

Victorian Government School Site Selection Criteria – Toolbox

General principles and requirements for government school site selection in greenfields, established areas and high density areas

October 2021 (updated August 2022)

Purpose: The Victorian Government School Site Selection Criteria Toolbox (the Toolbox) provides detailed notes and resources for implementing / applying the General Principles and Requirements included in the Victorian Government School Site Selection Criteria Guidance. The Toolbox draws on the considerable experience in the planning, delivery, and subsequent evaluation of school building projects that has been developed over the years within the Department of Education and Training (the department) and Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA). It incorporates demonstrated best practice in school site selection projects and allows those involved in the planning of proposed government schools to benefit from this experience and knowledge. This Toolbox does not substitute consultation with the department. The department should be consulted from the early stages of the strategic planning process to ensure that all relevant requirements, including unique and precinct specific issues, are identified and assessed in selecting proposed government school sites.

Audience: While the Toolbox is primarily intended for use by internal departmental teams, it can also act as a reference for urban planners and designers, developers, other government agencies and local councils. Schools may use also use it for understanding the department's site selection and school planning processes.

General principles: The department seeks to achieve a range of general principles. Different site features, such as sites size, shape, orientation, co-location with open space and community facilities, surrounding road network, potential hazards and other factors, have an impact on whether or not a particular principle will be achieved.

Requirements: The department seeks to achieve the same general principles when selecting proposed government school sites in all geographic settings, but it also recognises that different settings / areas present different opportunities and challenges. A different set of requirements are applied for different geographic settings to accommodate the idiosyncrasies associated with the area under consideration. These geographic settings are:

- **Greenfield areas** refer to Melbourne's growth municipalities areas of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Wyndham, Whittlesea and growth areas of Mitchell, and greenfield development in Victoria's regional areas.
- **Established areas** refer to the areas in Melbourne and regional centres that have been urbanised for at least several decades or have been fully developed.
- **High density areas** refer to areas with significantly higher density residential development compared to other parts of Melbourne and Victoria.

In addition, to the general principles and requirements detailed in this Toolbox, there may be extra site and precinct specific requirements that the department will consider on a case-by-case basis during the preparation of a precinct structure plan, structure plan, masterplan or other land use planning strategy. Where necessary, especially due to natural constraints and limitations, the department may consider alternative options as appropriate. The department recognises that in planning decision-making, choices need to be made depending on the context and circumstance.

Hierarchy of requirements and departures: Experience has shown that the department's requirements cannot always be met for various reasons but that it is still possible to achieve the general principles. This is reflected in the Toolbox which includes a 'Hierarchy of requirements and departures' section. 'Must' and 'Should' qualifiers (included within the 'Requirements' column) seek to clarify the instances where requirements can depart and/or be further negotiated. A 'Must' requirement is critical for ensuring a safe school environment and facilitating effective building design and operation, and/or is required under other department or Government policy (for instance, concerning safety, pedagogy, environmentally sustainable design, or the co-location of kindergartens and new government primary schools). A 'Should' requirement is the recommended method for achieving the general principle.

Limitations: The identification of a proposed government school site based on the department's school site selection criteria toolbox does not necessarily represent any commitment to the delivery of the proposed school by the department, nor does the identification of a proposed government school site necessarily create an obligation for the department to acquire the land. This Toolbox is not applicable to existing government school sites or proposed government school sites selected prior to the development of the school site selection criteria. Site selection requirements for non-government schools and other educational facilities are not considered in this Toolbox, these should be obtained from relevant educational providers.

Version update: This toolbox is reviewed regularly, with these annual reviews informed by the experiences, observations and learnings of departmental staff involved in school planning and proposed school site selection processes and periodic consultation with external stakeholders.

Current version: 18 August 2022

Next update: 2023

No.	General Principle	Site Feature	Greenfield Requirement	Hierarchy of Requirements and Departures	Established Area Requirement	Hierarchy of Requirements and Departures	High Density Requirement	Hierarchy of Requirements and Departures
1	Avoid competition / negative impact on enrolments at existing schools or other planned schools	Distance from other existing and planned government schools	Future school catchment boundaries (based on halfway point between schools) should ensure a balanced distribution of local enrolments.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department provided that any negative externalities on long-term enrolment can be outweighed by addressing an access gap in school provision / network.	School sites should be centrally located to align with where student demand is located and a suitable geographic distribution with existing and other future school sites. Any implications to the existing school zones should also be assessed by the department. New school sites should address access gaps between existing and planned schools.	Possible. Can be varied depending on the land availability within the established area.	School sites should be centrally located to align with where student demand is located and a suitable geographic distribution with existing and other future school sites. Any implications to the existing school zones should also be assessed by the department. New school sites should address access gaps between existing and planned schools.	Likely. Can be varied depending on the land availability, and in the case of vertical schools or capital projects with extreme land restrictions.
2	Ensure surrounding land uses are complementary to a school site	Location	Land uses surrounding school sites should be limited to residential development, open space and community facilities. Locations proximate to industrial areas, and other existing land uses where the proximity of a school could be problematic (for example, adult services, licenced premises, service stations) should be avoided. Common boundaries of school sites with residential uses should be avoided whenever possible to avoid adverse amenity impacts on residential areas. New government primary schools must have a kindergarten co-located with the school. Where a specialist school is proposed, it should wherever possible be co-located / adjacent to an existing or proposed government school, preferably a secondary school.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that any negative externalities from the alternative land use (for example, parking and traffic from a town centre) can be minimised.	Land uses surrounding school sites should be limited to residential development, open space and community facilities. Locations proximate to industrial areas, and other existing land uses where the proximity of a school could be problematic (for example, adult services, licenced premises, service stations) should be avoided. Common boundaries of school sites with residential uses should be avoided whenever possible to avoid adverse amenity impacts on residential areas. New government primary schools must have a kindergarten co-located with the school. Where a specialist school is proposed, it should wherever possible be co-located / adjacent to an existing or proposed government school, preferably a secondary school.	Possible. Can be varied provided that any negative externalities from the alternative land use (for example, parking and traffic from a town centre) can be minimised.	Land uses surrounding school sites should be limited to residential development, open space and community facilities. Locations proximate to industrial areas, and other existing land uses where the proximity of a school could be problematic (for example, adult services, licenced premises, service stations) should be avoided. In the case of vertical school design (high rise development) co-location in the same building with other uses must be limited to community facilities, indoor sports and recreation facilities. New government primary schools must have a kindergarten co-located with the school. Where a specialist school is proposed, it should wherever possible be co-located / adjacent to an existing or proposed government school, preferably a secondary school.	Likely. Can be varied provided that any negative externalities from the alternative land use (for example, parking and traffic from a town centre) can be minimised. Unlikely. In the case of vertical school design (high rise development) co-location in the same building with other uses can only be varied if any negative externalities from the alternative co-location use (for example, community health services access) can be minimised.

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3	Encourage walking to and from school, ensure safe and convenient access by walking and cycling and allow for increased connectivity and accessibility	Location	Located centrally within the catchment and linked to the proposed cycling and walking network.	No.	Located proximate to population base / areas of population growth. Impact of major barriers between population base and school site (freeways, railway lines, rivers) can be addressed.	No.	Located proximate to population base / areas of population growth. Impact of major barriers between population base and school site (freeways, railway lines, rivers) can be addressed.	No.
4	Ensure that the surrounding street network is able to cope with traffic volumes likely to be generated by the school	Location	Should be located on a connector street/s.	Unlikely. Can only be varied if the local council is satisfied that the surrounding street network is able to cope with traffic volumes likely to be generated by the school.	Should be located on a connector street/s.	Unlikely. Can only be varied if vehicle access to the school is to be limited and the local council is satisfied that the surrounding street network is able to cope with traffic volumes likely to be generated by the school.	Should be located on a connector street/s.	Unlikely. Can only be varied if vehicle access to the school is to be limited and the local council is satisfied that the surrounding street network is able to cope with traffic volumes likely to be generated by the school.
5	Encourage use of public transport for journeys to and from the school	Location	Secondary schools should be located with access to the principal public transport network or regional public transport network (either rail or bus).	Yes. Only required if possible.	Primary and secondary schools should be located with access to the principal public transport network or regional public transport network (either rail or bus).	Yes. Only required if possible.	Primary and secondary schools should be located with access to the principal public transport network or regional public transport network (either rail or bus).	Yes. Only required if possible.
6	Minimise the impact of busy roads on school sites and improve the amenity and safety of schools	Location	<u>Must not</u> be located on an arterial road (declared or undeclared).	No.	<u>Should not</u> be located on an arterial road (declared or undeclared).	Yes. If agreed to by Department of Transport and/or local council (as relevant).	<u>Should not</u> be located on an arterial road (declared or undeclared).	Yes. If agreed to by Department of Transport and/or local council (as relevant).
7	Maximise passive heating, solar exposure and natural light infiltration for school buildings	Site orientation	Site should be orientated in an east west direction with a ratio of 1.5 to 1.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that passive heating and solar exposure for school buildings is still achievable.	Site should be orientated in an east west direction with a ratio of 1.5 to 1.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that passive heating and solar exposure for school buildings is still achievable.	North facade of buildings should not be overshadowed by other buildings to the north.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that passive heating and solar exposure for school buildings is still achievable.
8	A site large enough to fit the necessary permanent and relocatable buildings, sport facilities and dispersal spaces	Site size	In greenfield areas sites should be 3.5 hectares (ha) for a primary school, 8.4 ha for a secondary school and 1.9 ha for a specialist school.	Unlikely.	Preferred sites sizes are 3.5 ha for a primary school, 8.4 ha for a secondary school and 1.9 ha for a specialist school. If the greenfield standard cannot be met, the size of a new school should approximate the size of surrounding schools of a similar type.	Possible. Can be reduced if agreed by the department, particularly where options for the school to have shared use of nearby facilities are favourable (e.g. sports fields).	In high density areas, a minimum of 2.0 ha should be provided for a primary or secondary school to allow room for the building footprint and at-ground outdoor space.	Possible. Can be reduced if agreed by the department, particularly where options for the school to have shared use of nearby facilities are favourable (e.g. sports fields).

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9	A site with sufficient dimensions to fit the necessary buildings and sport facilities	Minimum site dimensions	In greenfield areas, the minimum acceptable dimension for the narrow section of an L-shaped site must be 80 metres to enable buildings to be accommodated in that section of the site. <i>Note: 80 metres is NOT the minimum dimension for a rectangular site.</i>	No.	Depending on the gym facilities needed, specific dimensions and street frontages lengths are required.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that the site can accommodate the relevant facility requirements.	Depending on the gym facilities needed, specific dimensions and street frontages lengths are required.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that the site can accommodate the relevant facility requirements.
10	Facilitate efficient layout of buildings and outdoor facilities	Site shape	Should have a standard square or rectangular shape. <i>Note: L-shaped sites wrapping around a community facility are acceptable.</i>	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that the site can accommodate the relevant facility requirements.	Should have a regular shape that does not compromise opportunities for the efficient layout of buildings and outdoor facilities.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that the site can accommodate the relevant facility requirements.	Should have a regular shape that does not compromise opportunities for the efficient layout of buildings and outdoor facilities.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department, provided that a site masterplan demonstrates that the site can accommodate the relevant facility requirements.
11	Facilitate safety and efficiency of traffic and pedestrian movement, especially at pick-up and drop-off times	Number of street frontages	Three street frontages desirable, two street frontages essential.	Unlikely. Can be varied to a minimum of two street frontages if the department and local council are satisfied that the surrounding street network will ensure safety and efficiency of traffic and pedestrian movement and/or where schools are located with public open space and car parking will be delivered close to the school.	Three street frontages desirable, two street frontages essential.	Unlikely. Can be varied to one street frontage if the department and local council are satisfied that the surrounding street network will ensure safety and efficiency of traffic and pedestrian movement and/or where schools are located with public open space and car parking will be delivered close to the school.	Pedestrian access to school site should be prioritised. Vehicle access (i.e. vehicle access for the purpose of student pick-ups and drop-offs) to the school should be discouraged.	Possible. Where opportunities for sufficient street frontages are limited, the school design should allow for entry or pedestrian access points from street level from all school sides.
12	Allow student drop-off zones and on-street parking areas	Street design	At least two streets abutting new school sites must have sufficient widths to allow for student drop-off zones and on-street indented parking in addition to other street functions.	No, except where a detailed travel management plan has been developed and the department and local council are satisfied that student drop-off zones and on-street parking are not required.	At least two streets abutting new school sites should have sufficient widths to provide student drop-off zones and on-street parking in addition to other street functions.	Possible, particularly where a detailed travel management plan has been developed and the department and local council are satisfied that student drop-off zones and on-street parking are not required.	School entry or pedestrian access points should be provided from street level from all school sides. Vehicle access (i.e. vehicle access for the purpose of student pick-ups and drop-offs) to the school is discouraged.	Student drop-off zones and on-street parking will not generally be provided for schools in high density areas.
13	Enable opportunities for integrated facilities at delivery stage	Street design	No roads should be separating community facilities and schools.	Unlikely. Can be varied if agreed by the department and local council.	No roads should be separating community facilities and schools.	Possible, particularly if a safe pedestrian crossing point between the school and community facility is provided.	No roads should be separating community facilities and schools.	Possible, particularly if a safe pedestrian crossing point between the school and community facility is provided.
14	Ensure students have access to community sports fields within close proximity to the school	Street design	No roads should be separating open space and schools.	Possible, particularly if a safe pedestrian crossing point between the school and open space is provided.	School site should be adjacent to open space / sports fields.	Likely, particularly if sports fields can be accessed within a 5-minute walk from the school site.	Sports fields should be accessed within a 5-minute walk from the school site.	Likely, particularly if sports fields can be accessed within a 400-metre walk from the school site.

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15	Ensure students have access to buses within close proximity to the school	Street design	One street abutting the school should have a road easement that is able to accommodate on-street indented parking (that can incorporate a student drop-off zone), bus parking and two-way traffic movement in addition to other street functions.	Possible. Can be varied if the department is satisfied that there is a road capable of supporting bus parking within easy walking distance of the school.	Bus parking possible on a street that can be accessed from the school site without crossing a road.	Possible. Can be varied if the department is satisfied that bus parking is possible within easy walking distance of the school.	Bus parking possible on a street that can be accessed from the school site without crossing a road.	Possible. Can be varied if the department is satisfied that bus parking is possible within easy walking distance of the school.
16	Ensure that the public infrastructure required to ensure the site is accessible and suitable for the department's proposed use will be delivered	Street delivery	All roads abutting school sites should be able to be delivered (by others) before or at the same time as the school site is subdivided. Situations where a proposed school site and an abutting road are controlled by different owners / developers should be avoided.	Unlikely. Can be varied if agreed by the department.	All roads abutting school sites should be constructed to a standard that ensures the site is accessible and suitable for the department's proposed use.	Possible. Can be varied if the department is satisfied that the roads will be upgraded and modified to bring them up to standard.	All roads abutting school sites should be constructed to a standard that ensures the site is accessible and suitable for the department's proposed use.	Possible. Can be varied if the department is satisfied that the roads will be upgraded and modified to bring them up to standard.
17	Reduce complications associated with site acquisition	Site ownership	Should be owned by one sole owner / developer.	Possible. Can be varied if the department and local council are satisfied that the land can be serviced and appropriate access provided, including how surrounding roads will be delivered. Variation is more likely to be necessary if land ownership patterns in the area are very fragmented.	Should be owned by one sole owner / developer and should be available for purchase / acquisition when required.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department and if acquisition of all parcels can be negotiated in a timely manner.	Should be owned by one sole owner / developer and should be available for purchase / acquisition when required.	Possible. Can be varied if agreed by the department and if acquisition of all parcels can be negotiated in a timely manner.
18	Avoid any impact to schools from electromagnetic fields (EMFs)	Distance from transmission lines (66 kilovolts (kV) and above)	New government schools should be located a minimum of 60 metres from the edge of any transmission line easement, as measured from the closest property boundary of the proposed school site.	Possible. Subject to consideration of current electromagnetic fields (EMFs) information from the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANZA) and asset management and safety advice from the relevant electricity transmission authority.	New government schools should be located a minimum of 60 metres from the edge of any transmission line easement, as measured from the closest property boundary of the proposed school site.	Possible. Subject to consideration of current electromagnetic fields (EMFs) information from the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANZA) and asset management and safety advice from the relevant electricity transmission authority.	New government schools should be located a minimum of 60 metres from the edge of any transmission line easement, as measured from the closest property boundary of the proposed school site.	Possible. Subject to consideration of current electromagnetic fields (EMFs) information from the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANZA) and asset management and safety advice from the relevant electricity transmission authority.
19	Minimise any potential risk from high pressure gas pipelines	Distance from high pressure gas pipelines	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any pipelines and/or explore other appropriate infrastructure solutions.	Unlikely. Risk mitigation to be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the relevant authorities.	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any pipelines and/or explore other appropriate infrastructure solutions.	Unlikely. Risk mitigation to be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the relevant authorities.	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any pipelines and/or explore other appropriate infrastructure solutions.	Unlikely. Risk mitigation to be discussed on a case-by-case basis with the relevant authorities.

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20	Avoid other potential hazards	Distance from other potential hazards	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any potential hazards (e.g. quarries, sources of excessive noise or air pollution, transport pollutants or risk of exposure to toxic chemicals due to industrial fires).	No.	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any potential hazards (e.g. quarries, sources of excessive noise or air pollution, transport pollutants or risk of exposure to toxic chemicals due to industrial fires).	Possible. As site options are more limited in established areas, it may be more feasible to mitigate a risk than to avoid it.	Must maintain an appropriate distance from any potential hazards (e.g. quarries, sources of excessive noise or air pollution, transport pollutants or risk of exposure to toxic chemicals due to industrial fires).	Possible. As site options are more limited in established areas, it may be more feasible to mitigate a risk than to avoid it.
21	Ensure students can evacuate from schools quickly and safely	Location and surrounding land uses	Not applicable. Site size should ensure that an evacuation can be accommodated within a school site.	Not applicable.	Preferred that site size ensures that an evacuation can be accommodated within a school site. Where the ability to carry out a successful evacuation within a site is considered unlikely, consideration must be given to the school's proximity to a public space where a school evacuation could be accommodated.	No.	Where the ability to carry out a successful evacuation within a site is considered unlikely, consideration must be given to the school's proximity to a public space where a school evacuation could be accommodated.	No.
22	Ensure that utility services are available to the new school site	Location and proximity to utilities	Utility services must be available or proposed to be delivered to the school site to ensure that the site will be suitable for the department's proposed use. Required utility services are: drinking water; recycled water (where mandated by the water business); gas; power; sewer; stormwater drainage; and telecommunications services.	Unlikely. Can be varied if agreed by the department.	Utility services must be available or proposed to be delivered to the school site to ensure that the site will be suitable for the department's proposed use. Required utility services are: drinking water; recycled water (where mandated by the water business); gas; power; sewer; stormwater drainage; and telecommunications services.	Unlikely. Can be varied if agreed by the department.	Utility services must be available or proposed to be delivered to the school site to ensure that the site will be suitable for the department's proposed use. Required utility services are: drinking water; recycled water (where mandated by the water business); gas; power; sewer; stormwater drainage; and telecommunications services.	Unlikely. Can be varied if agreed by the department.

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23	Avoid significant impacts on cost of construction	Various	<p>Should avoid sites with significant trees or vegetation requiring State or Australian government environmental approvals or offsets, heritage features, site slope, extreme topographical features involving extensive on-site earthworks, contamination, erosion, fill, easements, flooding overlays or other features that would increase the cost of building on the site.</p> <p><i>Note: Due diligence to this level of detail is generally not undertaken during a structure planning process and impacts may not be known until implementation. Where significant cost, occupational health and safety, emergency management and/or accessibility impacts subsequently become known, alternative sites may need to be explored.</i></p>	<p>Yes. Site features with cost implications may be agreed by the department, particularly if this assists in the protection of significant trees or heritage features, or contributes to the desirability of the site for a future school.</p>	<p>Should avoid sites with significant trees or vegetation requiring State or Australian government environmental approvals or offsets, heritage features, site slope, extreme topographical features involving extensive on-site earthworks, contamination, easements, flooding overlays or other features that would increase the cost of building on the site.</p> <p><i>Note: Due diligence to this level of detail is generally not undertaken during a structure planning process and impacts may not be known until implementation. Where significant cost, occupational health and safety, emergency management and/or accessibility impacts subsequently become known, alternative sites may need to be explored.</i></p>	<p>Yes. Site features with cost implications may be agreed by the department, particularly if this assists in the protection of significant trees or heritage features, or contributes to the desirability of the site for a future school.</p>	<p>Should avoid sites with significant trees or vegetation requiring State or Australian government environmental approvals or offsets, heritage features, site slope, extreme topographical features involving extensive on-site earthworks, contamination, easements, flooding overlays or other features that would increase the cost of building on the site.</p> <p><i>Note: Due diligence to this level of detail is generally not undertaken during a structure planning process and impacts may not be known until implementation. Where significant cost, occupational health and safety, emergency management and/or accessibility impacts subsequently become known, alternative sites may need to be explored.</i></p>	<p>Yes. Site features with cost implications may be agreed by the department, particularly if this assists in the protection of significant trees or heritage features, or contributes to the desirability of the site for a future school.</p>

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Further information

For further information about the Victorian Government School Site Selection Criteria Toolbox, contact: provision.planning@education.vic.gov.au