



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

SDG 02-TN05

SEN Repurposing

Design Guidance Technical Note 05

1. Background

- 1.1 This document is to be used as a guide to assist school authorities and design teams in identifying feasible options to increase Special Education Needs (SEN) capacity in our schools for the 2026/27 school year through the creative and flexible use of existing teaching space to support the needs of all learners.
- 1.2 The Department of Education and Youth (DOEY) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) have reviewed the forward planning for special education needs (SEN) and highlighted an urgent need for additional SEN special classes. In order to respond to this need at pace, the Department is progressing urgent building projects that involve the repurposing of existing space in schools for SEN purposes.

These projects will ensure that existing school capacity is optimised and that teaching spaces are adaptable and flexible to facilitate a student-centred approach to learning. Potential repurposing options will be school and site specific, presenting different opportunities and challenges. The Department and the NCSE are cognisant at all times that any repurposed accommodation has due regard for the needs of children with special educational needs.

To support the delivery of these classes in good time for the 2026/27 school year a new streamlined approach to funding is available to repurpose accommodation for SEN. This document is to assist school authorities and consultants in identifying suitable classrooms and relevant issues for consideration. Under this new approach the priority is for the delivery of SEN classrooms. Any other works will be considered as appropriate as part of the wider capital programme and prioritised accordingly. Where there is additional area available to provide support spaces, please refer to *SDG 02-04 Primary and Post Primary Specialist Accommodation for Pupils with Special Educational Needs* for guidance.

2. Repurposing Existing Accommodation

- 2.1 The repurposing of existing accommodation involves the adaptable use of existing school spaces. In many schools, existing space has already been successfully adapted for SEN purposes with straightforward internal works. This guidance note should be read in conjunction with *SDG 02-04 Primary and Post Primary Specialist Accommodation for Pupils with Special Educational Needs*. In line with *SDG 02-04*, the location of additional SEN accommodation should promote inclusivity and integration within the existing school. Guidance on sensory spaces within schools is also available from the NCSE.

Re-use of existing accommodation is often a sustainable and cost effective option that can be delivered quickly in response to local needs. In most cases this will provide a long-term SEN classroom.

Proposals will evolve through close consultation with school stakeholders considering site specific conditions. School authorities will engage design consultants to assist with developing viable proposals where it envisaged that works will be required. The appointed consultant will assess any impact on existing statutory consents, for instance if works involve a material alteration or impact on the fire safety strategy. In addition, the consultant will highlight any potential impact the proposed works will have on overall school operations.

3. Guidance on Key Issues to be Considered

The following is some general guidance in selecting a suitable location within a school for SEN class provision. The school authority and their appointed consultants, if required, should consider each of the following elements.

3.1 External Environment (*Refer to SDG 02-04 for further guidance*)

- *In all school building projects the accommodation suite for pupils with SEN must be appropriately located within the school in order to promote and develop inclusivity. It should not be located in a remote or isolated part of the building or site where contact and social development opportunities with the main school population would be impossible to promote (*SDG 02-04).
- Review site conditions, security and boundaries, identify any physical/geographical features within the school site or in proximity that present a health & safety risk.
- The SEN class location should be easily accessible from the main school entrance. The main entrance approach should be universally accessible with way finding/signage clearly visible. Review building security and secure main entrance lobby connected to the school admin office in line with Department standards.
- An alternative access route / secure external entrance in close proximity to the SEN class is required for pupils who struggle with transitions and busy noisy routes / external areas.
- The location should be within close accessible distance to the designated vehicular set-down area. Review existing parking and traffic management system and consider any required adaptations.
- Review external circulation routes and paths, routes to play areas and social areas. Ensure that a universally accessible route exists to main school play areas.

- Review location in relation to external site planning and potential for noise/disturbance from outside.
- In selecting a suitable location for SEN classrooms, priority should be given to locations that offer opportunity for creating a designated external space accessible from the classroom. SEN external areas should not be overlooked by other classrooms or social spaces. Ideally the external space should form part of the SEN classroom and be in a quiet part of the school and not adjacent to the main school play area. If it is unavoidably located adjacent to the main external school play or social areas, consideration should be given to suitable boundary/fencing. The use of solid materials to provide privacy may be required. If play equipment is installed, consideration should be given to its suitability to meet the needs of students, both sensory and to ensure it is accessible for use by all.

3.2 Internal Environment

- As above, locations for new SEN classrooms are suited to low traffic/quieter areas of the school with more than one circulation route. Review circulation areas, universal accessibility, way-finding (ex. corridors or stairways are sufficiently wide and accessible).
- Up to a maximum Floor Area limit of 80m² to form a SEN Class – this is to provide a Classroom, Storage Wall, WC and Quiet Space.
- The Quiet Space should be directly accessible from the classroom and if not possible then located in an adjacent space. This space is an essential resource for pupils who require sensory breaks during the school day.
- General classrooms are suitable to be re-assigned as a SEN classroom. Where a smaller classroom is available an additional room of 10-15m² is recommended for a Quiet Space/ Sensory Room. Please refer to tables below for specific guidance.
- Where a suitable room of 15-20m² (SET rooms/Multi-Purpose/Office) is available, this can be repurposed as a Multi Activity room (refer to SDG 02-04 for further information).
- Sanitary facilities – If there is a *User Assisted Shower Room or Changing Places WC* its location should be considered when selecting an appropriate area for repurposing. Provision of a new UAWC would be based on a site-specific requirement.
- In Primary school SEN classrooms, en-suite WCs are required – an enlarged universal access WC of 2.5 x 2m is required as a minimum.
- In Post Primary settings, where independence and living skills are developed, it is not necessary to provide en-suite classroom WC facilities in the SEN class (SDG 02-04). It is essential that suitable WC facilities are available in close

proximity- specifically a universal access WC/ enlarged independent WC cubicle / Assisted User WC – max travel distance of 20m from proposed SEN Classroom recommended.

- SEN classes are usually located on ground floor with direct access to a designated external play area. Review proposed location and viability of providing a designated external space in close proximity. Where circumstances do not allow for a ground floor classroom to be repurposed classes can be put at first floor with consideration given to the internal circulation route to the school entrance and SEN play area.

3.3 Sensory Environment – Acoustic, Visual, Smell, Touch and general sensory inputs

- Review acoustic conditions in existing space. Consider suitable interventions for the performance improvement where required – (ex. acoustic ceiling panels, flooring and wall panels). Is there potential for sound disturbance or background noise from adjacent areas (internal or external) or mechanical/electrical services?
- Check alarm and intercom systems. Is there volume control/ warning system before a loud noise or bell is going to sound to support pupils who find loud noises or alarms very difficult to tolerate?
- Is natural day lighting suitable in the classroom? Avoidance of glare, check daylight factor, avoid reflective surfaces and install blinds to help control daylighting levels?
- Check artificial lighting- upgrade to controllable/dimmable LED fittings may be required.
- Some pupils can struggle with visual distraction and require individual workstations – room layout and flexibility to be planned – this should include space for workstations and group work area, teaching wall and adequate closed/lockable storage area. Check furniture layout to ensure classroom organisation can adapt to different needs accommodating individual workstations and group teaching.
- Secure storage area and wet area with sink to be provided– a typical standard storage wall as per Department standard design is provided for information.
- Consider existing radiators within classrooms and review conditions, radiator covers, replacement low surface temperature radiators or radiant panels should be considered.
- Review finishes and materials, avoidance of patterns and selection of neutral colours on walls, floors and ceilings are recommended to provide a neutral background for teacher selected artworks and displays.
- Review ventilation strategy. Ensure adequate background and purge ventilation in line with TGDs and building regulations.

- Consider proximity of specialist teaching rooms and potential odours from areas such as Dining Areas/ Home economics.
- Review access, door and ironmongery specification. Any adaptations must not impact on the fire safety strategy for the school in the event of an emergency. The design of circulation must equally maintain the safety and security requirements of the SEN accommodation at all times.
- Glazing – check glazing specification in any existing vision panels and doors. In compliance with *SDG 02-04*.

Please refer to *Appendix 1* for Tables 1 & 2 below for guidance on recommended areas and items for consideration. Sample repurposed classrooms are included in *Appendix 2*.

4. Funding

Funding is available, as detailed below, based on the level of intervention required to repurpose accommodation for SEN purposes. The level of works required will vary depending on the age of the school and the current condition/use of the room.

4.1 Start Up Grant of €30,000

This grant will be paid to each school that is approved by the NCSE to open a special class for the 2026/27 school year. This grant payment relates to each new special class and does not require an application from the relevant schools – it will be paid by the Department's Planning and Building Unit based on notification to it from the NCSE on lists of schools that are opening new special classes for the 2026/27 school year. This grant will provide good flexibility to schools to facilitate the opening of a new special class and encompasses the existing start-up grant, sensory room fit out grant/creation of a quiet space, Furniture & Equipment grant and ICT grant all of which have been updated to an overall total of €30,000. Further details on the start-up grant of €30,000 can be accessed here - [Guidance Note on Enhanced Grant](#) For schools opening SEN classes in newer accommodation (some with an existing SEN base) or schools with relevant projects at advanced design (Stage 2b) or later, it is envisaged that only this grant of €30,000 will be required to cover the provision of the core requirements.

Schools will have flexibility as to how they deploy this funding subject to the understanding and acceptance that this would be the full and final capital grant covering core requirements of creation of suitable quiet space/sensory room, suitable furniture, equipment and ICT.

Any residual funding within the €30,000 may be used to carry out small-scale works elsewhere in the school that support an inclusive school environment once the core requirements are met.

4.2 Small Scale Repurposing Works - up to max €80,000

Some schools may require small-scale re-purposing works to facilitate the establishment of a new special class in existing accommodation. For these schools, a new simplified application process is also being put in place to support delivery of same in a timely manner.

The level of funding involved will depend on the nature of the small-scale works to be undertaken, will be up to a maximum of €80,000 and will be in addition to the €30,000 start-up grant. This grant funding will provide good flexibility to schools to facilitate the opening of a new special class. In applying for this funding, schools will need to briefly explain a) how they are deploying their start-up grant and b) the basis for the additional funding requirement.

Items such as SEN friendly outdoor area, suitable toileting facilities (if not already available), fitted furniture, security, acoustics, internal finishes and lighting can be items for consideration as part of small scale repurposing works. The grant funding will be provided to schools for devolved procurement and delivery and includes flexibility to prioritise the nature of the necessary small-scale works to facilitate the opening of the new special class for September 2026. Further details on the application process can be accessed here – [SEN Repurposing Information](#)

Not all schools will require all of the measures referenced above, and it is a matter for the school to prioritise based on their specific situation. A suitable consultant should be appointed to avail of this funding. The appointment of a consultant must adhere to public procurement guidelines as noted in [Circular 5/23](#) where a school authority seeks a minimum of five written tenders from interested and competent consultants. It is a matter for the school authority to ensure this guidance is fully complied with for the appointment of the consultant.

The total available to the school for the establishment of the special class will be the total of the start up grant and the funding approved for small scale works, including consultant fees. It is up to the school authority to prioritise how the funding will be deployed and to retain a contingency from within the total in the event that an element of the works run over budget. The school should discuss with the consultant the total budget available, make choices on what measures they wish to prioritise within that budget, and be clear that any works must be delivered within that total budget. If an element of the works run over budget, savings will need to be made on other elements. The small works funding is envisaged to encompass low risk minor works that typically are not expected to run over budget and both the school and consultant should be cognizant of this when reviewing options (for example, using acoustic panels rather than more invasive alternatives for acoustic treatment). If at the outset it is considered that your school is one of the anticipated minority of schools that may involve more complex and higher risk works, this should be the subject of a separate application for more significant repurposing works and this will be reviewed from a technical perspective by the Department as outlined in the section below.

4.3 More Significant Repurposing Works

A minority of schools may require more significant works relating to the opening of a new special class in existing accommodation. These will generally relate to school buildings which are in poorer condition with limited facilities. If a school authority is approved for more significant repurposing works, this will constitute the full repurposing works project, and the school authority will not separately be granted flexible funding as outlined in the previous section.

On receipt of such applications, a more detailed technical assessment will be undertaken to validate the scope of necessary works. This will also determine the initial phase of works needed to facilitate the opening of the special class for the 2026/27 school year. A suitable consultant should be appointed to avail of this funding. The appointment of a consultant must strictly adhere to public procurement guidelines. Guidance on Procuring Consultants for Small Works is available here: [Guidance on Procuring Consultants for Small Works](#). It is a matter for the school authority to ensure this guidance is fully complied with for the appointment of the consultant.

Any other works will be considered as appropriate as part of the wider capital programme and prioritised accordingly. It is envisaged that such projects will generally be delivered as devolved projects in accordance with current governance arrangements. Project Management supports will be targeted at special schools and mainstream schools that involve complex projects. Further details on the application process can be accessed here – [Additional Accommodation Scheme](#)

Appendix 1 - Repurposed Accommodation

Table 1 - Primary or Special School

Area Guidance for SEN Classrooms
Guidance - 80m² Space per Additional SEN Classroom

Item No.	Room to be Repurposed	Area (m ²)
1	Classroom – Standard Primary Classroom - 80m² with en-suite WCs (ref. SDG 02-04) - Modern General Classroom suitable for Re-use as SEN Classroom. - Sanitary Provision – see internal environment considerations below. - Quiet Space to be created within classroom (8-12m²) - Adequate Storage – example of storage included in this document - Internal finishes upgraded where necessary to suit Sensory Needs. - Direct external access to play area where feasible. - Refer to suggest layouts below and <i>SDG 02-04</i> for relevant drawings and technical guidance.	80.00
	External Play	
2	SEN friendly outdoor space	

SEN Classroom (Non Standard Primary Classroom or Ancillary Teaching Space)

Item No.	Room to be Repurposed	Area (m ²)
1	Classroom – Recommended Classroom size of 49m² to be proposed for teaching (excluding WC & Quiet Space) - Sanitary Provision – see internal environment considerations below. - Classrooms over 70m²- Quiet Space can be formed within classroom (8-12m²) or alternatively accessible from an adjacent space. - Classrooms under 50m²– Additional room required/preferably adjacent to be assigned for Quiet Space, Storage and universally accessible WC. - Internal finishes upgraded where necessary to suit Sensory Needs. - Direct external access to play area where feasible. Refer to suggest layouts below and <i>SDG 02-04</i> for relevant drawings and technical guidance.	49-80
	External Play	
2	SEN friendly outdoor space	

Table 2 - Post Primary School

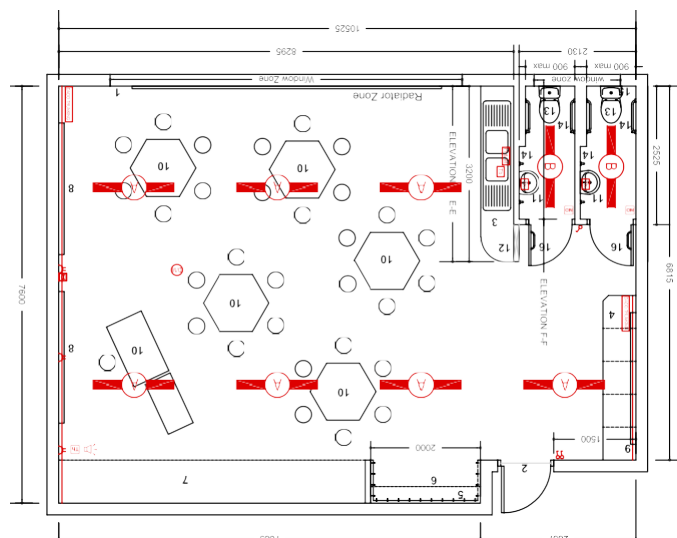
Area Guidance for SEN Classrooms

Guidance - 80m² Space per Additional SEN Class

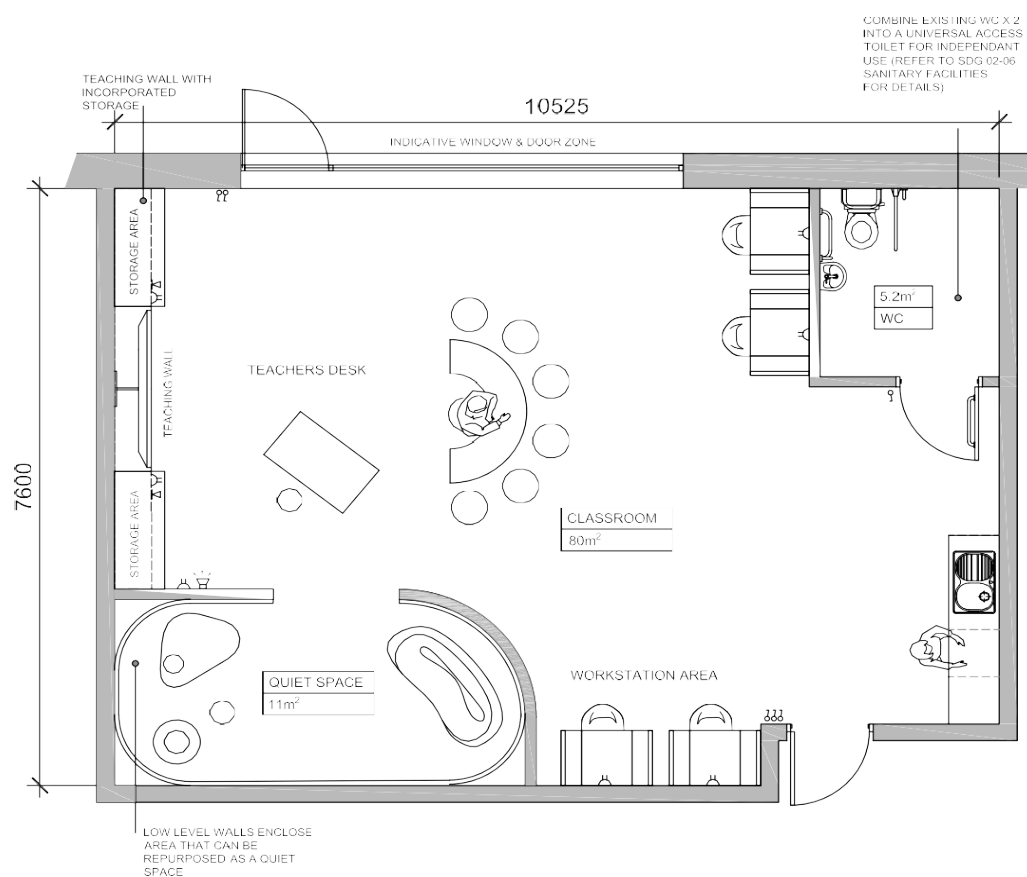
SEN Classroom with associated WC and Quiet/Sensory Space

Item No.	Room to be Repurposed	Area (m ²)
1	Classroom – size varies – current standard PP Small (38.5) and General Classrooms (49-58.6) • Recommended Classroom size of 49-58.6m² to be proposed for SEN teaching (excluding WC and Quiet Space) • Classrooms over 70m²- Quiet Space can be formed within classroom (8-12m²) or alternatively accessible from an adjacent space. • Classrooms under 58.6m² – Additional room/preferably adjacent to be assigned for Quiet Space, Storage and universally accessible WC. • Internal finishes upgraded where necessary to suit Sensory Needs. • Sanitary Provision – see internal environment considerations below • Direct external access to play area where feasible • Refer to suggest layouts below and <i>SDG 02-04</i> for relevant drawings and technical guidance.	49-80
	External Play	
2	SEN friendly outdoor space	

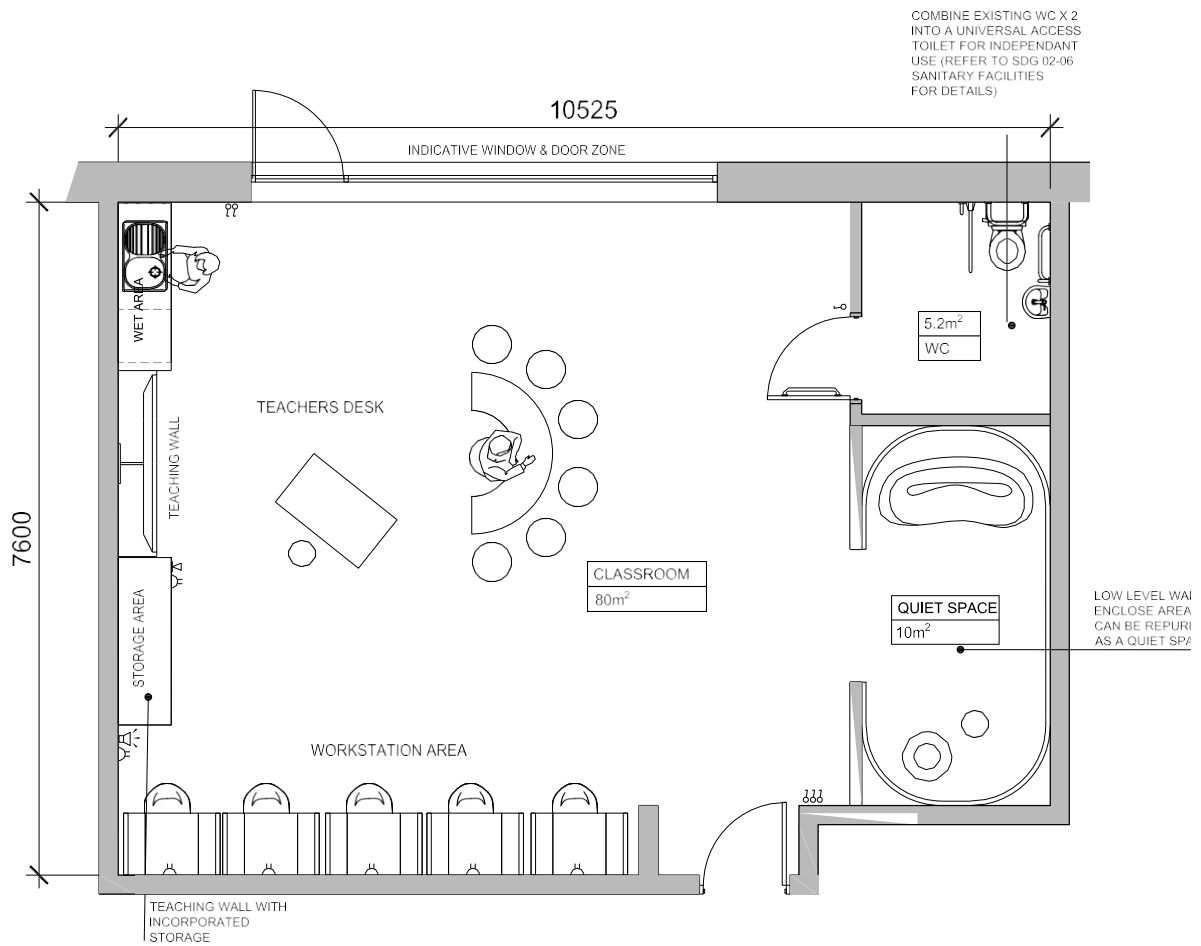
Primary Classroom



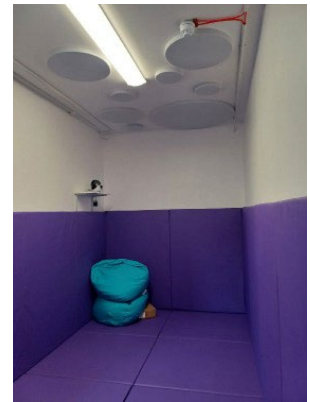
- Review location, proximity to existing SEN Base (if applicable), School entrance, sanitary facilities
- Review specification for access, finishes and mechanical and electrical installations taking account of guidance.
- Access to external play – possibility for direct access to a designated area.
- Review furniture layout and consider inclusion of Lockable Storage Wall/Sink as per DoE Spec.
- Review Sensory Environment and any required modifications.
- Include additional noise insulation for Quiet Space, Black out blinds, Wall/Floor Padding and additional sockets as required.



Standard Primary Classroom Repurposed

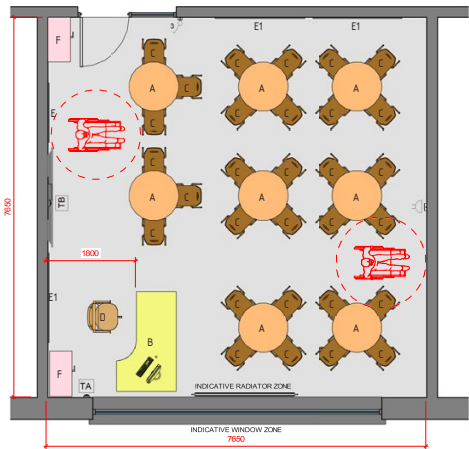


Standard Primary Classroom Repurposed



Examples of Quiet Spaces Created in Classrooms

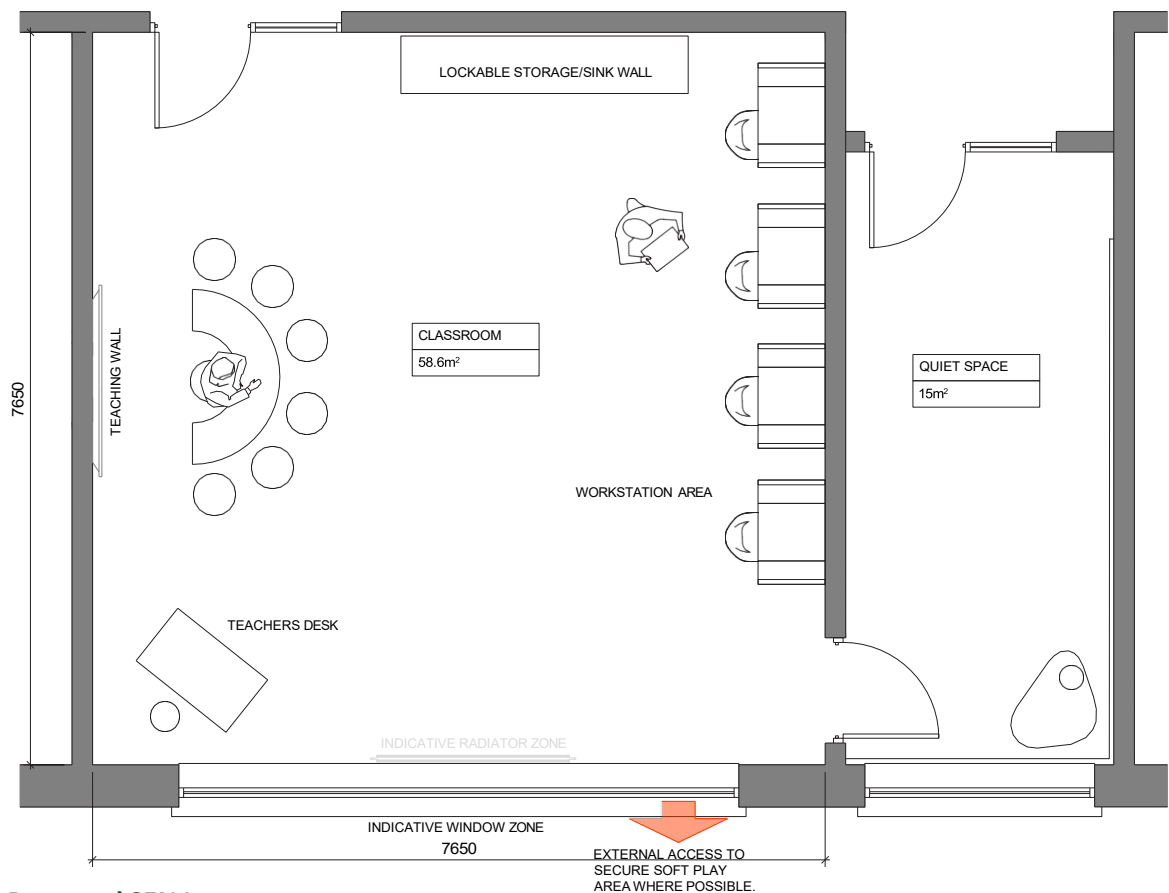
Post Primary Classroom & Pastoral Office/SET



Existing PP Classroom Plan
(49-58.6m²)

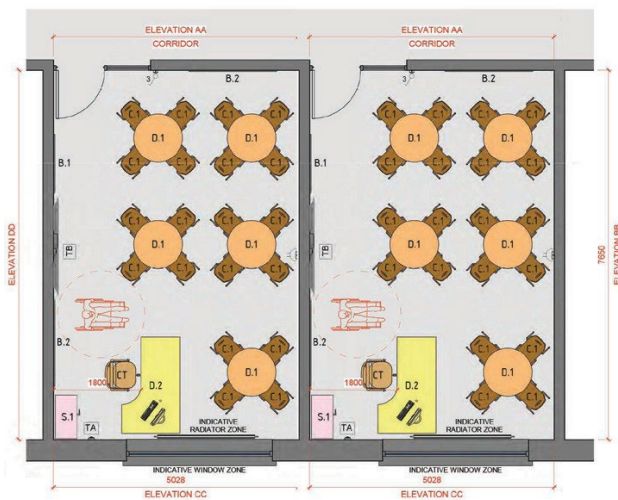
Alterations to existing can include/not limited to;

- Review location, proximity of existing SEN Base (if applicable), School entrance, sanitary facilities
- Review specification for access, finishes and mechanical and electrical installations taking account of guidance.
- Access to external play – possibility for direct access to a designated area.
- Review furniture layout and consider inclusion of Lockable Storage Wall/Sink as per DoE Spec.
- Review Sensory Environment and any required modifications.
- Include additional noise insulation for Quiet Space, Black out blinds, Wall/Floor Padding and additional sockets as required.



Proposed SEN Layout

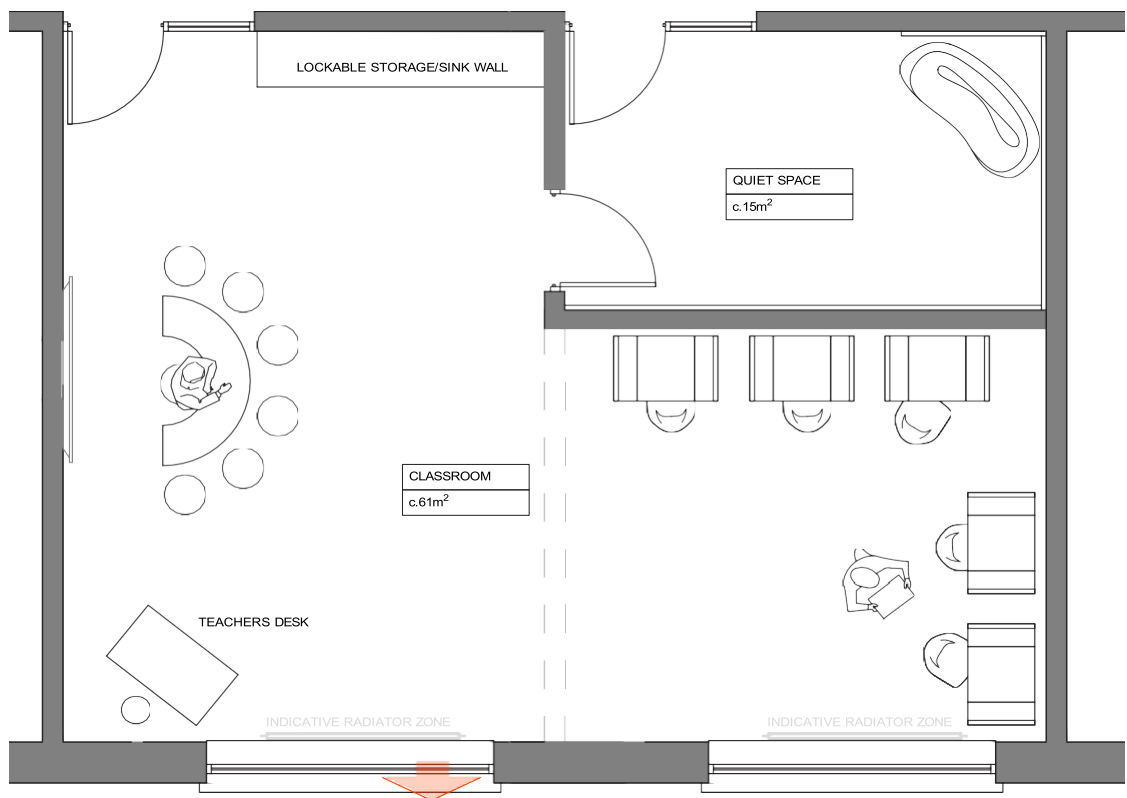
Small Classroom (38.5m² Double)



Existing Classroom Plan

Alterations to existing can include/not limited to;

- Review location, proximity of existing SEN Base (if applicable), iSchool entrance, sanitary facilities
- Review specification for access, finishes and mechanical and electrical installations taking account of guidance.
- Access to external play – possibility for direct access to a designated area.
- Review furniture layout and consider inclusion of Lockable Storage Wall/Sink as per DoE Spec.
- Review Sensory Environment and any required modifications.
- Include additional noise insulation for Quiet Space, Black out blinds, Wall/Floor Padding and additional sockets as required.



Proposed SEN Layout

Lockable Storage Wall/Sink

