

- (a) The Multi-Sensory Room does not require a window or natural daylighting in view of its function.
- (b) It will however require mechanical extract ventilation. The fan selection and system design should be based on the air volume and acoustic requirements for the particular area and the adjoining spaces. The entrance door from circulation should be undercut to facilitate the mechanical ventilation of the space.
- (c) A suspension beam with fixing points should not be provided in this space – this activity is catered for in the para-educational room.
- (d) Power supplies for equipment should be provided via power points, each independently controlled and switched separately at the switch bank located at a safe height located inside the room and beside the door.
- (e) The location of the radiator in this room requires careful consideration. It must not restrict the use of the space. Consideration should be given to locating the radiator at high level.

2.3.14 PARA EDUCATIONAL ROOM

- (a) The Para Educational Room can be used for different functions including sensory integration, involving the use of padded walls and flooring over much of the space. In order to create maximum flexibility in the use of this space and create a safe swinging zone, it is recommended that the minimum clear width of this room between wall finishes, before padding, shall be 3.5 metres.
- (b) Padding should typically be brought to a height of 1.5m minimum over finished floor level.
- (c) Wall and floor padding, where required, shall be provided as part of the loose furniture and equipment grant. It will not form part of the main building project funding.
- (d) The location and size of the window within the room should be carefully considered, in order to facilitate the maximum amount of wall area for the safety padding. Standard height windowsills will restrict the use of padding depending on where it is located. There are also safety implications for the swing zone from the beam in close proximity to a window. Padding should not pass across a low level window.
- (e) An 'I' beam will be required for this space. The location of the beam which provides the suspension points requires careful consideration. The bottom flange should lie flush with the finished ceiling. The swing zone must be located as far away from the window as possible. The beam should have a minimum of three fixing eyes, one of which is located mid span.
- (f) The location of the radiator in this room should be at high level, close to the ceiling and above the level of the padding. All fixings, pipework etc should also be out of general reach.
- (g) The positioning of light switches and power points requires careful consideration. They should be located above the 1.5 metres padding height. Alternatively the light switch can be located directly outside the room. Power points should not be located behind padding.

2.3.15 M&E SERVICES

- (a) This section should be read in conjunction with DoES M&E Building Services Guidelines TGD-002, 003, 004, 005, 030 & 031 and are available on the [DoES](#) website
- (b) The provision of absence detection as a means of controlling artificial lighting is not recommended for the SEN suite of accommodation. This type of control can give rise to anxiety and panic attacks in some pupils, making them reluctant to use the space and create dependencies for adult accompaniment.
- (c) The electrical installation in SEN accommodation shall be wired in flush conduit. Surface mounted conduit is not acceptable.
- (d) Appropriate LED type light fittings should be used in all corridor and toilet areas.
- (e) Corridor lighting in SEN accommodation shall be manually controlled via two-way switches located at either end of corridors.
- (f) All low level radiators should be recessed within the thickness of the 215mm plastered block walls throughout the SEN accommodation unless referenced otherwise. The outer face of the radiator should lie flush with the plaster face of the wall,
- (g) The sizes of low level radiators in SEN accommodation shall be based on the space heating analysis for individual spaces. The overall size of the recessed openings should be based on the required radiator manufactured length plus 100mm clearance at the top and 100mm at each end (for valves).
- (h) Radiators are not required in the Small Safe Place attached to each classroom and in standard size WC's.
- (i) A recessed radiator should be provided in the Toilet/Shower for Assisted Users.
- (j) Where local access is required to heating control valves or other pieces of equipment for future maintenance etc it shall only be via a removable tile in the ceiling of the link corridor or the toilet area between pairs of classrooms. This is to avoid classroom disturbance during emergency servicing and eliminates the need for a ceiling access trapdoor within a classroom. (All other ceilings throughout the SEN accommodation should be as outlined in [Section 2.3.1 Ceilings](#) above).
- (k) Mechanical extract ventilation shall be provided in the en-suite toilets in the SEN accommodation. It shall be via an extract fan incorporating a run-on facility set to 10 minutes and controlled via a local on-off switch incorporating a pilot light. The fan selection and system design should be based on the air volume and acoustic requirements for the particular area and the adjoining spaces.
- (l) The school intercom system should be extended into the SEN accommodation. Loudspeakers in all classrooms in the SEN accommodation only shall have a volume control in addition to the toggle switch. This is to facilitate switching off the speaker as well as controlling the volume level from it. On occasions announcements/class change sounds from the system can create distractions for certain pupils which in turn can lead to behavioural outbursts etc.

2.3.16 TELEPHONY

- (a) A telephone point shall be provided in each teaching space i.e. Classroom, Central Activities Area, Para-educational Room, Multi-sensory Room, Daily Living Skills Room and office for internal communications.

- (b) The system should also allow for external calls to be routed via the main office in the school.

2.3.17 ICT INSTALLATION

- (a) The provision of ICT services in the SEN accommodation suite requires careful consideration by the client and end user.
- (b) For data connectivity the standard option in the classrooms is usually a structured cabling system feeding local network points on the teaching wall and other locations in classrooms.
- (c) The school authority may opt to provide a wireless type ICT installation in the SEN accommodation. Should it wish to proceed with this it should advise the DoES of this in writing at an early stage in the design process and raise it at the Pre-stage 1 meeting with the DoES.
- (d) The equipment associated with wireless type ICT installations is more expensive so the school authority will also need to consider how it proposes to fund the extra costs involved.
- (e) Where a wireless type ICT installation is being provided the 3 network points and associated socket outlets in each classroom as outlined in DoES [TGD-026 Section 3.13 Electrical Services](#) should be omitted and replaced with a network point at high level in the office in the SEN accommodation. An additional 5m length of coiled cable should be provided in the ceiling space above the network point to facilitate relocation of it in the future should the need arise.
- (f) The network point and associated socket outlets on the teaching wall in each classroom shall be retained.
- (g) One twin socket outlet should also be provided in a discreet location and at an appropriate height above finished floor level in classroom store or in an adjacent store, to facilitate charging of laptops, tablets etc.

2.3.18 OTHER

- (a) Oversized below ground waste outlets should be provided for the SEN accommodation. Some children may have a habit of stuffing items down the WC pan, making access and cleaning very difficult. It is a matter for the Architect and other members of the Design Team to work out the details of this.
- (b) High level windows should be controlled using a proprietary mechanical winding system, placed either in the window reveal or at high level on the wall, above the normal pupil's head zone height. Electrically operated systems are expensive to install and maintain and should be avoided.

END