



SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL
EDUCATION AND
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Learning Estate Strategy

Strategic framework for managing and improving
the school estate

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1. Foreword

Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy: Connecting People, Places and Learning, was launched by the Scottish Government in autumn 2019, providing a platform for each local authority across Scotland to consider their strategic approach for managing their Learning Estates.

This strategy should be read in conjunction with Shetland Island Council's Admissions Policy, Accessibility Strategy and Accessibility Design Brief.

Strategy / Policy	Purpose
Accessibility Strategy	Improving access to education provision.
Learning Estate Strategy	Strategic framework for managing and improving the school estate.
Accessibility Design Brief	Guidance for creating accessible and inclusive learning environments.
Admissions Policy	Admissions arrangements for early learning and childcare, primary and secondary schools.

It is important to have buildings which are flexible and meet modern learning requirements. Shetland Islands Council's strategy continues to have four broad aspirations:

- Equity
- Excellence
- Inclusion
- Sustainability

Shetland's Learning Estate is diverse, covering a wide range in age, condition and geographic spread which all adds to its complexity. The aim of this strategy is to provide education in a way which is equitable, strives for excellence, is inclusive for all, and sustainable in the longer term.

2. Legislative Duties and Guidance

Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Local authorities have a legal duty to ensure that there is adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area. As part of that duty, the local authority must provide and maintain sufficient, safe and adequate school buildings.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

Local Authorities must provide appropriate support for any child with additional support needs.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

This approach helps practitioners focus on what makes a positive difference for children and young people and how they can act to deliver these improvements. GIRFEC is threaded through all existing policy, practice, strategy and legislation affecting children, young people and their families.

Curriculum For Excellence

The 3-18 curriculum aims to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need to flourish in life, learning and work.

Curriculum For Excellence Through Outdoor Learning

Offers opportunities for all children and young people to enjoy first-hand experience outdoors, whether within the school grounds, in urban green spaces, in Scotland's countryside or in wilder environments.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Provides the legislative framework for looked after children and their rights.

[Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future](#)

This document sets out the Scottish Government's shared vision and aspirations for the school estate and the guiding principles and objectives.

Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000

Provides the legal framework which underpins the policy of 'presumption of mainstreaming': that all children will be expected to attend mainstream school unless certain circumstances apply.

[Supporting Children's Learning - Code of Practice: statutory guidance - fourth edition - gov.scot](#)

This document explains the duties on education authorities and other agencies to support children and young people's learning.

Equality Act 2010

Under the Equality Act 2010, Shetland Islands Council has a duty to eliminate discrimination and harassment, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between those who have a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not. The 9 protected characteristics are outlined below:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002

This places a duty on education authorities to improve access to education, school environments and information for pupils with disabilities.

Shetland Islands Council Corporate Plan - Our Ambition :

- **Caring for our Community** Shetland Islands Council will deliver services to children and young people with additional support needs with facilities appropriately positioned across the Learning Estate which meet the Accessibility Design Brief.
- **Fairer Shetland** –Shetland Island's Council remains committed to supporting children and young people to thrive and reach their full potential by having modern, flexible, fit for purpose learning spaces – both indoors and outdoors.

[Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy: "Connecting People, Places and Learning" - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot) : provides ten Guiding Principles which each local authority should strive to provide for, in setting out the country's strategic approach for managing their Learning Estates. This is further detailed below.

3. Rationale for the Learning Estate Strategy

As stated above, Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy provides ten Guiding Principles which apply across the Learning Estate and are as follows:

- **Learning and Teaching:** Environments must support joined-up learning to meet all student needs.
- **Wellbeing and Inclusion:** Spaces must foster health, support varying needs, and ease transitions.
- **Best Value:** Assets should be well-maintained, resource-efficient, and maximize occupancy.
- **Condition and Suitability:** Physical states must directly enhance educational functions.

- **Community Integration:** Facilities should serve local areas and share public services via the place principle.
- **Sustainability and Digital:** Buildings must be green, net-zero aligned, digitally enabled, and safely accessible.
- **Outdoor Learning:** Use of external natural environments must be maximized.
- **Consultation:** Direct engagement with learners and communities must drive decisions.
- **Collaboration:** Local partnerships should unlock the full potential of the estate.
- **Economic Growth:** Investments must support inclusive economic growth and better outcomes.

4. Assessments

Assessments help inform decisions about the future development of the Learning Estate. To ensure all children and young people have equitable access to opportunities, learning environments must continue to evolve over time. This includes making best use of existing buildings while improving accessibility, inclusion, wellbeing and suitability for future generations of learners.

Having the right buildings in the right place is essential for the future of learners. The long-term sustainability of the Learning Estate is dependent on all of the buildings working harder. In some circumstances this may mean focusing investment on fewer better equipped learning environments capable of supporting a wider range of learner needs and delivering greater flexibility over the longer term.

The Scottish Government's "School Estates: Core Facts Overview" published in 2017 provides that both Condition and Suitability surveys must be carried out at least every five years or sooner if substantial change occurs.

Condition

"Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security. Condition has a direct impact on what goes on in the school. Appropriate forward planning and prudent, timely decisions on ongoing maintenance will best enable authorities to sustain the quality and asset value of their school buildings over the long term."

The Condition Core: Fact Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future

Condition assessments are undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Government publication 'The Condition Core Fact: Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future (2017)'. This guidance provides a nationally consistent methodology for assessing and reporting the condition of the school estate. It also retains the established elemental approach to condition surveys and is supported by a weighted workbook to promote consistency in assessment and reporting across local authorities. The guidance was refreshed to:

- Strengthen the risk-based approach to condition surveys through a raised awareness of the importance of effective risk management as an integral part of the facilities management regime.
- Ensure greater uniformity in the scope and methodology applied to each school, by every authority, to minimise variations in assessment methods and criteria.

- Reduce the inconsistencies arising from different property officers or external contractors exercising varying but equally valid professional views, by setting out the framework within which judgements should be made.

Condition will continue to be established by assessing the performance of individual elements from A – D scoring, where:

A: Good – Performing well and operating efficiently.

B: Satisfactory – Performing adequately but showing minor deterioration.

C: Poor – Showing major defects and/or not operating adequately.

D: Bad – Economic life expired and/or risk of failure.

In addition to bringing clarity and consistency to the condition survey process, the refreshed Condition Core Fact Guidance also stipulates that a full condition survey of the school estate should be carried out at least every five years and, that between the full condition surveys, the condition data should be reviewed at least on an annual basis, using a risk based assessment. Dates are also to be recorded to demonstrate when full surveys and annual intermediate surveys have been undertaken, with these to be provided to Scottish Government when requested as part of the Annual Core Fact Return.

The refreshed Condition Core Fact Guidance also puts an onus upon local authorities to demonstrate that key statutory and non-statutory property compliance matters are addressed to demonstrate compliance as part of a greater emphasis on safer buildings. As part of future Core Fact Returns, local authorities are to provide inspection dates for the undernoted items with physical, electronic, copies to be provided upon request:

- Asbestos
- Electrical
- Fire Safety Risk Assessment
- Gas Appliances
- Health and Safety File
- Water Hygiene and Safety

Suitability

“Suitability is a measure of whether a school is fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum. That is whether the design and layout enhance its function and use, whether there is space and scope to accommodate all the pre-school, day-school and after-school demands and services and whether it is ‘inclusive’ and accessible.”

Suitability Core Facts: Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future

Suitability assessments are undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Government publication The Suitability Core Fact: Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future (2017). The guidance provides a nationally consistent framework for assessing how effectively learning environments support the delivery of education and Curriculum for Excellence.

The assessment covers five key areas for primary schools with an additional key area included in the secondary assessment. These are: General Learning and Teaching, Practical Learning and Teaching (Secondary only), Internal Social,

Internal Facilities, External Social and External Facilities. These key areas are then broken down by relevant curriculum/subjects/areas that impact the title area. Curriculum/subjects/areas are then scored on the following criteria:

- Functionality
- Accessibility
- Environmental conditions
- Safety and Security
- Fixed furniture and fittings

Each individual aspect covered is graded as follows:

- A:** Performing well and operating efficiently
- B:** Performing well but with minor problems
- C:** Showing major problems and/or not performing optimally
- D:** Does not support delivery of service, seriously impedes delivery of activities

To make informed decisions about the Learning Estate there are other assessments which must be considered. At times there will be conflicts; one assessment may call for subdued lighting while another calls for bright lights and building regulations require something entirely different. A compromise will need to be found in this example e.g. it may be that a child is asked to wear dark glasses, noise cancelling headphones or have an individual reading lamp on their desk.

Other assessments which are taken into consideration when planning the Learning Estate are:

Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum Learning Environment (CIRCLE)

Further assessments are carried out using the CIRCLE Framework which supports schools to better understand how environments, relationships, teaching approaches and planning processes affect children and young people day-to-day.

The framework encourages schools to consider:

- how spaces are experienced by learners.
- sensory and communication needs.
- movement around the school day.
- classroom environments.
- emotional wellbeing and regulation.
- participation and inclusion within the wider school community.

Environmental assessments carried out through the CIRCLE process can help schools identify practical improvements that can make spaces more accessible, inclusive and supportive for a wider range of learners. This approach moves beyond focusing on individual pupils and instead supports whole-school inclusive practice and planning. Examples of intervention can include:

Accessibility Audits

Accessibility Audits identify physical, sensory and communication barriers within learning environments and help prioritise actions that will improve accessibility for pupils, staff and visitors.

Environmental/Access Audits for Educational Settings

Environmental/Access Audits for Educational Settings improve the accessibility and suitability of the environment for pupils with visual impairments.

Staff Feedback

Staff Feedback can provide professional insight into how environments support learning, teaching and inclusion, and help identify practical changes that may improve outcomes for learners.

Health and Safety Requirements

Accessibility and other improvements may also be informed by health and safety considerations, statutory duties and risk assessments to ensure that buildings remain safe, accessible and supportive for all users.

5. Prioritisation

The investment that has gone into the Learning Estate in recent years has been mainly in relation to emergency repairs, ongoing maintenance and testing, and reactive works to meet the needs of learners as they occur. Compared to many local authority areas, the estate is in a reasonable condition however, as with suitability, there are factors within schools which do fall into the 'C' category, and recognise that these have to be addressed, along with areas graded a low 'B' in order that they do not deteriorate to a 'C'.

A key principle of this strategy is that each geographical cluster should have access to at least one school capable of supporting a wide range of learner needs. This will help ensure that specialist provision, accessible environments and inclusive learning spaces are available across Shetland in a planned and equitable way. Future investment decisions will take this principle into account when considering improvements to the Learning Estate.

The Accessibility Design Brief supports the delivery of this principle by providing a consistent framework for the planning and development of accessible and inclusive learning environments.

The implementation of this strategy will mean that, the Learning Estate will be looked at holistically by all stakeholders and the decisions taken as to how budget may be spent will be taken in accordance with the aspirations. The data gathered will be used to inform priorities. In doing this the Council cannot lose sight of the legal obligations and the safety and security of learners, staff and communities. The proposed works must be prioritised.

Any investment made should offer the greatest educational benefit to the widest range of children and young people within a school both for now and in the longer term.

1. There will be a register of all works required across the estate, irrespective of the size of the job. This will then be used to formulate the priorities. It will be ongoing and continuous and all, but emergency works will be carried out following approval and agreement by the Learning Estate Liaison Group. This group is made up of representatives from Assets Commissioning and Procurement, Infrastructure, Education and Learning and Learning Estates.

2. The Learning Estate must comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the related regulations, which require every employee to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and other persons, pupils and visitors, who may be affected by their acts or omissions whilst at work.
3. Current Fire Safety Regulations will be complied with.
4. The estate will be compliant with the Equality Act 2010.
5. Compliance with the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 or subsequent revisions will be ensured. This will be particularly, but not wholly, in regard to sanitary provision.
6. All statutory testing of equipment and plant will be up to date and compliant.
7. To ensure the safety and security of all buildings an agreed specification will be applied to the whole Learning Estate with regards to access systems.
8. With the exclusion of temporarily closed schools, all 'C' grades in both Suitability and Condition will be elevated to at least a 'B' and preferably an 'A'.
9. All Condition and Suitability ratings which fall into the lower 'B' category will be elevated before they deteriorate to a 'C'.
10. CIRCLE will help shape the decision-making process.

In line with the Accessibility Design Brief, it must be understood that not all improvements are possible and those that are, cannot all be delivered at the same time. The feasibility of any structural changes will be first considered by the Learning Estate Liaison Group. The following points will then be taken into consideration:

- health and safety requirements.
- evidence gathered through assessments and engagement.
- statutory accessibility duties.
- affordability and available resources.
- opportunities to align improvements with planned maintenance or refurbishment projects.

This approach helps ensure that structural improvements are evidence-based, proportionate and focused on delivering the greatest benefit for Shetland's Learning Estate.

6. Capacity

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Capacity

The Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate's 'Space to Grow' design guidance for early learning and childcare and out of school care settings outlines the format for calculating capacity in ELC settings. The current Care Inspectorate expectations are:

- For children under two years – a minimum of 3.7 square metres, per child
- For children aged two years to under three years – a minimum of 2.8 square metres, per child
- For children aged three years and over – a minimum of 2.3 square metres, per child

The document outlines all the considerations for space, including the number of toilets.



Primary Capacity

Determining Primary School Capacity, Scottish Government Guidance – 24 October 2014, provides the format for calculating primary school capacity. The planning capacity of a primary school is calculated by taking the area (wall-to-wall measurements) of each space deemed to be a teaching area and dividing it by 1.7. This gives the maximum children that could be taught in that space. Cognisance must then be taken of the current class size maxima which as of April 2020 is in accordance with Section 3 of the Education (Lower Primary Class Sizes) (Scotland) Regulations 1999 which set the new maximum class sizes.

Primary class	Number of pupils
1	25
2-3	30
4-7	33
Composite	25

Taking this into account gives the working capacity of the school. Each class size will be capped at either the maximum children that can be accommodated in that room or the class size maxima whichever is the least. Team teaching can also be taken into account, and this allows for 33 pupils per class.

There should be sufficient general-purpose spaces for the number of classrooms:

Number of classrooms	Number of general-purpose spaces
1-7	1
8-14	2
15-21	3
22+	4

General purpose can include but it is not limited to:

- Libraries
- Art rooms
- Gym halls
- Music rooms
- Drama rooms
- ICT suites
- Break out areas
- Teaching spaces not used as a class base

When calculating planning capacity The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 must be adhered to. They may introduce other limiting factors such as sanitary provision, Health and Safety Regulations, dining facilities and the provision of security. The contents of these regulations may further restrict the planning capacity of the school.

It should be noted that planning capacity cannot always be obtained due to the distribution and ages of a particular cohort.

Secondary Capacity

Currently there are no set guidelines as to how secondary capacity should be measured. Anderson High School was built for a capacity of 1,180 giving a total of 11² metres per pupil.

7. Projected School Rolls

School roll projections should be calculated considering:

- The number of births within the catchment area
- The average number of placing requests
- A calculation of 0.3 children for every new dwelling in the catchment area
- The number of pupils leaving

The rurality of Shetland and the local knowledge that the schools have will mean that these calculations need not be strictly adhered to if using local knowledge will result in a more accurate forecast than would ordinarily be produced by strictly applying the formula.

In the larger schools and where there are scheduled larger housing developments, the calculation of 0.3 should be used, this takes into account the fact that; some families will be moving from one house to another in the same catchment area, many people live in dwellings on their own (there are not always children within a household) and parenting arrangements often sees children spending part of their time in separate dwellings.

8. Occupancy

Occupancy levels in schools must be continually monitored, tracked and forecast, as accurately as possible given the information available at the time. This information is monitored by Audit Scotland; it also provides information with regards to affordability and how rural education can be sustained.

Low occupancy levels are difficult to maintain particularly in regards staffing and rarely offer best value in terms of educational benefit, service or financial expenditure. Conversely, very high occupancy levels can reduce flexibility and limit a school's ability to accommodate changes in demand.

There is no nationally prescribed optimum occupancy level for schools. Shetland Islands Council will seek to maintain occupancy levels between 75% and 90%, with 85% used as a planning benchmark to balance efficient use of the estate with operational flexibility.

9. Equity

Promoting equity as an aspiration is hugely important in many ways; crucially to transform education in Scotland. The Scottish Government has a clear vision:

“Achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.”

Scottish Government, Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland, 2016

The Learning Estate Strategy will support and further this work in Shetland by:

- Giving every child the same opportunity to succeed; by establishing inclusive learning environments. Every child will have access to the learning environment and facilities that they need to succeed.
- Ensuring the environment in every ELC setting supports the delivery of high-quality early learning and childcare that achieves the best possible outcomes for all children, in line with national practice guidance.
- Striving to reach a situation where no child attends a school which does not attain an “A” for Suitability. This will give all pupils access to a learning environment that is not only fit for purpose but one which is equal to that of their peers.
- Analysis of the assessments carried out will provide a base of information to ensure that equity of provision is being delivered. Areas where improvements are required will be taken forward by the Education and Children’s Services Learning Estate Liaison Group.

10. Excellence

Together with equity, promoting excellence is crucial and coincides with achieving the best outcomes for young people. The vision promoted by the Scottish Government is:

“Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, set out within Curriculum for Excellence levels, and the right range of skills, qualifications and achievements to allow them to succeed.”

Scottish Government, Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland, 2016

The Learning Estate Strategy will support and further this work in Shetland by:

- Striving to attain A or B ratings for condition, with the majority of the subdivisions attaining the same.
- Prioritising the improvement of those schools which fall below an A for suitability.
- Ensuring that future investment will be focused around achieving the best possible experience for all children and young people, and the communities within which they live.
- Ensuring that an integrated approach is taken with communities and other service providers, such as the NHS, and that they are consulted prior to any major changes taking place.
- Planning to improve the performance of all buildings, to make them well heated and ventilated and therefore comfortable spaces to be in and help achieve the Scottish Government’s Climate Change Legislation target of net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045.

- Providing digitally enabled (where appropriate) flexible learning spaces will empower both learners and teachers; there will be fewer designated spaces for specific tasks/subjects, and outside learning environments will be developed further. Spaces should be flexible enough to meet the needs of the current cohort and those in the future.
- Ensuring that buildings are working efficiently and are being used in ways which deliver the greatest possible educational benefit. Spaces should be flexible and used for multiple purposes throughout the school day and beyond.

11. Inclusion

Inclusion will be at the forefront of future improvements to schools across the Learning Estate. The suitability and condition of spaces contribute to the extent areas can be utilised within schools. The use of areas will be reviewed regularly to ensure the changing needs of pupils are met. Flexible furniture options will enhance pupils' experiences and further promotes inclusion.

'The diversity of learners challenges policy makers, teachers, and others to provide education that is able to flexibly respond to that diversity. We need to respond in such a way that barriers to participation, learning and achievement are removed, inclusion and equality are promoted and a high-quality education for all is developed and sustained.'

Education Scotland

Shetland Island Council's Admissions Policy and Accessibility Strategy sets out how individual children and young people will be placed and supported to access education.

A variety of measures will be implemented to foster and support inclusion, as detailed in the list below:

- The implementation of flexible nurture areas.
- The Accessibility Strategy, Accessibility Design Brief and the CIRCLE Framework will provide a consistent approach to all works. This will enable the Learning Estate Liaison Group to strategically and proactively plan building works across the estate and therefore meet the needs of all pupils.
- There will be sufficient provision of space for the storage of specialist equipment within school buildings. Together with the equipment, flexible spaces should be designed in accordance with delivering specialist services and accommodating those who deliver these.
- Within ELC settings, there is a need to continually evaluate and review the impact the environment has on each child or young person to ensure the needs of each individual are supported.

12. Sustainability

Sustainability is an important element of Curriculum for Excellence and promotes a school and community approach by amalgamating global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning described by Education Scotland as;

“Learning for Sustainability is a cross-curricular approach to creating coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences. It’s all about learners, educators, schools and their wider communities building a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society.”

Sustaining education in rural areas comes with many challenges, it is important that this strategy is read in conjunction with the Scottish Government’s Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Delivering education on remote islands where the schools are either temporarily closed or will become so in the future (no school age children on an island) is problematic in a small community. The model, already in existence in Foula, and to an extent Fair Isle, where the community and the school share the same building should be followed. Sustaining both education and a community space will therefore become symbiotic.

To sustain schools and local communities, Education and Children’s Services will work collaboratively to create areas within schools which can be accessed by communities; this may be when the school is not open to children but may also be during the school day where appropriate risk assessment have been undertaken.

Maintaining a large estate with low occupancy levels can result in resources being spread too thinly across the estate, this can reduce the ability to invest meaningfully in improving the quality, suitability and accessibility of learning environments.

The Council must also make best use of the buildings and facilities that it already has. Where appropriate, opportunities to rationalise the learning estate, reduce duplication and maximise the use of existing accommodation should be considered. This can help ensure that available resources are focused on maintaining and improving high-quality learning environments capable of meeting the needs of current and future learners while supporting the long-term sustainability of education provision across Shetland.

Sustainability is not just about keeping buildings open it is about ensuring that learning environments remain educationally effective, financially viable and capable of meeting future needs of generations to come.

13. Outdoor learning

The outdoor environment can provide a positive learning experience in a variety of different settings.

Outdoor learning is one of the guiding principles in Scotland’s Learning Estate Strategy: Connecting People, Places and Learning, where it states:

Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised.

The grounds of schools can be another learning environment, for example external open-air classrooms, polycrubs, environmental/wild gardens etc.



**New surface for
Whiteness Primary
School play area**

14. Stakeholder Engagement

It will be important to engage and consult with all stakeholders (especially pupils, staff, parents and community groups) when making decisions about the Learning Estate. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) affirms the right of children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them. Focus groups and co-design workshops involving participants in the relevant communities will form part of this process, as well as surveys and calls for responses promoted by traditional and social media. Guidance from the Youth and Employability Service, and national partners such as Young Scot will be sought. Engagement activities, communications and consultation materials will be designed to be accessible, inclusive and equitable. Information will be made available in a range of formats appropriate to individual needs, including Easy Read, visual supports, translation and interpreting services where required. This will support children, young people, families and wider stakeholders to participate in ways that meet their individual needs and ensure their views are meaningfully considered in Learning Estate planning and decision-making.

15. Ongoing Review

Regular updates to the documents will allow for the most recently available data to be used for forward planning, and to ensure that the estate can operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

This continuous planning approach will allow officers to engage with other services and stakeholders, alongside local communities, to gather feedback and in turn, develop and improve the Learning Estate in a way which is sustainable and meet current and future demands.

The core facts and capacity information will be reported annually to the Education and Families Committee, and the strategy will be reviewed after a period of five years.