

# EARLY LEARNING DESIGN PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT

Little Lane Early Learning \_ Drummoyne Reservoir

Assessment and  
Documentation  
Provided by ECFgroup



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## 1. ABOUT ECFGROUP

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ECFgroup or Early Childhood Focused Group is a unique Interior Architectural Design + Educational Studio for early learning educational settings

ECFgroup strives to provide environments that empower children, to encourage independence, curiosity, engagement, a sense of belonging, and self-achievement.

ECFgroup supports physical environment consultation, interior architectural design, learning play space design, learning + development consultancy, early childhood advocacy, support and documentation for service approval development and the guidelines placed on regulations, council approvals and NSW planning and environment approvals.

## 2. REVIEW AND DOCUMENTATION BY TRACEY SHARP

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Tracey Sharp from ECFgroup is an Early Learning Interior Architectural Consultant and Educational Practitioner with over twenty-five years' experience in the early learning sector. By combining degrees in early childhood education and interior architecture she strives to bridge the gap between the early learning sector and the design and construction industry. With a play-based learning pedagogy, Tracey's design approach is informed by individual needs, biophilic design, sustainable practice, and individual learning styles. Focusing in on the physical, sensory, and temporal environments provides a design brief and a physical environment identity that informs her decision making and design practice and enables a collaborative approach with clients.

### QUALIFICATIONS

Bachelor's Degree in Teaching (Early Childhood Education)  
University of Armidale

Bachelor of Interior Architecture with Honours  
University of New South Wales

Associate Diploma in Social Science (Child Studies) Mid  
North Coast TAFE

### 3. BACKGROUND AND GENERAL INFORMATION

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The design proposal has been reviewed against the Education and Care Services National Regulations (clauses 103-115), The State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care Facilities) 2017 (the SEPP) 'Child Care Planning Guideline – Delivering quality child care for NSW, August 2017' the Canada Bay Local Environmental Plan 2013, Canada Bay Development Control Plan Development and the Heritage Act 1977 for design suitability of an early learning setting.

The design proposal has also been reviewed in line with The National Quality Framework (NQF) which is inclusive of a national legislative framework. It consists of the Education and Care Services National Law, Education and Care Services National Regulations, National Quality Standards and Approved Learning Framework 'Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years

Learning Framework for Australia' to ensure early learning operational requirements can also be achieved with the proposed early learning architectural design.

All information must be read in conjunction with the Building Code of Australia and all other relevant regulatory requirements when providing an education and care service. Refer to the References listed in the review for further documentation on relevant requirements.

#### **Education and Care Services National Regulations**

Part 4.3 Physical Environment of the Education and Care Services National Regulations (clauses 103-115) sets out the physical environment requirements for early education and care services. The information in the regulations assists stakeholders to apply the requirements set out in the National Regulations when preparing development and service approval applications.

#### **The State Environmental Planning Policy- The Childcare Planning Guideline**

The Child Care Planning Guideline – Delivering quality child care for NSW, August 2017 provides information on the requirements to achieve Part 4.3 Physical Environment of the Education and Care Services National Regulations (clauses 103-115).

#### **The National Quality Framework**

The National Quality Framework consist of the Education Care Services National Law, the Education and Care Services National Regulations and the National Quality Standards.

## 4. INTRODUCTION

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The proposed development seeks to redevelop the Drummoyne Reservoir in Drummoyne NSW as an early learning environment for Little Lane Early Learning. The reservoir is a heritage listed decommissioned elevated service reservoir. Located at Rawson Avenue in Drummoyne and under the City of Canada Bay, the reservoir was built from 1910-1913. The proposal aims to accommodate 159 children in the existing Drummoyne Reservoir water tower, the reservoir water tower structure and a new construction, labelled as the 'Annex'. Milton Architects have looked beyond the typical early learning environment in Australia and found inspiration and collaboration with international designs and architects during the design phase.

## 5. DOCUMENTATION UTILISED IN THE ASSESSMENT

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The following documentation has been provided to ECFgroup to conduct the design proposal assessment.

Statement of Facts and Contentions provided by  
Milton Architects

2021\_07\_20 Avenues Drummoyne Sydney. Architectural Set. Revision F Provided by Milton  
Architects

## 6. REVIEW AGAINST THE REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

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### 6.1 THE SITE

**SEPP - Child Care Planning Guidelines- Planning & Environment NSW Government**

#### 3.1 Site Selection and location – pg.9-14

The proposed development should ensure that the site, local character, streetscape, and public domain interface and building design supports the needs of the community and proposed early learning environment.<sup>1</sup>

Surrounded by residential zoning, the location of the Drummoyne Reservoir provides an opportunity for an early learning community to nestle into an already established community. Every site has their own community and when there is a connection to that community, children develop their sense of identity. Little Lane Early Learning have recognised an opportunity in the site and the existing reservoir as a potential innovative learning environment. Children and families need a strong sense of belonging and connection to their early learning environment. Familiarity in the surroundings and a connection to one another support reciprocal and respectful relationships.

There is already a connection in the community to the reservoir with the Drummoyne public school neighbouring the site, a local café called T.A.N.K close by and a community of homes surrounding the heritage listed structure like its one of their own. Developing this structure into a community facility and highlighting the architectural beauty of the reservoir provides a strong foundation to an early learning environment. The design developed by Milton Architects brings the heritage listed structure into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and highlights the best of historical design. There are benefits in providing old and new architecture that can be included in the everyday learning curriculum. From simple conversations surrounding the historical value of the site to learning activities. Mimicking the architectural design in construction play, drawing, painting, and the understanding of engineering principles are a few examples of developing an early learning environment in a historically valuable structure.

The site is in a densely populated urban area with access to public transport, whilst being tucked securely away from the major roads of Victoria and Lyons Road. It is surrounded by streets on all four sides, ensuring that there are no shared boundaries. The location of this site ensures that families have access to an early learning environment that meets the needs of everyday life. Access can be achieved through walking, bicycle, vehicle and public transport ensuring the location is ideal.

Milton Architects have met the site constraints with a level of excitement and considered respect for the proposed early learning community and the existing residential community.

The local DCP requires a minimum of 800m<sup>2</sup> for a childcare centre, the proposed design utilises all 1810 square meters of the site. From the size of the site, Milton Architects have managed to embed more than 1620.64m<sup>2</sup> of unencumbered outdoor space.

Children observe the world with wonder, innocence, and excitement. The simplest of community tasks, using the bus, walking the dog, picking up children from school, older children walking past

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<sup>1</sup>Child Care Planning Guidelines- Planning & Environment NSW Government outline further considerations

with a basketball or skateboard in hand. Early learning requires the observation of these tasks prior to the engagement of these tasks. The siting of the buildings, the height and levels and the verandah's have allowed for this passive observation whilst ensuring the external observation from the community is limited. The use of screening and landscaping to block external participation unless invited by the community ensures that the children and the community have been considered in regard to visual acoustics. The younger children have been screened thoughtfully and will provide the educators with the choice of when they observe the external community. Acoustic barriers and design elements such as planting, screening, and fencing will support the noise buffers both to and from the proposed early learning environment. The acoustic arbour proposed ensures children have access to nature and beautiful surroundings while ensuring the acoustic integrity for the residents.

## 6.2 THE DESIGN

### **SEPP - Child Care Planning Guidelines- Planning & Environment NSW Government 3.3 Building Orientation, envelope and design**

The design, orientation, and envelope should ensure that it is compatible with the community, is accessible and designed to cater for all children, families and educator's needs. <sup>2</sup>

The design involves the adaptive reuse of the heritage structure and the construction of a new two-storey building 'the Annex' with three levels of basement car parking. The early learning environment spans over five levels of interior learning spaces with access on each level to either outdoor or simulated outdoor learning spaces. The natural learning environments are abundant on the ground floor, rooftop levels and terraced levels.

The addition of the Annex supports the connection of a somewhat familiar layout of an early learning environment that we have come to expect from the sector. However, the design of the Annex has placed innovation and an understanding of children's learning and interests at the forefront. The envelope is unique as it has taken inspiration from how children move, learn, and play in their environment. The ramps and terraces will provide learning opportunities, including the slight inclination of the rooftop floor level. The drawings and images cannot convey the experiences and activities that will be available to educational practitioners and the children. The movement in the incline represents a very small change to the adult but significant joy and inspiration to a child's experiences.

"There are three teachers of children: adults, other children, and their physical environment."<sup>3</sup> The design has captured a respect for the environment as the third teacher with the inclusion of the inclination of rooftop level, the terraced gardens, large voids, landscaping and trees to the roof level, diverse learning spaces and a respect for natural lighting.

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<sup>2</sup> Child Care Planning Guidelines- Planning & Environment NSW Government outline further considerations

<sup>3</sup> Loris Malaguzzi

## 6.3 VENTILATION AND NATURAL LIGHT

### REGULATIONS (2011) - VENTILATION AND NATURAL LIGHT

#### **PART 4.3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Regulation:* *Title:*

*Division 1: Centre-based services and family day care services*

110

*Ventilation and Natural Light*

The ventilation and natural light in a building directly impacts on our health and well-being. The proposed redevelopment of the reservoir will have sections of the fabric of the existing water tank walls removed to allow natural light penetration and ventilation. In addition, the atrium or void space will be open to the sky and will allow rainfall to penetrate to places on ground floor. The outdoor play areas on levels 3, 4 and 5 will access natural vertical and horizontal ventilation. The height of the tank and the sections of fabric being removed will provide a balance of wind ensuring that children do feel that wind. At times in inner city spaces located on ground floor, access to wind and that immense feeling of wind on your face has been removed. This design ensures that children can respond to the opportunity or simply move to a different space. The void provides wonderful opportunity for light and ventilation, not to mention the shadows and learning experiences that will come from having the natural elements penetrate through a building to ground level. The circular shape of the tank provides windows facing all orientations allowing for light at different times of the day. The Annex has windows on all sides of the building and the southwest and northeast elevations have banks of glazed openable transition doors to sun-drenched verandahs.

Milton Architect's have designed the learning spaces with consideration to ceiling heights, voids, diversity in window heights, glazed doorways and transition paths ensuring that the service will be well ventilated and access to different lighting and temperatures throughout the day.

## 6.4 THE OUTDOOR SPACE

### REGULATIONS (2011) - OUTDOOR SPACE

#### **PART 4.3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Regulation:* *Title:*

*Division 1: Centre-based services and family day care services*

108 (2) (3) (4) (5)

*Outdoor space*

Milton Architects have taken advantage of the reservoir being placed in the middle of the site by utilising all the outdoor space surrounding the built form. The drawings indicate a landscape schematic design that will be further reviewed by an experienced and registered landscape contractor. Initial drawings have allowed for vegetable gardens, stone paved garden maze, driftwood logs, outdoor art experiences, sand play, large play frames and grassy mounds. In combination with large trees, shrubs and planting, the inspiration to include the natural world within the design appears robust and has an underlining respect for an outdoor natural pedagogy.

They have included further outdoor space within the built form with natural outdoor space and simulated outdoor space, occurring throughout the levels. The design goes beyond providing the required outdoor space in accordance with Regulation 108.

With the education and care of 159 children, the outdoor space required under National Regulations is 1113m<sup>2</sup>. The design exceeds this requirement by providing 1620m<sup>2</sup> of natural outdoor space. In addition to the national regulation requirement, there is simulated play space located within the reservoir building design.

This simulated play space provides additional square meterage for early learning practitioners to design, and fitout based on children's individual needs and interests. This flexible space allows for both indoor and outdoor play opportunities and can be utilised at the educator's discretion. The design of the reservoir and annex provide diverse learning spaces to allow educators to provide high quality care and education during days of wet weather, poor air quality days and excessive temperatures. Early learning practitioners must constantly make decisions around the environments that children have access to. This is a regular, several times a day occurrence that requires the architecture to support them in this practice.

Whilst it is considered ideal to have access to the natural world directly from the built form, concessions are required in inner city suburbs. Milton Architects have managed to provide access to the natural world with a considered and enjoyable transition to gain access to that natural world. They have taken the thinking around providing education and care on multiple levels and optimised the space to ensure architectural and sensory environment diversity.

The stepped play area from Level 2 of the Annex to the roof top will provide a diversity of floor levels and play spaces that cannot be achieved with one flat floor level. Children will be able to explore their physical skills utilising the stepped areas. This play space also acts as a flexible learning environment and can be adapted, educators will be able to change the stepped areas into smaller play spaces. They also act as delineated spaces, where the floor level is acting as a divider for play spaces without hindering supervision.

Simulated outdoor environments as outlined in the Child Care Planning guideline are considered internal spaces with qualities and experiences that are similar to natural outdoor spaces. Interiors and simulated outdoor spaces will have access to natural ventilations, rainfall and sunlight. They will also be fitted with a combination of flooring types and textures such as wooden decking, pebbles, grass, artificial grass and crazy pave to ensure a diverse range of sensory experiences with the architectural materials.

The vertical and horizontal ventilation and access to rainfall on level 3, level 4, and level 5 will ensure that these additional outdoor spaces will feel and represent as a simulated outdoor space.

## 6.5 THE NATURAL OUTDOOR SPACE

### REGULATIONS (2011) - OUTDOOR SPACE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

#### **PART 4.3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Regulation:*      *Title:*

*Division 1: Centre-based services and family day care services*

**113**

*Outdoor space – Natural Environment*

The drawings indicate a landscape schematic design that will be further reviewed by an experienced and registered landscape contractor during construction phase. This allows for a complete understanding of access to the natural world during and after the construction on the built environment.

Little Lane Early Learning has adopted the philosophy of an organic inspired playground that is designed and constructed in situ with a design and construct procurement strategy. The plans mention a diverse range of natural materials that may be used.

The outdoor space could have amazing inclusions; vegetable gardens, double mound slide, mud kitchen, large- shaded areas, cubby houses, edible gardens, sensory paths, dry creek bed, water tanks for children to have water play access. The options are limitless and when you utilise natural materials such as tree stumps, logs, sleepers, rocks, boulders, you are elevating the children's physical development, proprioceptive input and their health and well-being. In designing the outdoor learning areas, when you create pathway's that are bordered by plants, flowers or any other natural materials to create a nature trail within the early learning environment they become learning experiences. A learning path as a transition path can be counted in usable space and it provides an abundance of joyful learning experiences. Sensory paths, plants that provide scent and hidden secret story garden areas enhance the children's sensory input and can help regulate their emotions and interactions. With the design and construct procurement strategy, the stakeholders will be able to create a sense of wonder within the landscape design to provide depth and learning experiences. For example, go around a mulberry bush and down the lavender path to get to the mud kitchen will come from an educator who is knowledgeable and experienced in setting children's learning spaces. They can collaborate with the landscape architects and builders to ensure this level of robust design.

*"Flexible arrangements of furniture and equipment, together with materials that allow for multiple uses, encourage children to become flexible thinkers and investigators as they engage in play-based learning"*<sup>4</sup> Typically outdoor built structures are provided to the educators, and they must then adapt learning experiences which is not always ideal. This design and construct procurement strategy removes this restriction and ensures better learning outcomes.

## 6.6 SHADE AND SOLAR ACCESS

### REGULATIONS (2011) - OUTDOOR SPACE SHADE

<b>PART 4.3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>Regulation:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
<i>Division 1: Centre-based services and family day care services</i>	<b>114</b>	<b>Outdoor Space - Shade</b>

The balance of sun and shade in early learning is an important aspect to any architectural design. Ensuring the health and wellbeing and individual preferences of children and educators is reflected in their access to sun, vitamin D, and shade. Natural shade in the form of trees with dense and ideally deciduous foliage, dense shrubs are the ideal type of shade. They also form educational opportunities with the reflection of seasons changing.

The shade studies produced by Milton architects provide a detailed understanding of the shade on site. The design provides a diverse range of sun and shade throughout the year. Children and educators are provided the autonomy to decide if they would like to engage in the sun, the shade or

<sup>4</sup> Guide to the NQF, pg 195

the simulated outdoor spaces at any given time. The opportunities are endless, and access will be able to be monitored in the services sun safety policy.

The drawings indicate a landscape schematic design that will be further reviewed by an experienced and registered landscape contractor. Additional built structures can be added to the rooftops if required however at this stage it appears there is adequate sun protection. I would strongly advocate for the addition of the trees to the rooftop as this has been widely successful in other early learning environments.

Little Lane Early Learning have proven their commitment to provide natural shading as well as complying with the required year-round solar access to at least thirty percent of outdoor play in previous early learning settings.

## 6.7 ENGAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

### REGULATIONS (2011) - SUPERVISION

#### **PART 4.3: PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Division 1: Centre-based services and family day care services*

*Regulation:*

**115**

*Title:*

*Premises designed to facilitate supervision*

Supervision in the early learning setting is necessary and at times can be difficult to achieve without interrupting valuable learning experiences. The desire to plan architecture for easy supervision is certainly a way to reduce the need for additional educational practitioners or developing complex supervision plans. However hidden pockets, individual spaces, places of discovery, and diversity in the room and outdoor layouts provide opportunity for autonomy and places a level of respect for the child's right to choose.

The National Quality Framework calls for reasonable precautions and adequate supervision to ensure children are protected from harm or hazard. This does not automatically translate into large open spaces with clear eyelines and no privacy for children. Good design may allow for effective supervision in children's spaces according to the CCPG, but great design allows for children's individual learning styles, sensory needs, interests and abilities. The guideline to the National Quality Framework stipulates that 'Children must be supervised in sight and/or hearing of an educator at all times' <sup>5</sup>.

This design has provided little spaces that children will love and have automatic engagement with. My eye as an educator is drawn to the spaces in between the heritage archways, the area allocated for the veggie garden, the ramps and of course the space that circles the reservoir. Continual supervision adjustments are a requirement that educator's conduct almost every moment of every day. Ensuring children are engaged within their environment, reduces the need for supervision and allows for active engagement instead.

All early learning environments are required to have supervisions plans and policies. This building will need robust thinking and reflective practice surrounding their supervision plans; however, this is what is needed to ensure that children's needs and interests are met.

Interesting architectural plans and layouts are beneficial for setting up interesting learning experiences. Large rectangular open spaces are one of the biggest restraints in providing quality environments.

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<sup>5</sup> Guide to the NQF, pg 169

## 6.8 OPERATIONAL INTENT

The operational intent of an early learning environment in many ways has a stronger position to play in early learning service delivery over the architecture. Educational practitioners have a responsibility that is aligned with the National Quality framework to ensure that children are provided with a diverse range of learning opportunities. Ideally the architecture and the operational intent should work together and provide a design that not only provides a wonderful curriculum, but it also understands that the built environment becomes the curriculum.

Little Lane Early Learning has demonstrated their commitment to the learning outcomes and operational intent by seeking inspiration and collaboration conceptual design with Takaharu Tezuka, founder of Tezuka Architects in Tokyo, Japan. An architect known for his commitment in designing children's spaces with a belief that children do not need to be forced to learn, they simply cannot stop learning. Discovery style learning and design that supports social interaction and collaboration underpinned the award winning 'Fuji Kindergarten' designed by Tezuka.

Early learning care and education settings have the immense responsibility of supporting children in seeing themselves as capable, confident, and respected individuals. Educators need to provide experiences and environments that support relationships to thrive. They are responsible for children at times for eleven hours of their day. They are essentially responsible for children's daily lives. Tezuka once said "I learned that the most important role of architecture is creating a lifestyle"<sup>6</sup>. The proposed redevelopment of the reservoir, with the addition of the Annex has taken on the responsibility of creating a lifestyle for children that respects their freedom of choice while maintaining their safety.

Milton Architects and Little Lane Early Learning have clearly taken the time to develop a design brief that seeks to inspire the architecture to take on an active role in the curriculum.

Whilst the architectural plans indicate that the rooms located in the reservoir tower will be age based, it is my understanding the Little Lane Early Learning also embraces an interest-based program where children are seen as confident learners with freedom of choice. The design layout of the reservoir is suited to an interest-based program and will ensure that children are able to access the indoor, outdoor and natural environments.

There is an opportunity to view the kitchen as a learning kitchen rather than just another on-site requirement. By opening the kitchen out to the learning space, it may be included as unencumbered space but more importantly it can be used within the curriculum in daily experiences. Dining is an important learning experience, as is preparation of food and the social experiences that children gain from setting up and organising social gatherings with their friends.

The design also allows for connecting the kitchen to the outdoor area, which will provide the children with the opportunity to experience daily, the cycle of growing, preparing, trying and eating the food. Creating a physical environment that acts as the third teacher allows the educational practitioners to spend more time with the children rather than setting up and packing away several times a day.

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<sup>6</sup> Takaharu Tezuka – Japanese Architect

## 7. SUMMARY

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The collaboration undertaken by Little Lane Early Learning and Milton Architects has resulted in a design interpretation that hopes to meet a pedagogical philosophy that has evolved over several years. Continual reflective practice and ongoing improvement underpins the early learning sector, and this design reflects the conversations, educational architectural rigor and the collaborative conceptual design process that this team has engaged in.

Little Lane Early Learning have taken on a design approach that respects and validates the knowledge, education and pedagogy of the early learning practitioner by ensuring that the architectural spaces will be designed in collaboration with their educational team.

With each new project, this team continues to develop their skills, experience, and their collaboration techniques, resulting in early learning environments that display innovation, sustainable practice, and an understanding of early learning physical environments that meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The physical environment influences interactions, relationships, and behaviours. It has the power to communicate values and impact on our social being. Buildings can invite us in and encourage us to stay out. In the early learning space, the physical environment is particularly powerful as children are learning about their social constructs.

*"The spaces and places where children experience their childhood will help create memories that last a life-time. Our physical environment is not simply a passive setting- it has the power to elicit or inhibit behaviour, evoke emotional responses and influence the way relationships are formed"*<sup>7</sup>.

Milton Architects have provided an architectural design that leaves the simulated outdoor environment open to educational interpretation. Much of the 21<sup>st</sup> century early learning pedagogy is derived from flexible and adaptable architecture and design. The curriculum and indeed the physical environment must have room to grow and develop with the community of users. The procurement strategy of design and fitout of the space and including customised furniture and equipment to the simulated environment will ensure a stronger pedagogical outcome.

*"In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge."*<sup>8</sup>

As an early learning educator with an interior architecture degree and experience in designing children's learning spaces, I believe in this model of collaboration between owners, architects, landscape designers and educators to ensure educational spaces thrive and adapt to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am truly inspired to see early learning architecture in Australia that seeks inspiration from international design and is trying to develop a uniquely Australian Architectural Pedagogy.

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<sup>7</sup> Michele Zini – Italian Architect

<sup>8</sup> Lella Gandini (1998)

## 8. REFERENCES

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority 'Guide to the National Quality Framework'  
Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority 'Guide to the National Quality Standard'  
Draft State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care  
Facilities) 2017 (NSW)  
Education and Care National Regulations  
Greenman, J. 1988, 'Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children's environments that work', Exchange  
Press, Redmond.  
Kidsafe New South Wales Inc. Playground Advisory Unit  
Local Strategic Planning Statement,  
NSW Government Planning and Environment Childcare Planning Guideline 2017

## 9. DISCLAIMER

The assessment has been provided for information purposes and all documentation made available by ECFgroup in this report is provided on the understanding that the reader exercises their own skill, judgment and understanding in respect of the relevant regulatory requirements and the use of this document. All persons reading this report must undertake responsibility in assessing the content.

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Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss further if you have any questions.

Regards,

*Tracey Sharp*

Director

ECFgroup

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