

# **SEN School Design: What's working and what's not**

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# Introduction

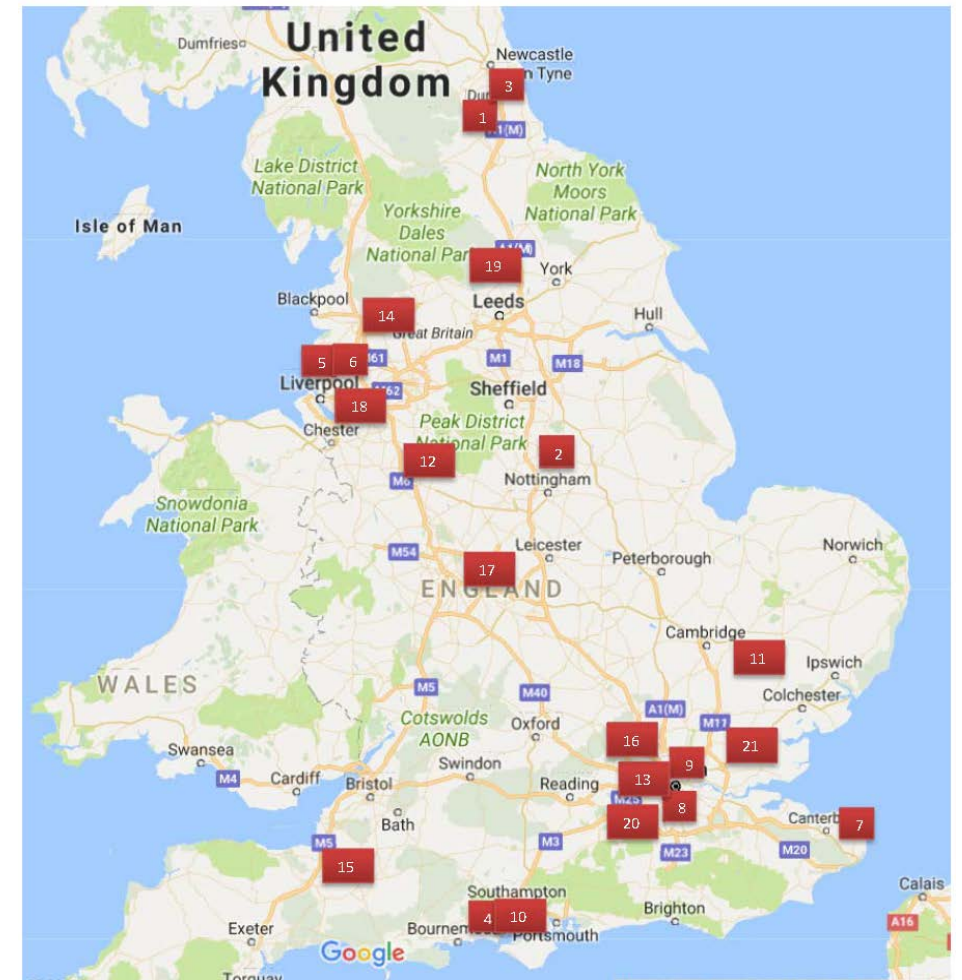
## Context

- Mace was commissioned to undertake the Post Occupancy Evaluation of 21 special schools.

**Post Occupancy Evaluations complete the cycle of continual improvement as there is a shift in emphasis to evidence based design and whole life performance of buildings.**

- Two programmes: PSBP, Free Schools
- Over 84 special schools and AP projects completed

**The aim of school delivery is to provide buildings with spaces that are suitable to facilitate learning**



## Choice of schools

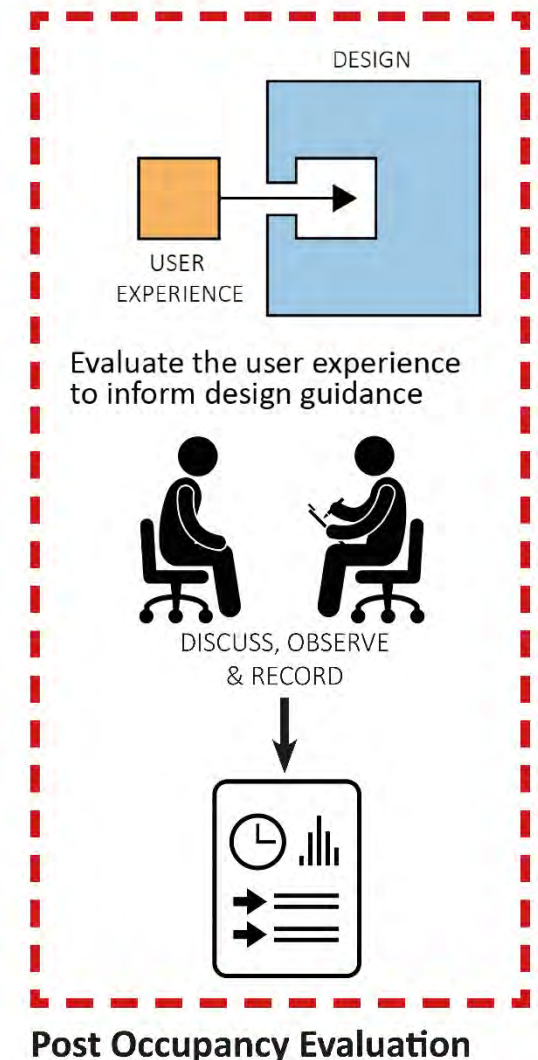
- A range of pupil needs (PMLD, ASD, MLD, SEMH) and AP
- PSBP and Free Schools
- In operation for more than one year

## The brief

- How are the building and grounds meeting pupils' educational and emotional needs as well as their medical and therapeutic needs?

## The method

- Observations of learning, therapy and pastoral activities
- Discussion with the school
- Questionnaires
- Data analysis
- The 6 principles of the ESFA Output Specification provided a framework



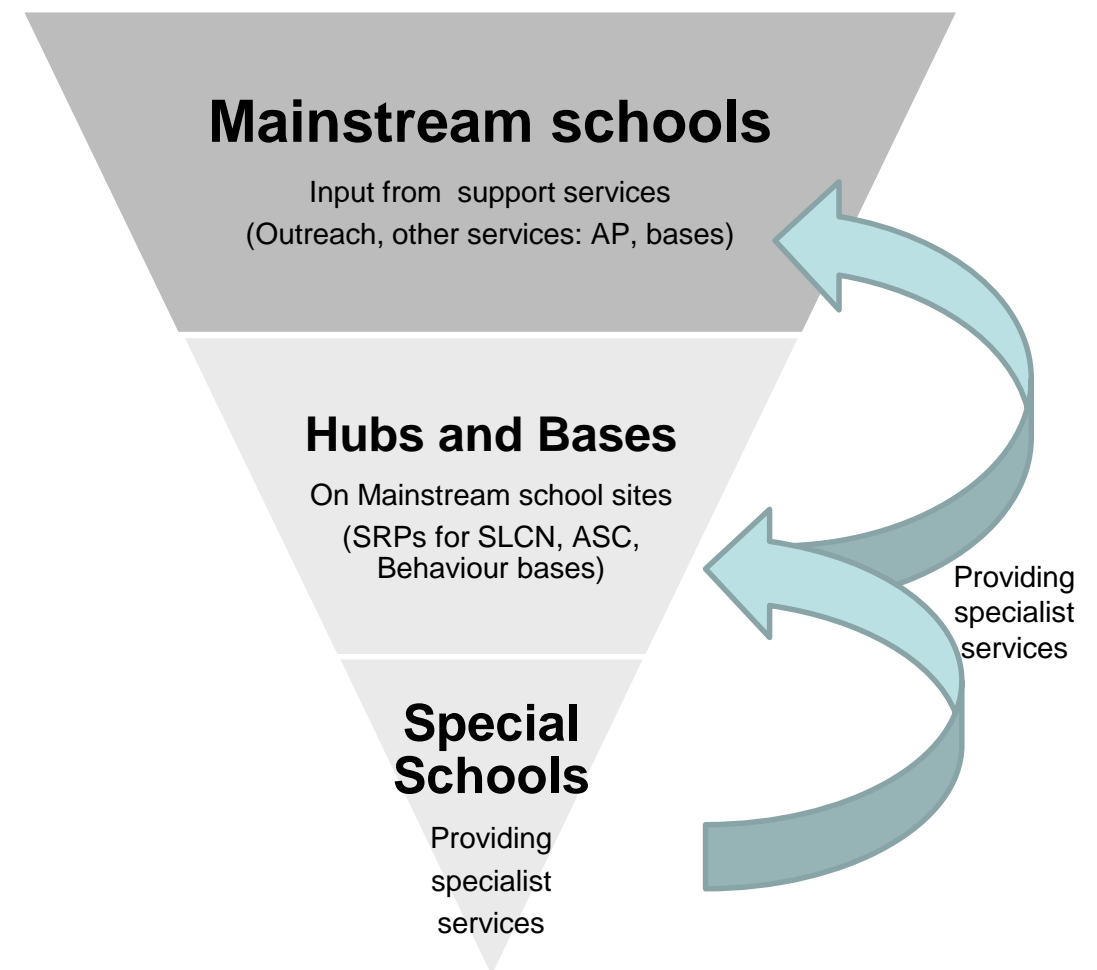
## The six principles of the Output Specification

- **Functionality**
- **Health and Safety (also inclusion)**
- **A Standardised Approach**
- **Future Proofing**
- **Minimum Life Expectancy**
- **Sustainable Design and Construction**

# Where Special Schools fit into SEN provision

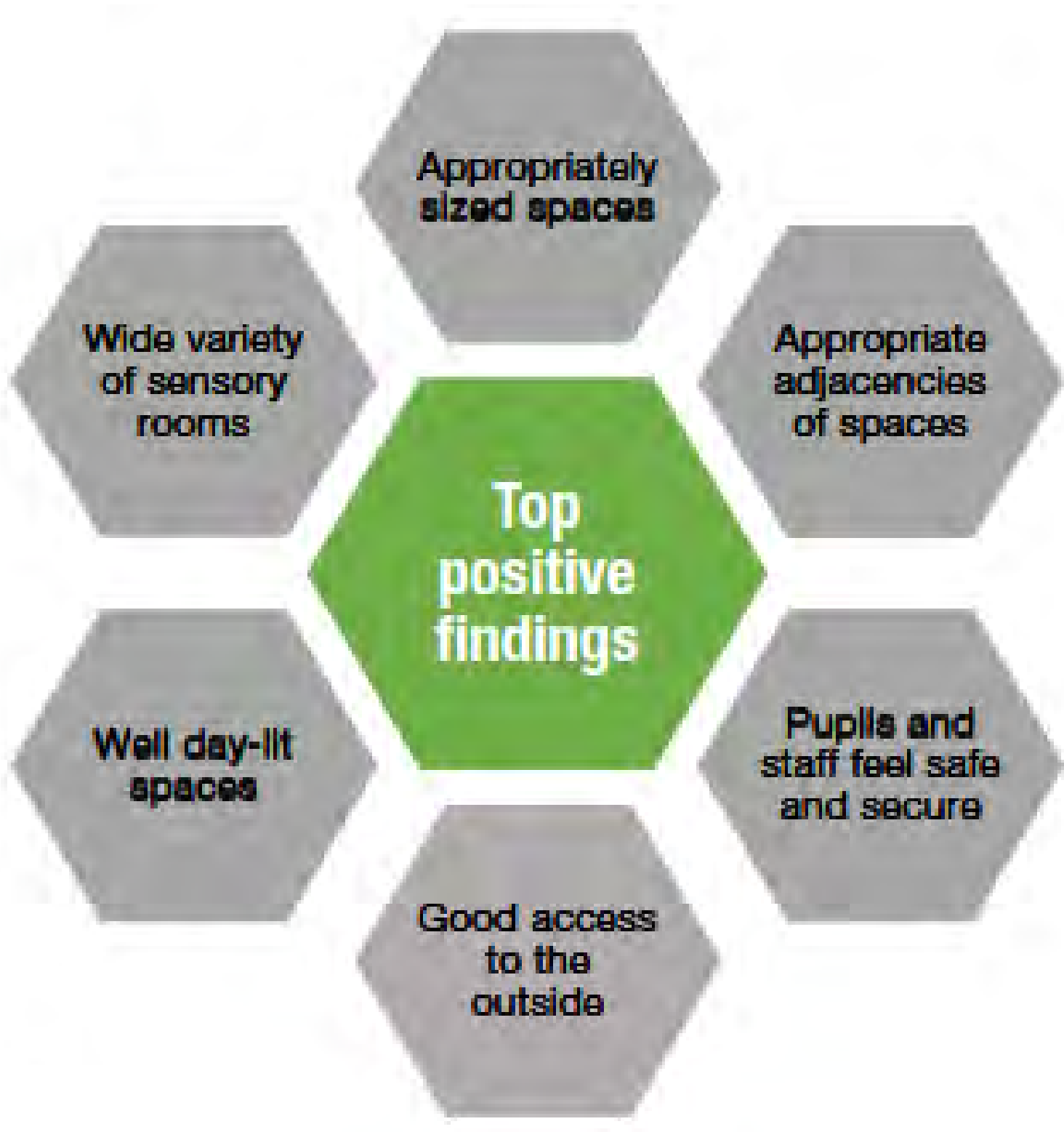
- Local authorities face the challenge of ensuring there is SEN provision locally
- Graduated approach to SEN provision
- Broad-range special schools are part of the answer
- There is still a need for SEN specific special schools – PMLD, ASC, SEMH

**Through sharing knowledge we can learn together how to provide the buildings that better facilitate inclusive education.**



# Positive Findings

- There were a significant number of recurring positive findings.
- These findings validate the EFSA specification and guidance.



# Challenging findings

- These challenges form the basis of the lessons learned
- Aspects of delivery processes also played a part
- Many issues already addressed
- Part of ESFA continual improvement



# Classrooms

- **Broad-range of needs**
- **Need for flexibility**
  - Changing cohorts
  - Changing needs
- **Space should be appropriate to needs**
- **Bigger spaces are not always better spaces for facilitating learning (AP / SEMH)**



**AP(Behaviour) KS2  
Classroom**



**AP(Behaviour) KS3  
Classroom**



**SEMH Classroom**



**MLD Classroom**



# Circulation

- 2m to 2.2m works for ambulant schools
- PMLD Free School in the south west has rounded walls to aid the movement of mobility aids – not essential in an ASC school
- Positives and negatives to large volume spaces
- Corridors can be too wide even though used as breakout space
- Schools should consider the impact of furniture on the effective width of corridors



**PMLD school with curved walls**



**Large volume circulation**



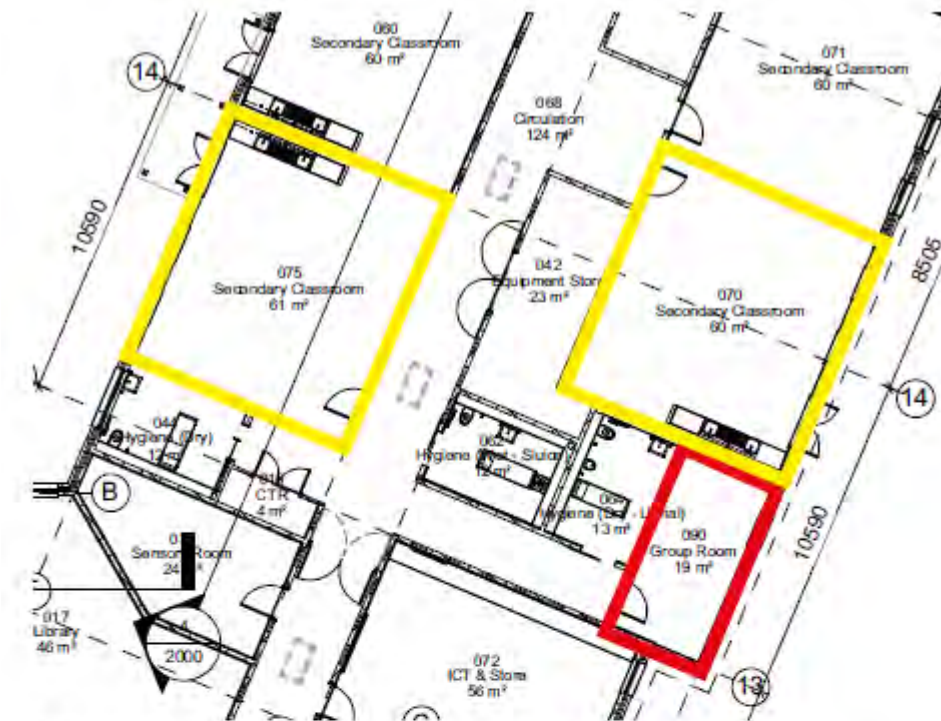
**ASC school circulation width extreme**



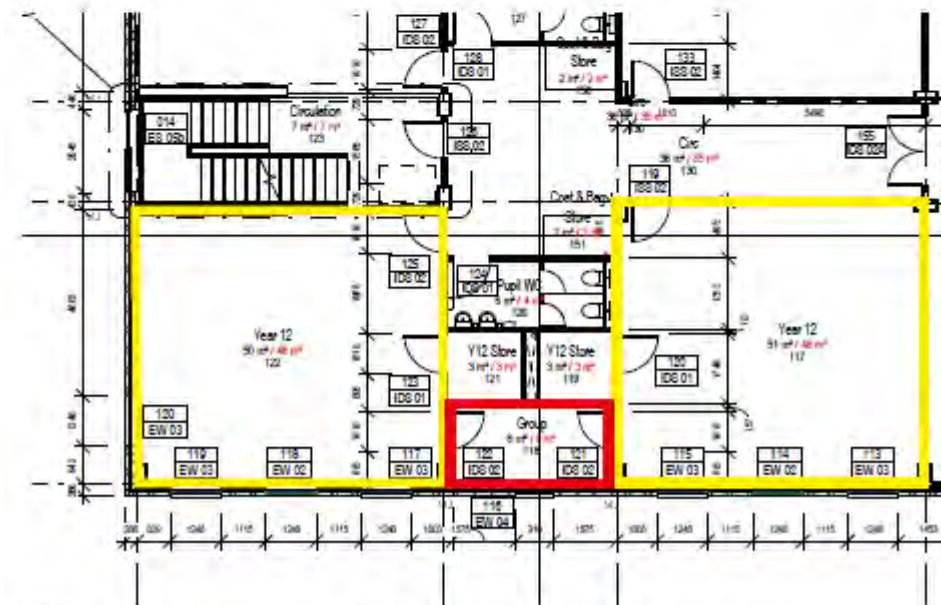
**ASC school with circulation effective width reduced**

# Support Spaces

- Group rooms located directly off classrooms are utilised more.
- Group rooms shared between classrooms reduces need for withdrawal rooms.
- Poorly located group rooms are under utilised, including those that are cold and poorly day lit.
- Transition from teaching spaces to withdrawal spaces can cause disruption of learning in other teaching spaces.
- Alternative break-out spaces to consider: Individual learning room (ILR); 'My space' alcoves



Classbases and group rooms



Classbases and adjacent group rooms

# Support Spaces

## Therapy & Sensory Rooms

- Sensory rooms are generally well equipped eg. projection, smells, bubble tube, magic carpet.
- A PMLD high school in the north is one of only a couple that has a rebound therapy space with a sunken trampoline pit.
- A MILE (immersive and interactive therapy) room was evident at schools, for pupils to practice real life scenario in safe place.
- Efficient use of space: MLD School has music and drama therapy which takes place in the sensory circuit room.



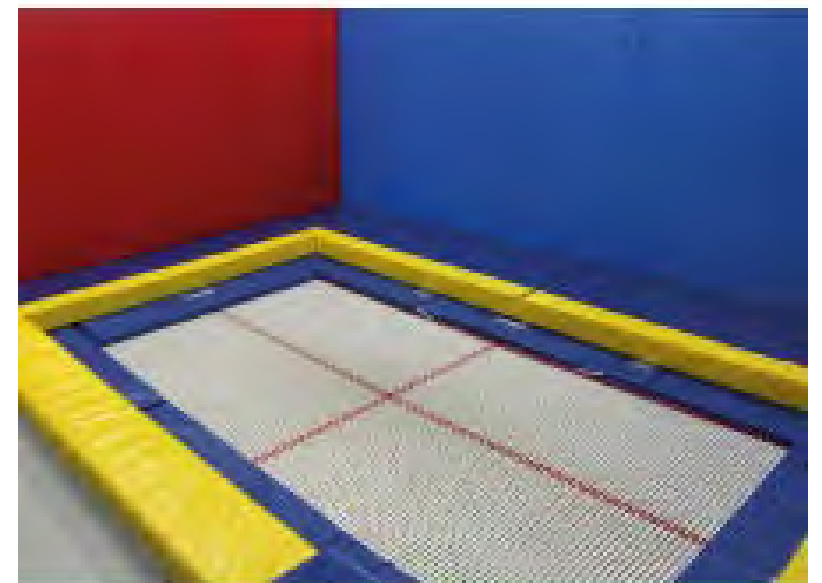
**PMLD school Sensory Room**



**ASC school Soft Play Room**



**ASC school Sensory room**



**PMLD school Rebound  
Therapy room**

# Staff Spaces

- Spread across school generally preferred
- Staff rooms appropriately sized and fitted out in majority of schools.
- Half of the visited schools' reception area plays an important role in receiving pupil at start of day and handing over at the end of day.
- Lack of meeting rooms at broad-range & SEMH schools which cater for pupils which may be receiving support from multiple agencies.



**Secure reception lobby**



**Staff Room**



**Meeting Room**

# Externals

- Majority of schools have direct access to the outside. Variable canopy provision.
- It is important for EYFS pupils to ideally have direct access to a dedicated and secure outside play area with a canopy.
- The car park and pick up arrangement needs to be well-conceived and thought through.
- At three broad-range SEN schools the drop off/pick up area was combined with informal hard play.
- General dissatisfaction with the state of grassed areas.



**EYFS Canopy**



**EYFS Canopy/Fencing**



**Car Park**



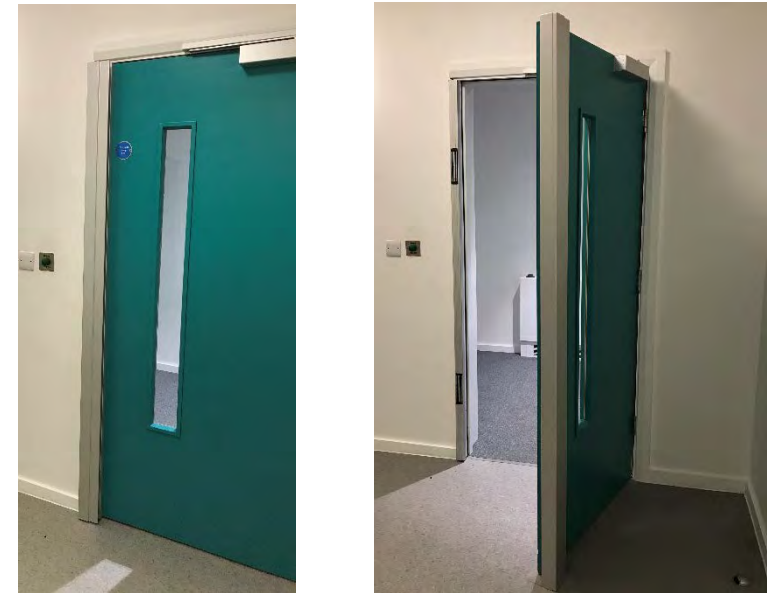
**External Soft Play**

# Fabric

- Some schools have damaged window restrictors that can be over-ridden by pupils.
- Inappropriate door maglocks
- Transition strips between vinyl and carpet
- Paint and plasterboard specification at many schools was not suitable (wipability) – this has been addressed.
- Sparkly paint used on a teaching wall causes issues for pupils with sensory sensitivities (one-off).
- Render and cladding



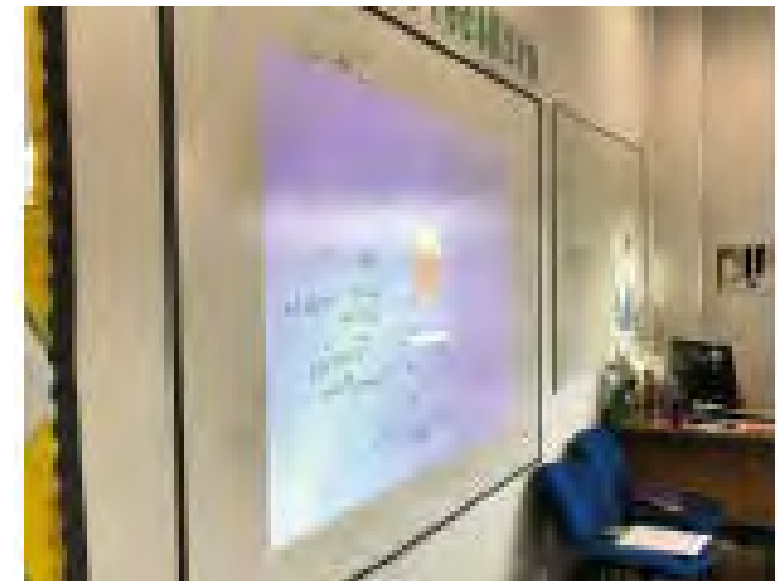
**Problem window restrictor**



**Example of robust door maglock**



**Typical transition strip issue**



**'Sparkly' teaching wall**

- There is little evidence to suggest that overall layouts can be standardised.
- Flexibility is facilitated through the provision of standard sized spaces.

## **Top tip: Use the BB104 provision-appropriate standard sized spaces**

(use the calculations and graphs as a check)

Why?

1) Buildability

2) Flexibility

- Perhaps standard arrangements could be developed for group room, store room and hygiene room arrangements.
- Practical spaces work well so best examples could be used to produce a set of standard room layouts.

# Standardisation

Standardisation could be achieved in a number of ways:

- whole school / parts of schools / modules
- kit of parts / components
- standard dimensions / dimensional coordination / grids
- process / procurement (including FF&E)
- supply chain / other (including briefing)

The ESFA generic design brief and associated tools go a long way to achieving this.



**MLD school ICT**



**MLD school Science**



**MLD school Food  
Technology**



# Any Questions?

There is a lot more that is working in our new SEN school buildings than is not.

Post Occupancy Evaluations complete the cycle of continual improvement as there is a shift in emphasis to evidence based design and whole life performance of buildings.

Through sharing knowledge we can learn together how to provide the buildings that better facilitate inclusive education.

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#SEN #BB104 #collaboration #MMC #POE

