

SEN Repurposing Guidance Note

IPPN has reviewed the Draft SEN Repurposing Guidance and has the following observations.

1. A Project Manager needs to be appointed for projects of any size. School boards of management and school leaders do not have the expertise or the capacity to carry out this role. This would alleviate what is a significant concern and challenge for schools.
2. The Circular needs to be amended throughout to clarify that the responsibility for repurposing projects rests with **school boards of management**, e.g. to engage design consultants, so it's clear to school leaders and Boards that the DE isn't expecting principals to lead this work. Wherever the circular states 'schools', this should read 'school boards of management'.
3. The **tendering** for each element is also a key challenge. It can be a very onerous and complex process. Again, the expertise is not readily available to school boards. This work should be done by a design consultant or project manager and funding for same needs to be provided to schools.
4. With all of this guidance and the very long list of requirements, the **indicative funding** of €30,000, €50,000 and even €100,000 seem inadequate. Real life costs need to guide the funding provided.
5. The **flexibility** for schools to use residual funding to support an inclusive school environment once core requirements are met is a very welcome approach, although it is unlikely there would be a surplus, as noted.
6. The DE **Technical Guidance Documents** are very detailed and provide good advice. They should be referenced in the circular or in an appendix.
7. *'Schools will engage design consultants to assist with developing viable proposals where it envisaged that works will be required.'* - **What guidance and support is there for schools in engaging a design consultant?** Is this the same as the process highlighted later in the circular re. Guidance on Procuring Consultants for Small Works is available here: Appointment of Consultants? If so, mention it in the earlier section also.

8. 'Review building security and secure main entrance lobby connected to the school admin office in line with Department standards.' **Where are these standards documented?** Include reference and link.
9. Where the circular refers to *Guidance on Sensory Space*, **link to the relevant NCSE document** on this as well as the NCSE *Setting up a Special Class* document.
10. It is assumed that the procedures set out by the Schools Procurement Unit need to be adhered to. If so, this needs to be **clarified** and links to the relevant circulars/documentation provided.

Essentially, **an information pack with all relevant links would be very helpful for Boards, project managers and design consultants** to ensure each project - whatever its scope, size and cost – is managed according to all relevant guidelines.

With regard to **Key Issues to be considered:**

1. **Language** throughout, e.g. the Board of Management should appoint a Design Team....
2. Identify **Health and Safety Risk** - Conducting a Risk Assessment for Health and Safety can be very costly business. One Dublin school cited a cost of €900 every second year. This is a considerable expense out of a relatively small budget.
3. The reference to the **location of special classes** near the main entrance of the school seems strange - a separate entrance away from the overwhelm of entering school with all the other children would likely be more appropriate. In many schools, some children with additional needs line up with their peers on yard and then proceed to their own class, but others are not able for this. If there are DE standards, there should be a link to the document.
4. In relation to **Play Equipment**, school boards should be advised to connect with professional companies who deal specifically with this area. It is very important that the school BoM would realise that this equipment should be serviced at least annually for Health and Safety reasons as the children with additional needs can be very hard on the equipment. Such equipment should be bought from a reputable source with the capacity and expertise to maintain and repair the equipment. Some schools have a service contract for annual service.

5. Internal Environment - **Quiet Space/Sensory Area**. Having small 'quiet' spaces within the classroom is not advisable as it does not work. The child needs a quiet space to regulate away from the noise and bustle of the classroom.
6. Research done by one schools with its design team indicated that there should be a **Sensory Gym** where children let off steam to regulate and is as important as the Quiet Space to regulate also. If this is advised in the document, the special internal tyre swing can only be set up in the sensory gym if a special beam is put in the ceiling as the renovations are taking place; it cannot be done afterwards. The gym is a small space in provision but worth its weight in gold, and should be mentioned in the guidance.
7. **Sensory Environment**: In relation to the alarm control, the Functional Living Skills Programme indicates that pupils with additional need should at ALL times be developing skills to use in the real world. The children need to know what the alarm sounds like. It is up to the staff to know who finds it hard to cope and remove the child quickly. This should be worked on in the Fire Drills etc. Many schools bring in the Emergency Services to show the children the inside of the Fire Engine/Ambulance where the sound is played for them, in order to learn about it.
8. **Lighting and colour schemes** in the building are important. Expertise is available from design consultants and architects – guidance indicates that pastel colours with plenty of natural light is preferable to light bulbs and fluorescent lighting.
9. The **work stations** referred to should be on lockable wheels to facilitate the flexible work space referred to in the document. The same should be said for the lockable mobile storage units. They worked well in safeguarding against damage.
10. **Turnable locks high up on the door** – readily opened by adults - should be advised, to safeguard the flight risk of children.
11. It is good to see the **sample plans** - the picture selection could be better. A link to a gallery of pictures to show different layouts would assist in planning. IPPN can help to source such images.
12. **Outside space** – it is good to include this. While it is important to think of fencing, a green space provides calm and the children should be able to run without risk of 'flight'. Looking at the car park and footpaths is a great idea, though additional funding would be required.