

Essential Safety Measures (ESM) and seclusion

Essential Safety Measures (ESM) are fire and life safety items installed or constructed in a building, such as exit lights and fire doors. Principals are responsible for ESM Activities at their school site/s.

Maintaining essential safety measures and ensuring they operate satisfactorily intersects with some practices listed in the Restraint and seclusion policy as prohibited ones.

Seclusion

Seclusion refers to leaving a student alone in a room or area from which they are prevented from leaving by a barrier or another person. This includes situations where a door is locked as well as where the door is blocked by other objects or held closed by another person.

It is for this reason:

- designated seclusion rooms and areas that are primarily used for the purpose of seclusion are prohibited
- preventing free egress from an area normally used by students with a locking mechanism is prohibited
- doors and door handles installed in such a manner as to prevent a student from leaving the room unassisted are prohibited.

Safe access to and movement within a school

Schools must ensure students have safe access to, and movement within, school buildings and parts of the buildings normally used by students.

There are three exceptions to this rule.

1. Students should not be given access to areas which might pose a health and safety risk to them. For example: a swimming pool area without appropriate supervision.
2. Students should not be given access to areas where access would be inappropriate because of the particular purpose for which the area is used. For example: an IT server room
3. Students should not be able to move around a school building if a school enacts a 'lock down procedure'. For example: an intruder is violent and aggressive towards others on a school site or a snake is sighted around buildings and playgrounds.

New, special, and special development schools may need to consider additional factors to ensure students have safe access to, and movement within, their school including:

- the necessity of smoke/fire detection systems to deactivate magnetic locks
- automatic opening front door and security issues
- fencing types and security/containment issues.

Safe egress within a school

Restricting a student's egress from within, or from, a school is not permitted in Victorian government schools; exceptions are only granted in special circumstances. Free egress is a requirement under the National Construction Code.

Emergency exits

An emergency exit is a special exit used to provide a safe means of escape from a structure or area in the event of an emergency, such as a fire.

Emergency exits must be accessible. They must be a single action opening door and operable from the inside only to maintain security.

Emergency exits, and the paths occupants travel to reach the emergency exit, must have dimensions appropriate for the number, mobility, and other characteristics of buildings occupants and the function or use of the building.

Regular external exits

External exits must be simple to operate, kept fully functioning and clear of obstruction.

Sliding exit doors can be manually operated or power operated but must be able to be easily opened manually and, if power operated, must be able to be manually opened independent of the power source.

Swinging exit doors in an emergency exit, forming part of an emergency exit or in the path of travel to an emergency exit must be able to be opened:

- without a key
- using a single-handed downward or pushing action on a single device (handle)
- with a device (handle) that is between 900mm and 1.2m above the floor
- with a device (handle) that is on the side of the door facing the person seeking egress.

Exits and exit path signage must be easy to locate, kept fully functioning and clear of obstruction.

All new schools, major upgrades – a building refurbishment which may include changing the internal use of a building, reconfiguring walls within a building, a mostly new internal fit out and replacing floors –, special schools, and special development schools must have keyed security locking on all external doors for activation in the event of a school lockdown.

In new schools, all external doors must have locks on them, including for learning neighbourhoods and other buildings that are “normally used by students”, however, the requirement of free egress still applies so doors must always be able to be opened from inside the building.

Internal doors and hardware

Schools must ensure that internal doors don't impede or stop occupants from safely leaving an area or room within a school.

Internal doors in areas normally used by students:

- must be able to be opened with a single hand downward action on a single device (handle)
- should have a device (handle) which is located between 900mm and 1.2m above the floor

- must be operable by people of all abilities. For example, a lever handle instead of a round knob.

If the door has no device (handle), braille, tactile and/or visual communication methods must identify where to find the operation device.

In new special, and special developmental schools, internal doors with a hinge frame junction must include protection against finger injuries.

Security locking

In new schools, major upgrades, special, and special development schools, security locking is required for internal doors where the privacy or security of the room/ space function or the room/ space contents requires protection and access control.

These internal spaces include:

- all private offices, shared staff workrooms, general offices, library workrooms, and interview and conference rooms
- doors that form boundaries to zones that can be isolated for use outside school hours
- secure stores, storage rooms, IT server/ switch/ core communications rooms, ICT technicians' offices, sports stores, cleaners' stores, music stores, electrical and mechanical switch rooms, service cupboards, plant rooms, and similar
- room/ spaces where unsupervised access is not permitted (such as rooms containing computers, expensive equipment, music rooms, materials technology rooms, instrument rehearsal rooms, science laboratories and science prep rooms, the gymnasium hall, a theatre, swimming pool)
- rooms/spaces where in-progress or completed student creative work might need to be secured, excluding classrooms
- the canteen, food storerooms, pantries, and so forth
- rooms/spaces that may contain valuables or controlled substances (for example, the first aid room and chemical storerooms)
- storage cupboards and secure drawers in rooms (keyed identically within a room only).

Security locking systems must enable schools to enact their Emergency Management Plan's lockdown protocols, when required, while retaining single action egress.

Electronic access control system

In new schools, major upgrades, special schools, and special development schools electronic access control systems can be used to provide entry and exit for all authorised personnel.

These systems must include a central lockdown button to enact the school's Emergency Management Plan's lockdown protocols, while maintaining single action egress.

For more information

[Essential Safety Measures Policy](#)

[Restraint and Seclusion Policy](#)

If you have any questions regarding ESM compliance please contact the Victorian School Building Authority on 1800 896 950 or essential.safety.measures@edumail.vic.gov.au. Schools can also discuss ESM compliance matters with their Regional OHS Officers or Area Senior Provision and Planning Officers (Area SPPOs).

If you have any questions regarding seclusion, please contact:
restraint.seclusion@education.vic.gov.au