Safety and security

In a nutshell

Design can assist or hinder community access to SaCH facilities and services. If safety and security concerns dominate SaCH design, you may create an unpleasant or hostile environment that keeps the community away.

Explore built, environmental and human-centred security solutions – or combinations of these – early in design. Feeling safe involves feeling welcome and **security can be achieved in an inviting environment**.

What risk will you tolerate?

School leaders, staff members, students' families, and community members will have varying perceptions and tolerances of risk. Changes in SaCH leadership or participants may alter risk weightings and mitigation strategies.

Different cultures and generations accept different types and levels of risk. For example, some Danish schools allow passing hikers to camp on school sites overnight and even light a campfire, which may seem unacceptable to Australian schools. It's useful to reflect on your attitude to risk and where it stems from.

Balance risks and benefits

Inviting adults from the wider community onto school sites when children are present raises concerns that should be addressed in balance with other risks and community needs. Safety and access challenges are surmountable, if there is willingness – and funding – to collaborate on solutions.

Appropriate safety and security measures (see overleaf) should be determined **early in the design process** so they can be built in, rather than retrofitted, enabling convenient, efficient, and elegant solutions. Refer also to the 'Facility design' and 'Facility management' advice sheets in this series.

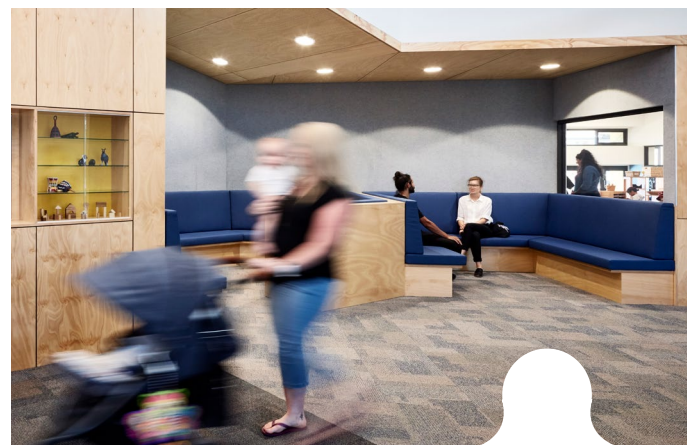Photo: Bridgewood Primary School by ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects

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Building Connections
Schools as Community Hubs

Think beyond fences

As publicly-funded infrastructure that can promote community education, health, and connection, schools should carefully consider if they need to be surrounded by high fences and strictly 'gated'.

There are other ways to ensure safety and security while maintaining accessibility and aesthetic appeal. For example, to prevent children running into traffic, you could slow or discourage motorised vehicles around your SaCH, and promote active transport like walking, scooting and bike riding. If fencing is essential, setting it back from the site boundary can reduce the visual impact.

Get to know your community

Trained staff who make the effort to get to know community members can provide an important layer of security. The 'single front door' design of Our Place SaCH makes it easy to monitor who's on-site, provides a welcoming space for the community and connects access to early learning, school, health services and community facilities.

Design for environmental security

You can create a welcoming and safe SaCH using principles of 'crime prevention through environmental design', including:

- **surveillance** – provide good lighting and clear lines of sight throughout your SaCH, including windows onto areas immediately outside entries

- **community ownership** – engage the community in co-design to foster a sense of stewardship and community protection of SaCH facilities and users

- **access control** – well-designed entries and transition areas can define and enforce private (staff/student-only), privileged (invitation-only) and public zones (including areas accessible outside of school hours).

Explore these security options alongside technology such as alarms, security cameras and coded or card-reader locks. Well-defined access protocols for different user groups during and outside school hours should guide your security measures.

Photos: (above) bike library at Margaret Hendry School, ACT; (right) Officer Secondary College, VIC, by ClarkeHopkinsClarke Architects.

Case study: Adelaide Botanic High School

Adelaide Botanic High School used environmental design and digital security technology to create a completely keyless campus with an open, fenceless facade.

Adjacent to the University of Adelaide, the Botanic Park and Frome Park, the bottom level of the six-storey school is about 1.5m off the ground, with steps and ramps creating a fence-free boundary. The design also prioritised visibility and clear lines of sight with extensive use of glass.

Campus security is controlled from one central management platform. The school can be locked down within seconds, creating secure zones and alerting staff, students, and visitors via SMS and broadcast notifications. Staff can activate a lockdown from their phones.

The project won an Australian Security Industry Award for Excellence in 2019.

Sources: Cox Architecture, Gallagher Security and ABC News

Case study: Sandy Hook Elementary School

The redesign of Sandy Hook Elementary School exemplifies best practice, being security conscious while remaining welcoming, calm and connected to nature.

The school was the site of a shooting in 2012 that killed 20 students and six adults, traumatising the community. The original building was demolished.

The new school, co-designed with the community, applies environmental design concepts like openness and clear sightlines for security, as well as subtle and concealed safety features.

'Buildings and public spaces must be designed for many goals, and the most important are to encourage compassion, prosperity, collaboration and joy,' said Jay Brotman, managing partner of architects Svigals + Partners.

'Nature, art and accessibility are just as important as security features.'

Source: Dezeen

Want to learn more?

- *Schools as Community Hubs Development Framework: Workshop 1, Emerging Themes & Insights from Australia* by Philippa Chandler and Benjamin Cleveland

- *Schools as Community Hubs Development Framework: Workshop 2, Insights from Canada and the USA* by Philippa Chandler and Benjamin Cleveland

- *Safe yet Welcoming: Alternative Design Strategies for Secure Schools* by Jamileh Jahangiri in *Schools as Community Hubs: Building 'more than a school' for community benefit* (2023)