

Creating great educational places and spaces



Design Quality & Delivery A Project Roadmap for Schools

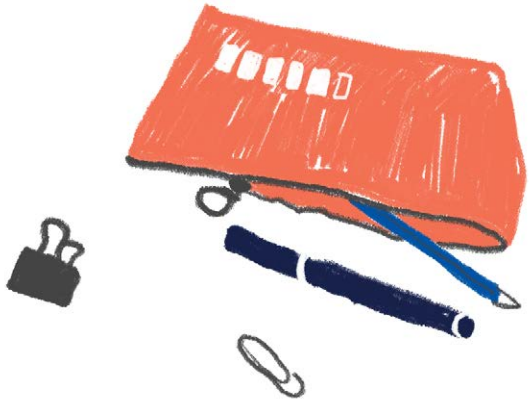
AUGUST 2026

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Contents

Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners	2
Creating great educational places and spaces	4
The value of design quality and quality in delivery	6
A Project Roadmap for Schools	9
A project roadmap for schools	10
Design quality and quality in delivery - What it means and why it matters	11
The role of the school	12
Where influence sits along the roadmap	13
The Project Roadmap	14
01 - Definition	16
1.1 Anchor your project in strategic direction	18
1.2 Understand the building blocks of your brief	20
1.3 Create a purposeful vision and clear principles	22
1.4 Define what design quality means for your school	24
1.5 Develop a brief that works	26
1.6 Build the right team for your project	28
1.7 Understand that governance structures vary	30
1.8 Provision for contingency	32
1.9 Share what you already know about your site before design begins	34
Checklist	36
02 - Design	38
2.1 How the design process works	40
2.2 Know when and how to engage	41
2.3 Concept design -Where a brief becomes a building	42
2.4 Schematic design– Where the concept is resolved into detail	44
2.5 Develop drawings and tender – Ready to build	46
Documentation - What to expect	48
Checklist	50
03 - Delivery	52
3.1 Understand roles and responsibilities	54
3.2 Maintain oversight	55
3.3 Communicate with clarity and confidence	56
3.4 Prepare for ownership	57
Checklist	58
04 - Evaluate	60
4.1 Why evaluation matters	62
4.2 Using the QIS BGA POE Toolkit	63
Checklist	64
A closing note	65
Appendix	67
Appendix A About the development of this guide	68
Appendix B Reference sources and other resources	72
Appendix C Glossary of useful terms	74

Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners

QIS BGA respectfully acknowledges past and present traditional owners and custodians, and the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians to the education of all children and people in this country that we all live in and share together.

QIS BGA also commits to supporting the ongoing journey of Reconciliation through education.



Creating great educational places and spaces

Resources for schools

About the BGA

Queensland Independent Schools Block Grant Authority (QIS BGA) is a not-for-profit organisation responsible for administering State and Australian Government funding for school facilities in Queensland's independent schools.

The BGA seeks to support the improvement of educational outcomes for young Australians, as represented by the Mparntwe Education Declaration's two interconnected goals:

Goal 1

The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.

Goal 2

All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Empowering schools

QIS BGA recognises that an informed school leader and a student-centred approach to the delivery of the school-based built environment contribute to enhanced learning opportunities and the maximisation of educational outcomes.

QIS BGA seeks to support schools in creating learning environments that promote educational excellence and equity by providing funding, access to expert advice and practical resources to help lift the capacity of school leaders to contribute positively to the design, construction, and activation of new or refurbished educational facilities.

A suite of resources

QIS BGA has created a suite of practical guides and resources for schools to help:

- Build knowledge and capacity
- Champion quality in the design and delivery of built assets that enhance learning outcomes and deliver value socially and economically to schools and their communities.

By fostering an accessible and supportive approach and providing tailored guidance for schools, the BGA encourages the active participation of schools in the process of shaping their built environments.

The activities involved in designing, developing, and delivering built infrastructure can often seem complex and overwhelming.

An understanding of the role, relationship, contribution and outputs of key stages in the design and delivery process will help schools navigate and contribute to this process effectively and ensure that their infrastructure investments support long-term educational goals as well as operational efficiency and durability.

The adjacent diagram has been developed to provide a simple overview of the interrelationships between the key outputs and approaches that will inform and influence the development of a school's-built environment.

Key Outputs

Strategic Plan

Should play a fundamental role in guiding the development and delivery of the built environment. It provides a long-term vision that aligns educational priorities, operational needs, and financial planning with physical infrastructure investments.

From a capital development perspective a school strategic plan should include a direction on the following at a minimum:

- Educational philosophy and pedagogical approach
- Curriculum areas (current & future)
- Student enrolment targets over the next 10 years
- The creation of safe and inclusive spaces beyond that required by law
- Sustainability
- How facilities will be used (or not) to support the School's engagement with the local community
- What financial ratios must be upheld to ensure the School's ongoing profitability, solvency, and sustainability.

Sustainability Strategy

Provides a structured plan to achieve long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability and create healthier, more inspiring, and future-ready learning environments.

Master Plan

Provides a strategic framework to guide development, ensuring facilities align with educational goals, operations, sustainability, and future growth requirements.

Projects

Is a focused and physically delivered project (building or infrastructure) aligned with the direction set out in the master plan.

Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE)

Collates insights that assess a building's performance, functionality, user and operational efficiency following completion and occupation.

Process & resource relationships

Using the diagram below schools can understand where they are in the process and also the relevant resources provided by the BGA to support them on their journey.



Approach

The four step approach illustrated in the diagram is a process embedded in the development of all the 'Key Outputs' listed above. The steps reflect theories and approaches used in systems thinking, user-centred design, classical architectural principles, and integrated delivery methods.

Define

To define purpose & ensure strategic alignment

Design

To translate the ideas expressed in a vision into feasible plans for place

Deliver

Advances the detail of the plans (for buildings, spaces and infrastructure) to implement designs and direct construction in a staged manner.

Evaluate & Learn

The assessment of the impact of a capital project (user value, functionality, build quality), enabling the collection of 'lessons learnt' to inform and improve the design and delivery of future projects.



A suite of resources

QIS BGA has created a suite of practical guides and resources. To find out more follow the link below www.bga.qld.edu.au

The value of design quality and quality in delivery

Delivering a major building project is one of the most significant things your school will do. It involves substantial financial commitment, complex professional relationships, and decisions that will shape the learning environment of students and staff for decades.

For most schools, it is not something that you will do often.

Many school leaders and business managers enter a building project without a clear understanding of the process, their role within it, or the decisions that matter most. The result is that opportunities to shape better outcomes, particularly at the early stages where a school's influence is greatest, can be missed.

A well-designed building actively supports teaching and learning, promotes the wellbeing of students and staff, expresses the values and identity of the school community, is resilient, and performs efficiently over the long term.

For a project to achieve this requires a clear brief, a capable team, well-structured governance, and a client who understands enough about the process to protect educational ambition as projects move through the complexity, cost pressures and time constraints of the design and construction process.

The need for this guide

QIS BGA recognises that how a building is designed and delivered has profound and lasting consequences for schools and their communities.

This guide has been developed in direct response to what schools have told QIS BGA they need. It offers a practical, accessible resource to help demystify the design and delivery process and supports schools to participate confidently at every stage - not as technical experts, but as informed, active clients who understand what they are trying to achieve and how to protect it.

Its structure and content have been shaped by collaborative workshops with school leaders, business managers and built environment professionals. The advice contained in the guide is grounded in their lived experience - the decisions they found hardest, the moments where better knowledge would have made a difference, and the practices that consistently produce stronger outcomes.



This guide offers

- A practical overview of the design and delivery journey - from early project definition through to evaluation after hand-over and use.
- An explanation of how decisions compound over time, and why early investment in clarity establishes a powerful project foundation.
- A framework for understanding the school's role at each stage, and what active participation looks like in practice.
- A collection of prompts, checklists and practical tools to support confident engagement.



This guide is not

- A technical design or construction manual
- A replacement for professional advice
- A prescriptive solution to any specific project challenge
- A tool for schools to manage design or construction independently.

Guide structure and how to use it

The guide is structured in four parts, each focused on a distinct stage of the project journey. It can be read cover to cover before a project begins and used as a reference, to be dipped into as your project progresses.

The Project Roadmap

Defines what design quality and delivery mean in the context of a built project, why they matter and the school's role throughout the project lifecycle.

Stage 01 Definition

This stage in the project process sets strong foundations before design begins. This is the highest-influence stage, where time invested pays the greatest return.

Stage 02 Design

Staying engaged as ideas become drawings. How to test alignment, ask good questions and protect intent through the design stages.

Stage 03 Delivery

Protecting intent through construction. Governance, communication, variations and transition to use.

Stage 04 Evaluate

Turning experience into insight. Post occupancy evaluation, organisational learning and building knowledge for future projects.

A note on how to read this guide

All schools are different, in scale, experience, governance structure and project complexity. This guide is designed to support the individuality of each project journey and each school's level of experience:

1. Take what is relevant to your school and your project
2. Return to sections as your needs evolve.
3. Read The Project Roadmap first.
4. Share insights prompted by the guide with your professional project team.
5. Refer back often.

Part of a suite of resources

This guide is one of a suite of practical resources developed by QIS BGA to support schools in creating great educational places. Each resource supports a different stage of the planning and delivery journey.



An overhead view of three construction workers on a site. They are wearing yellow high-visibility vests and hard hats (one yellow, two white). They are gathered around a laptop, with one worker pointing at the screen. The ground is dirt and concrete. In the bottom right, there is a tray of concrete test cylinders.

A Project Roadmap for Schools

The value created through design can only be realised if it is protected through delivery.

A project roadmap for schools

Your school facilities and infrastructure are both significant capital investments and long-term educational assets.

Their planning, design and delivery require careful stewardship to ensure resources are used effectively, risks are managed and value is realised over the life of the asset - not just at the point of delivery.

Decisions made throughout this process are not only technical or financial, they are also educational. They shape the quality of the teaching and learning environment, influence the wellbeing of students and staff, and determine how your school's identity and values are expressed through its built environment.

It is easy to focus on the cost of construction. It is harder, but as important, to understand the value of a building over its lifetime. Research consistently shows that design and construction costs represent only a small fraction of a building's whole-of-life expenditure. Operating costs - energy, maintenance, cleaning, adaptation - account for the vast majority of what your school will spend on a building over 30 to 50 years.

This is not an argument for spending more on buildings. It is an argument for spending wisely - investing appropriately in the definition, design and quality of a project so that the asset performs well, costs less to run, and continues to support educational outcomes for decades.

Design Fee
0.3-0.5% (approx)

Construction
2-3% (approx)

Maintenance
9-12% (approx)

Operating Costs
85% (approx)

Whole-of-life cost

Design, construction and operating costs as a proportion of whole-of-life expenditure.

Design quality and quality in delivery - What it means and why it matters

Design quality is not separate from delivery, it depends on it.

Design quality cannot be achieved without quality in delivery. Equally, disciplined delivery without a clear sense of priorities and purpose will not produce meaningful educational outcomes. Both benefit from your school's active involvement.

Many of the most significant decisions affecting quality, sustainability and long-term performance are made early in your project's life, often before construction costs are finalised. Establishing budget clarity early is essential. When design, costing, construction and user expertise are integrated from the outset, the budget becomes a shared point of reference rather than a late-stage constraint, enabling options and ideas to be tested, trade-offs resolved and solutions to be shaped that are both ambitious and affordable.

This is budget-conscious design and cost-enabled creativity - not cost-cutting - using early financial clarity to focus ambition where it matters most.



Design quality

The extent to which your project supports educational ambition - enabling effective teaching and learning, providing comfort and flexibility, responding to place, and performing well over time.



Quality in delivery

The discipline required to realise that ambition - ensuring decisions remain aligned, risks are actively managed and project intent is maintained as it moves through construction complexity, cost pressures and time constraints.



The role of the school

Guiding project intent does not require technical expertise. It requires your school to be informed and engaged.

A commercial developer typically has no ongoing relationship with a building once it is delivered -their role ends at completion. A school is different. It lives with the outcomes of its buildings for decades, alongside its students, staff and community, so its interests and the building's long-term performance are naturally aligned. This alignment, when actively harnessed, is a significant source of leverage.

In practice, your school achieves the best outcomes when it is an active participant in the design and delivery process. The professional team engaged by your school -architects, project managers, builders -do their best work when you are a genuine partner in decision-making, asking for quality, staying engaged at each stage, and understanding enough about the process to contribute meaningfully. When your school knows what it wants, can articulate it clearly and holds that position with confidence, it is well placed to keep cost and ambition working together throughout a project.

This guide exists to help your school do exactly that.

The participatory client

School capital projects involve a wide range of professionals, including designers, project managers, contractors and specialist consultants. Each brings invaluable technical expertise to the process. Your school's role within the project team is distinct -as the custodian of educational purpose. You are responsible for defining what the project is trying to achieve and ensuring that this intent is maintained as decisions are made over time.

You play a central role in defining what matters, setting expectations and maintaining alignment throughout the project lifecycle. When this role is clearly understood and actively fulfilled, you can guide the process in a way that embeds educational ambition into the project from the outset and protects it through delivery -engaging constructively with your professional team, ensuring performance expectations are understood, and recognising when key decisions are being made so you can participate at the right moments.

Your school is well-positioned to contribute to a project if it can answer yes to each of the following. These are worth considering before a project begins -and returning to at each stage in the design and delivery process:

Clarity of purpose

Can we clearly articulate what this project is trying to achieve -educationally, spatially and for our community?

Defined governance

Do we have agreed decision-making structures in place? Do we know who is authorised to approve what? Do we know how to protect the school's financial sustainability through the stages of development?

Informed participation

Can we engage constructively with our professional team — asking relevant questions and understanding key trade-offs -without needing to be technical experts?

Continuity of intent

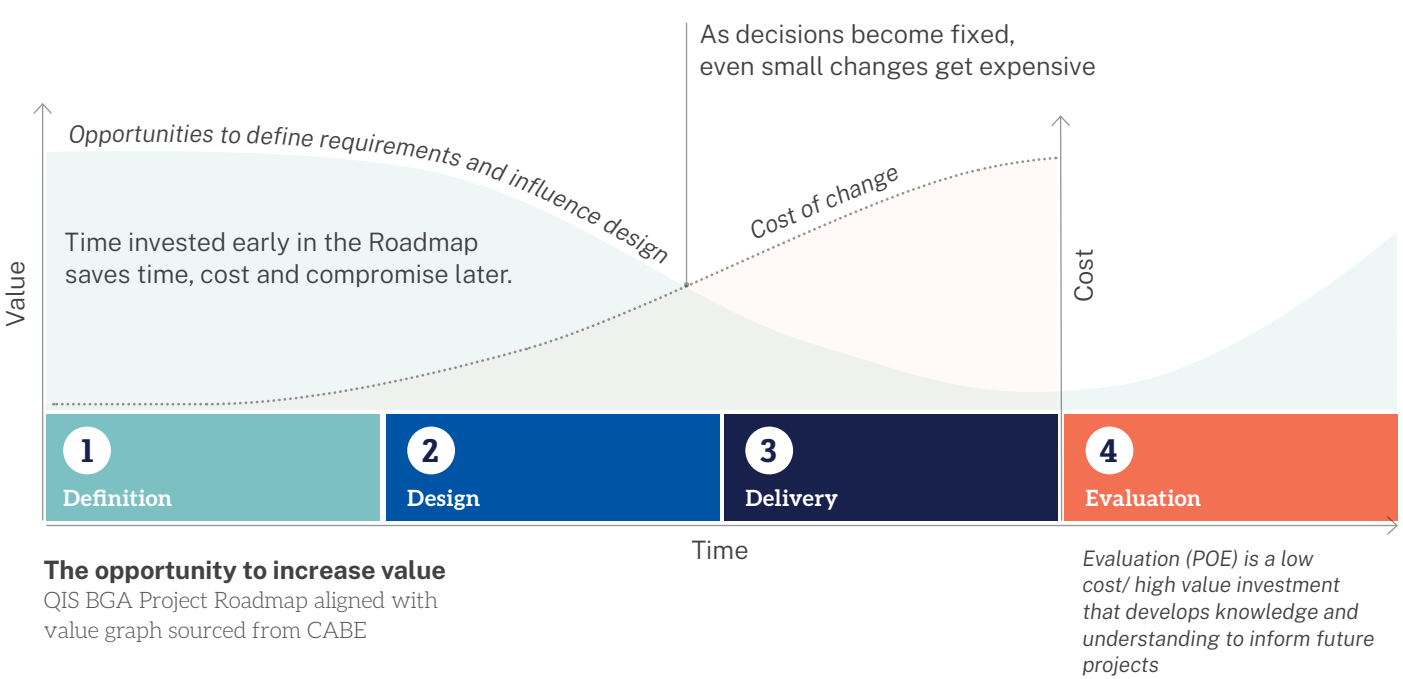
Do we have a way to maintain alignment between our original ambitions and decisions being made as the project progresses?

Willingness to learn

Are we committed to evaluating this project after occupation and using what we learn to strengthen future work?

Where influence sits along the roadmap

Your school's role evolves across the life of a project. Recognising this shifting role helps you engage appropriately at each stage, without becoming overextended or disengaged:



The Project Roadmap - Alignment with industry standard frameworks

The four stages of the Project Road map -describe this shift in focus across your project's life.

In practice, each stage unfolds through a more detailed sequence of steps, shared by your design and construction professionals. The design stages described in the Project Roadmap align with internationally recognised frameworks — including the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work and the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) design stages -adapted for the school context and validated through collaborative workshops with school leaders and built environment professionals.

These stage names are written in language for design and construction professionals, and can feel technical to anyone outside that world. This guide translates each stage for your school, so you can follow the process without needing to learn industry terminology.

Understanding this alignment means your school can work confidently with any professional team, knowing the language and sequence of the design process is consistent with industry standard practice. While different professionals may use slightly different stage names, the underlying logic is the same –design moves from broad intent to refined detail, and the school's participation evolves at each stage from active influence to active oversight.

The Roadmap diagram on the next page shows how these stages translate into practical steps

The Project Roadmap

Your school's scope and opportunity

Stages

Stage Overview

Steps

1

Definition

Focus on defining ambition and setting strategic direction. In the early stages of a project, your school has the greatest ability to shape outcomes. Purpose is being established, priorities are being set, and key decisions can be made with relatively low cost and disruption.

Defining what you want

1.1

Anchor your project in strategic direction

1.2

Understand the building blocks of your brief

1.3

Create a purposeful vision and clear principles

1.4

Define what design quality means for your school

1.5

Develop a brief that works

Organising yourself to deliver

1.6

Build the right team for your project

1.7

Understand that governance structures vary

1.8

Provision for contingency

1.9

Share what you already know about your site before design begins



2

Design

As the project progresses into Design, influence remains important but becomes more focused. Options are tested and refined, and decisions begin to be embedded in drawings, systems and cost plans. At this stage, your school's role shifts from defining ambition to maintaining alignment.

Understanding the design process

2.1

How the design process works

2.2

Know when and how to engage

Navigating the design stage

2.3

Concept design – Where a brief becomes a building

2.4

Schematic design – Where the concept is resolved into detail drawings

2.5

Develop drawings and tender – Ready to build



3

Delivery

During Delivery, the scope for change becomes more limited. Design intent has largely been resolved and formalised through documentation and contracts. Changes at this stage are typically more complex, more disruptive and more costly. Your school's role is primarily one of governance.

Navigating the delivery stage

3.1

Understand your role in delivery

3.2

Maintain oversight

3.3

Communicate with clarity and confidence

3.4

Prepare for ownership



4

Evaluation

Once the building is complete and in use, influence shifts again. The focus becomes understanding how the project performs in practice, identifying opportunities for improvement and capturing insights to inform future projects

Lessons Learnt

4.1

Why evaluation matters

4.2

Using the QIS BGA POE Toolkit



1

Definition

Set strong foundations
before design begins.
This is the point of highest
influence and lowest risk.
Invest here.

Overview

The definition stage is where the most important decisions in any building project are made and where your school has the greatest influence over the outcome. They are not technical decisions. They are educational ones.

- What kind of learning environment does your school need?
- What values should it express?
- What does success look like, and how will you know when you've achieved it?

These key questions belong to your school. No architect, project manager or builder can answer them on your behalf.

A clear brief, a well-selected team, a shared understanding of what quality means, and a governance structure that protects intent - these are the foundations that shape everything that follows. Time invested here will save time, cost and compromise later.

Use this section before engaging designers or builders - or to reset a project that feels unclear or misaligned.

Stage 1 Steps

Defining what you want

- 1.1 Anchor your project in strategic direction
- 1.2 Understand the building blocks of your brief
- 1.3 Create a purposeful vision and clear principles
- 1.4 Define what design quality means for your school
- 1.5 Develop a brief that works

Organising yourself to deliver

- 1.6 Build the right team for your project
- 1.7 Understand that governance structures vary
- 1.8 Provision for contingency
- 1.9 Share what you already know about your site before design begins

1.1

Anchor your project in strategic direction

Every built project should be driven by clear strategic intent. Not by an available funding opportunity, a single stakeholder's preference, or a reactive response to immediate need. The decision to undertake a project should be grounded in clear evidence that this project, at this time, is the right investment for your school and your community.

Before committing to a project, you should be able to answer clearly:

- How does this project advance our educational mission and pedagogy?
- Does it align with our current strategic plan and master plan?
- Is this the right project at the right time, or is there a more pressing priority?
- Do we have the organisational capacity and governance to deliver this project well?
- How does this project fit within our longer-term capital programme?

If any of these questions cannot be answered clearly and confidently, that is not a reason to abandon the project. It is a signal to pause, clarify and build the project foundations before proceeding.

The business case - a simple but powerful test

Before design begins, prepare a short Statement of strategic intent. This does not need to be a lengthy formal document. This statement becomes a reference point for every subsequent decision. When the inevitable cost pressure arrives the statement of strategic intent provides the basis for reflection and response.

DQG Worksheets



Click here for Statement of Strategic Intent Worksheet

Sequencing projects over time

Schools rarely undertake a single capital project in isolation. Understanding how individual projects relate to each other, and to the broader master plan, is essential for managing cost, programme and educational continuity.

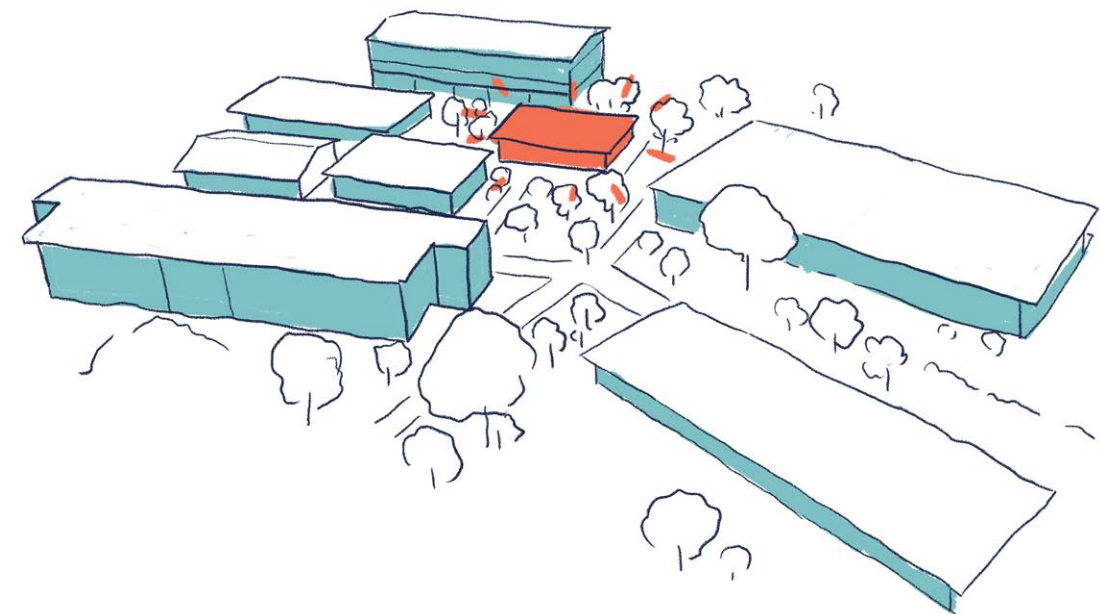
Projects that are poorly sequenced can:

- Compromise the function of adjacent spaces during construction
- Create coordination problems between contractors and consultants
- Undermine the logic of the master plan by locking in premature decisions
- Exhaust organisational capacity, leaving insufficient resources to manage delivery well.

Before committing to a project, confirm that its timing and sequencing have been considered in the context of the broader capital program and that proceeding now does not compromise what comes next.

If your school has not yet undertaken a master planning process, the QIS BGA Master Plan Guide provides the framework for establishing the strategic spatial context your capital projects need. A master plan is a prerequisite for project funding from the BGA. Without one, project decisions are made without a shared understanding of how the campus should develop over time - individual projects, each reasonable in isolation, can collectively waste land, use buildings inefficiently, and erode the building and place relationships and connectivity that make a campus work well.

Refer to the [Master Plan Guide](#) before committing to individual projects.



1.2

Understand the building blocks of your brief

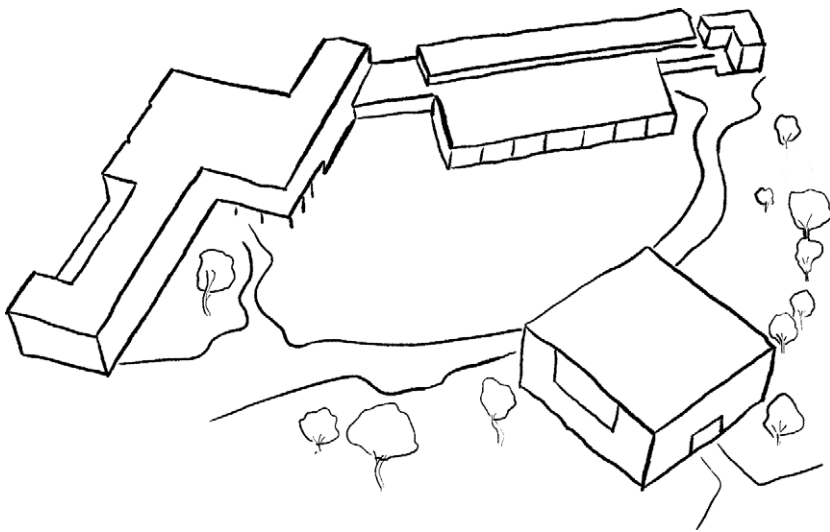
The next job is to gather and document what your school wants clearly enough to share with the architects, consultants and builders who will help deliver it. This is not a technical exercise. It is about capturing the values, ambition and non-negotiables that only your school can define, in a form your professional team can understand and work with.

A blueprint is a technical drawing that makes a building possible - the document that translates a designer's intent into construction reality. The term is used to describe any plan that guides the making of something. A blueprint establishes an original framework to guide every decision that follows.

The Priorities to Place Blueprint is the framework this guide uses to do that. It shows how the different pieces of information that shape a project - your school's values, its vision, its principles, its design quality expectations relate to and build on one another.

The Priorities to Place Blueprint works in the same way. It provides schools with a visual framework to record and translate their values and educational purpose into the vision, principles, strategies and project decisions to ultimately produce a built place. Documented, it establishes a resource schools can return to and build on, with their design teams, carrying values and ambition forward into clear instructions, and documenting the standard against which a project's success can later be measured.

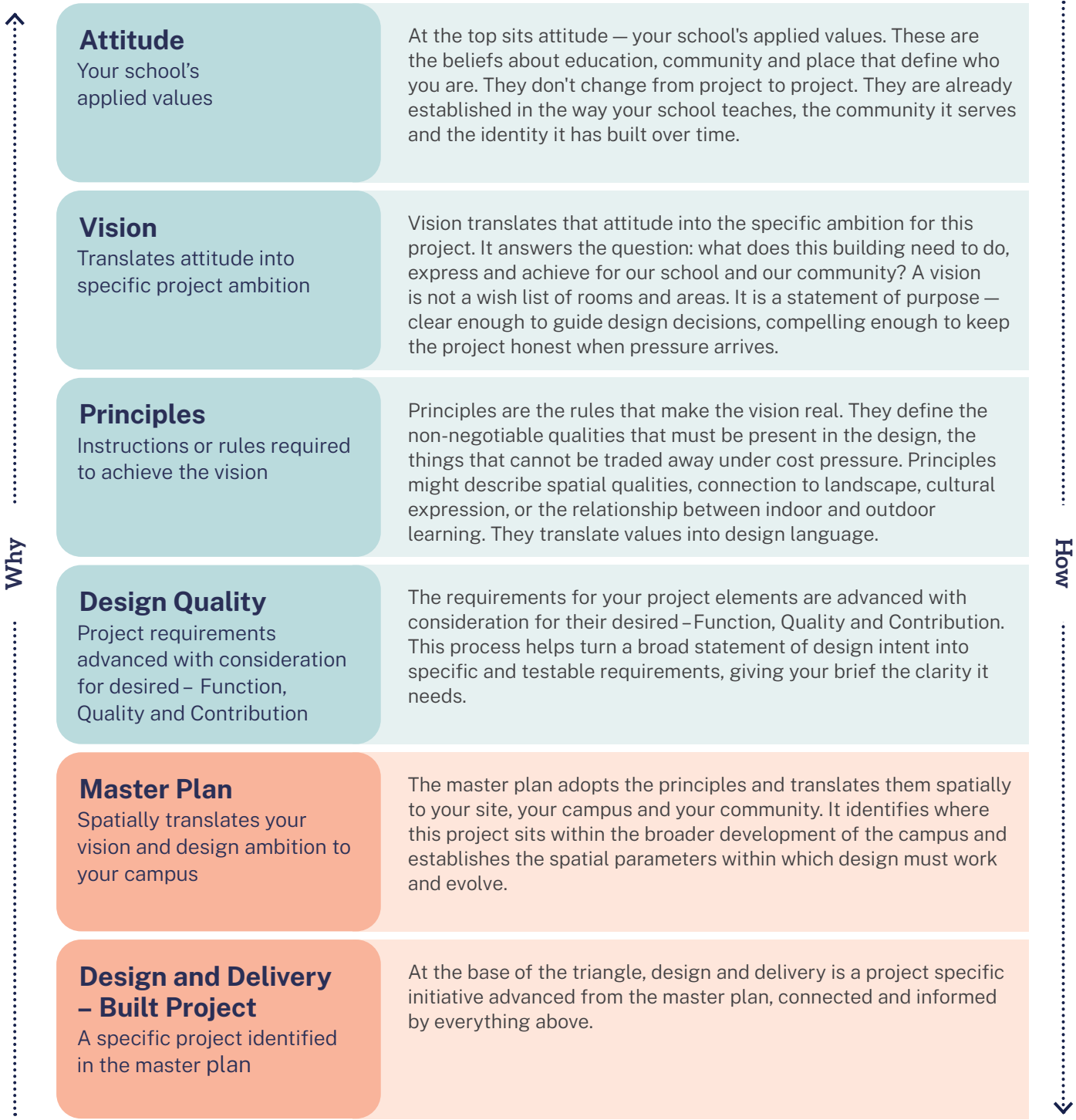
The Priorities to Place Blueprint has been developed by Dr Cathryn Chatburn as a general framework for built environment design thinking. The diagram articulates the relationship between values, intent and delivery. It has been adapted and applied here through her work on the QIS BGA Design Quality & Delivery Guide, translating its principles for school capital projects.



The Priorities to Place Blueprint

Why this matters for your project

This is not just a diagram. It is a reminder of where your school's influence is most powerful. Projects fail to achieve their potential not because schools lack ambition, but because the vision is unclear, the principles are unwritten, or the connection between values and design decisions is never made explicit.



1.3

Create a purposeful vision and clear principles

Projects often fail to achieve their full potential not because schools lack ambition, but because the vision is unclear, the principles are unwritten, or the connection between values and design decisions is never made explicit.

When a design team receives a brief without a clear vision, they fill the gap with their own assumptions. When principles are not written down, they cannot be protected when project pressures arrive.

A clear vision does more than describe what you want. It provides a shared reference point for ambition and quality throughout the project. Every decision that follows, from the master plan through to construction, can be tested against it -Does this still serve what we set out to achieve? Without that shared reference point, the risk is everyone on the project works from their own idea of what "good" looks like.

Good principles do more than describe intent — they become a measure of it. A well-written principle can be tested at every design review, referenced when trade-offs arise, and checked against the finished building after occupation to see whether it delivered on what you asked for.

Before engaging a design team, do three things:

- 1. Write down your vision for this project in plain language. Not a list of requirements, but a statement of what this building is for and what it should feel like to be in it. One paragraph is enough.
- 2. Write down your principles. Note the qualities this building must have, regardless of what budget pressure requires. Five to seven, clearly stated, is enough. Share them with your design team at the first meeting.
- 3. Test your vision and principles against your strategic plan and master plan. Do they express what you've already established?

For additional guidance in developing your vision and principles, the QIS BGA Master Plan Guide sets out a fuller process. It's a useful resource to guide your thinking for this project.

Once you are clear on vision and principles, the next step is to translate them into a specific definition of design quality for this project. That is the work of section 1.4.



Typical characteristics of a strong project vision:

Informed by a school's unique pedagogy and values

Drawing on a school's unique pedagogy and values to ensure strategic decisions and initiatives are meaningful, relevant, and aligned with the school's mission and educational programs, and that spaces support the teaching and learning methods adopted by a school.

Collaborative

Should ideally be developed through a collaborative process involving diverse stakeholders to foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility.

Forward thinking

Considering the long-term ambition for the school and its community.

Inspirational

Able to inspire and motivate stakeholders and encourage innovation and excellence.

Responsive to context

Reflect the distinctive qualities and physical characteristics of the project context and character of the area, respecting its history, culture, and unique attributes.

Inclusive

Consider the needs and aspirations of all community members, ensuring inclusivity and equity.

Flexible and adaptable

Set clear direction for the school whilst also allowing for a level of flexibility in interpretation, to enable responses to changing circumstances and new opportunities.

Clearly communicated

The vision should be clearly communicated and easy to understand. It should avoid jargon to be accessible to all stakeholders.



1.4

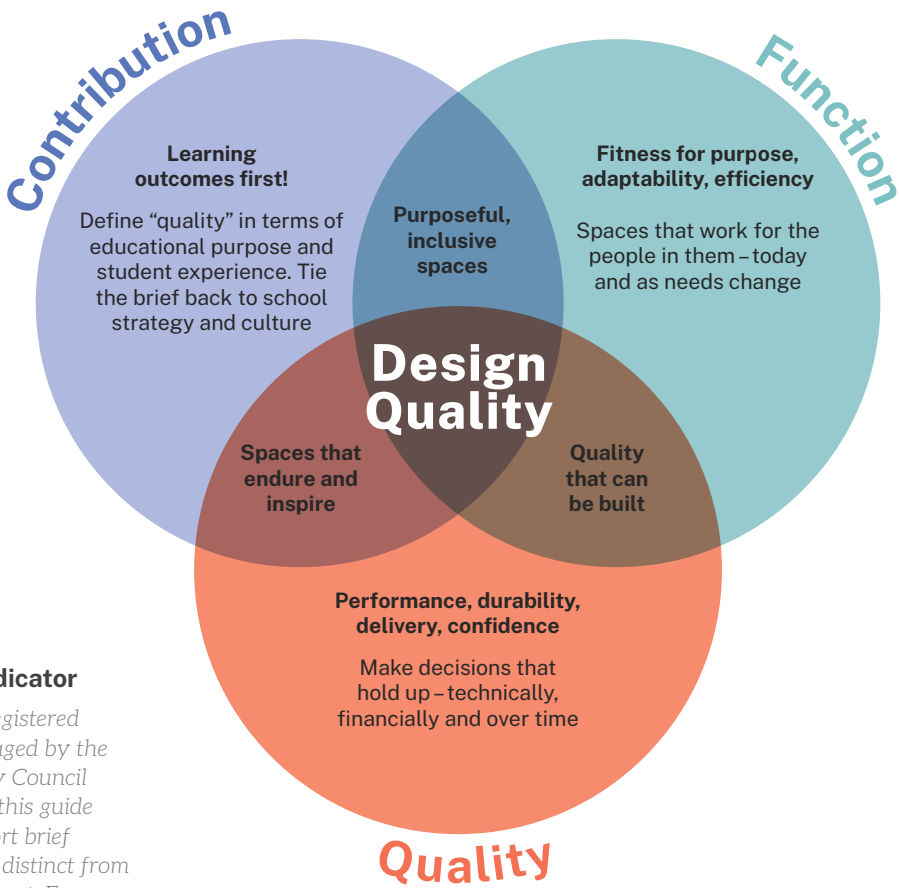
Define what design quality means for your school

Design quality is not an aesthetic standard, and it is not the same for every school.

Design quality can be defined as the extent to which a building supports your educational ambition, expresses your values and performs well for your community over the long term. When design quality is not clearly defined at the outset the result can be buildings that are technically compliant but fall short of their educational potential.

If your school cannot explore and articulate what quality means for its project it is vulnerable to decisions being made by others, decisions that may prioritise speed, cost or convenience over educational value. The brief is your primary instrument of influence. Without a clear definition of quality at its heart, that influence cannot be exercised.

This framework has been developed to take you through the process of defining what design quality means for your project. Work through the prompts in the table below with your leadership team, potentially even with your professional team, and write down your responses on the worksheet provided. Your responses will establish a record of quality considerations to discuss further with your design teams as the project design advances.



Design Quality Indicator

Note - The DQI is a registered assessment tool managed by the Construction Industry Council (UK). The prompts in this guide are intended to support brief development and are distinct from a formal DQI assessment. For further information on the DQI framework and its application to school and education projects, visit www.dqi.org.uk

Some prompts to guide discussion to develop the quality considerations for your project brief

What	Why	How
Function How well it works	Function focuses on the attributes that will influence how well the building works for the people who will use it. It asks schools to consider spatial organisation, room sizes, flexibility and the relationship between spaces and whether the building actively enables the school's educational programme, now and as it evolves. A building that functions well makes the school's work easier.	- What teaching and learning activities must this building support – now and as our educational programme evolves? - What spaces do we need, at what scale, and how should they relate to each other? - Who uses this building, when and how – and what does that mean for the layout and adjacencies? - How does our pedagogical approach shape the kinds of spaces we need? - What flexibility do we need as teaching practices and curriculum change across the mid to long-term?
Quality How well it's built	Quality asks how well the building is constructed – its technical performance, durability, safety and efficiency over the long term. Build quality is the foundation on which everything else depends. It is also the dimension most vulnerable to cost pressure during delivery. Specifications are often reduced here when budgets tighten, with consequences that last for decades.	- What level of acoustic performance do we need to support effective learning and staff wellbeing? - What thermal comfort and ventilation standards do we need for the Queensland climate? - What materials and systems will perform durably in our context and be practical to maintain? - How do we want this building to perform environmentally? - What safety and accessibility requirements must we meet and where do we want to go beyond the minimum?
Contribution What it achieves for its users	Contribution asks what the building gives back, to students, staff, families, community and place. This dimension captures the experiential, social, cultural and civic qualities of the building. It is often the dimension schools find hardest to articulate but frequently what they care about most deeply. It is also the most easily lost when projects are reduced to technical requirements alone.	- What experience do we want students, staff and visitors to have when they enter and move through this building? - What sense of identity, belonging and community should it create? - How should it express our school's values, culture and connection to place and Country? - What will make this building feel like it genuinely belongs to our school and our place?
Note	The responses you capture through this process don't stay on the worksheet. They feed directly into the Design Quality section of your Project Brief Builder (see section 1.5) turning what you've discussed under Function, Quality and Contribution into a record of requirements your design team will work from.	

DQG Worksheets



Click here for the Design Quality Worksheet

1.5

Develop a brief that works

The project brief is your school's most important document. It translates educational ambition into a clear and actionable set of requirements for the design team.

It does not stop being useful once design begins. A brief that is clearly written, widely shared and actively used is the most reliable protection against the gradual, unintentional erosion of design intent.

Treat the brief as a living document

A brief is not a handover document. It should not be written, submitted to the architect, and then forgotten. The best briefs are distributed widely to the whole project team including the builder and returned to at each design stage as a test of alignment.

At every design review, ask: Are we still building what the brief asked for? If something has changed, document why. This is the discipline that keeps the project connected to its original purpose.

Design intent erodes gradually. Each small decision, a material change here, a spatial adjustment there, may seem inconsequential in isolation. Collectively, they can fundamentally alter a project's educational performance. A shared, actively used brief is the most reliable defence against this drift.

The brief is also the foundation of fair and effective procurement. When consultants are briefed inconsistently, they cannot compare proposals on equivalent terms. When builders do not understand the brief, they cannot protect design intent during construction. A brief that is clearly written and widely shared aligns everyone toward the same outcome.

The brief should connect directly to the design qualities established in section 1.4. The brief is where those principles become specific, measurable requirements.

If a quality matters to your school, it belongs in the brief. If it is not named, it will not be protected.

Be explicit about needs and wants

One of the most useful things you can do when developing a brief is to be clear about what is non-negotiable and what is aspirational. Making this distinction explicit gives your design team room to innovate within real constraints and gives you a principled basis for decisions when project tensions arrive.

When drafting your brief, divide each requirement into two columns:

Needs

The non-negotiables - The requirements without which the project cannot fulfil its educational purpose. They are the minimum spatial standards, the acoustic performance necessary for effective learning, the number of teaching spaces required. These cannot be traded off under cost pressure.

Wants

The aspirational - These are the qualities and features that would significantly enhance the project if achievable within budget — a covered outdoor learning area, a particular material that expresses the school's character, breakout spaces between classrooms. These enrich the outcome but can flex if necessary.

Share this with your design team at the first meeting. It will save significant time and misunderstanding as the project develops.

DQG Worksheets



Click here for Project Brief
Builder Worksheet

Define what success looks like

A good brief defines what success looks like so that design proposals can be evaluated against clear criteria and the completed building can be assessed against the school's original intent.

Success criteria might include:

- The building achieves a target energy performance rating
- Every learning space has access to natural light and cross-ventilation
- The design actively supports the school's published pedagogical approach
- Construction is completed within programme and within budget
- Post-occupancy evaluation at 12 months confirms user satisfaction targets are met

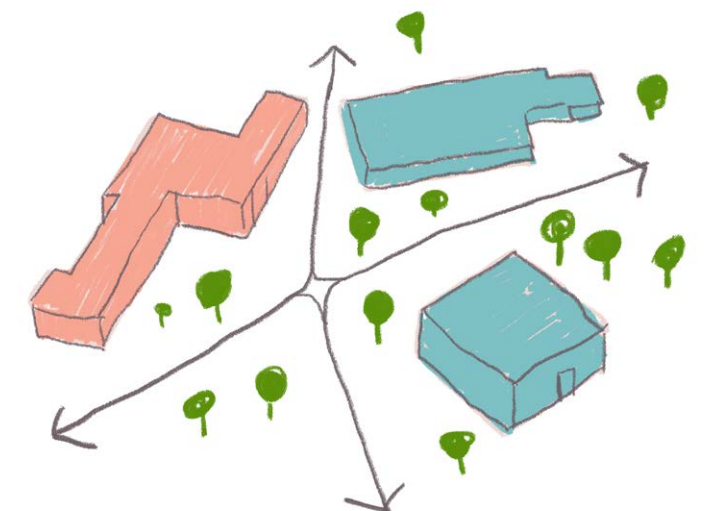
These criteria become the benchmark against which design proposals are reviewed, variations are assessed and the completed building is evaluated. They are also the basis for the post-occupancy evaluation process covered in Stage 04 of this guide. Refer also to the QIS BGA Post Occupancy Evaluation Guide for a full process and toolkit.

Use the brief to guide your design team

A good brief is the starting point for design, not the end point. Expect your architect to interrogate, challenge and return the brief and welcome that process. The design team should be able to tell you what the brief asks for and what it does not yet resolve. A brief that is simply accepted and executed without question is a missed opportunity.

At each design stage, ask the team to return a clear statement of how the emerging design responds to the brief. This does not need to be complex — a short, written summary or annotated drawing is enough. What matters is that alignment between brief and design is actively demonstrated, not just assumed.

The next step is to build the team that will help you realise it – see section 1.6.



1.6

Build the right team for your project

The quality of your project is shaped significantly by the quality and composition of your project team. Selecting the right professionals, and understanding

what each brings to the process, is one of the most consequential decisions your school will make. It is also one of the earliest. Get it right and the project has a strong foundation.

Typical key project roles

Typical attribution	Role	Typical responsibilities
School Principal	Custodian of educational purpose -defines ambition, establishes governance, maintains alignment	Articulates what the project is trying to achieve and for whom. The client voice throughout.
School Board	Strategic oversight, financial approval and governance accountability	Approves project scope, budget and key milestones. Sets the risk parameters.
Business Manager	Financial and operational oversight — manages budget, procurement and contract administration on behalf of the school.	Tracks project spend against budget, manages invoicing and procurement processes, and keeps the Board informed through financial reporting.
Facilities Manager	Custodian of site and operational knowledge — understands the campus, its infrastructure and how it is used day to day.	Can advise on site conditions, services and maintenance history to help inform the brief, and provide continuity through construction helping the project team navigate live-site realities.
Project Manager (PM)	Manages the overall project delivery process -programme, budget, coordination Note: this could be an architect.	Keeps the project on track, coordinates the team, manages risk and variations.
Architect	Leads design development and documentation. Typically, the lead consultant on a project	Translates educational brief into built form. Coordinates specialist consultants.
Landscape Architect	Leads the design of outdoor and site based spaces and supports the integration of the building in its context	Translates the educational opportunities into external environments, coordinating with the Architect on siting, drainage, planting and outdoor learning/play spaces.
Quantity Surveyor (QS)	Independent cost advice and cost management across all stages	Provides cost estimates, reviews tenders and manages cost risk.
Structural / Civil Engineers	Structural and civil infrastructure design	Ensures the building is structurally sound and site infrastructure is appropriately resolved.
Services Engineers	Mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) systems design	Designs heating, cooling, ventilation, lighting and electrical systems — critical to how the building feels and how much it costs to run.
Builder / Contractor	Constructs the building in accordance with the design documentation	Translates drawings and specifications into built outcomes.
QIS BGA	Administers State and Commonwealth capital funding for eligible schools	Reviews and supports funding applications. Provides guidance and resources throughout.

Understand who does what

Your project will involve a range of professionals, each with a distinct role. Understanding what each person in your team is responsible for helps your school engage effectively and avoid the common mistake of assuming that someone else is protecting educational value on your behalf.

Select your team with care

When selecting architects and other key consultants, look beyond the portfolio. The most important question is not "what have they built?" but "how do they work with clients?".

When assessing potential professional project partners, consider:

- Experience with school projects of similar scale, complexity and educational context
- Evidence of design quality and user-centred outcomes -not just completed buildings but how those buildings perform for the people in them
- Approach to client engagement and collaborative working -ask for examples
- Translates the educational opportunities into external environments, coordinating with the Architect on siting, drainage, planting and outdoor learning/play spaces.
- Track record in managing cost and programme across similar projects
- References from previous school clients -don't be afraid to call them.

Consider early contractor involvement

In projects of significant scale or complexity, consider engaging a construction advisor or builder at the definition stage-before design is finalised. Early contractor involvement brings construction market intelligence into the design process: what materials are available, what labour costs are doing, what lead times apply, what can be built on this site at this time.

This intelligence is most valuable before design decisions are locked in. Bringing that knowledge earlier gives the design team something real to work with.

For more information, please refer to QIS BGA's procurement guide.

Sign the right agreement

When engaging your primary project consultant, ensure the agreement clearly sets out the scope of services, fee structure, how variations are managed, intellectual property arrangements and what happens if the relationship breaks down. Seek advice on the most appropriate agreement for your project.



1.7

Understand that governance structures vary

Governance is the framework of authority, oversight and accountability your school adopts to oversees decisions throughout a project. It is not the same as project management. Project management is the day-to-day coordination of the project -the professional team's job. Governance is the framework within which decisions are made and accountability is held.

This distinction matters because it is frequently misunderstood. It is easy to assume that appointing a good project manager means governance is covered. A project manager manages process. Governance determines who has the authority to make which decisions, at what thresholds, and how the school's educational intent is protected when pressure arrives.

Good governance does not require complex structures. It requires clarity, agreed before the project begins and documented so that everyone knows where they stand.

Understand what your school is responsible for

Your school retains responsibility for:

- Defining the educational purpose and intent of the project
- Approving project scope, budget and programme milestones
- Reviewing and approving key design decisions
- Managing variations that affect scope, cost or educational outcome
- Signing off at each stage before the project proceeds
- Handover and commissioning

You delegate to professionals:

- Technical design and documentation
- Construction management and site supervision
- Cost management and quantity surveying
- Coordination of specialist consultants

The boundary between these two domains is where governance problems most often arise. When schools assume their professional team is managing something the school should be owning, or when professionals make decisions that properly require school authorisation, the project drifts. Clear governance structures prevent this.

DQG Worksheets



Click here for Project Governance Worksheet

1 Definition	2 Design	3 Delivery	4 Evaluation
Establishing authority, approving the brief and budget, confirming the project is strategically aligned	Reviewing design proposals against the brief, approving stage sign-offs, managing scope changes	Overseeing variations, monitoring cost and programme, maintaining alignment with design intent	Reviewing post-occupancy findings, capturing lessons learned, reporting to the Board

Governance Focus

Name a design champion

In larger or more complex projects, consider naming a design champion within your school's team -a specific person whose role is to maintain focus on design quality while others are managing the immediate pressures of delivery.

Design quality erodes in small steps. A material changed here, a space reduced there, an acoustic specification cut to save money. Each decision may seem minor in isolation but collectively they can shift the building far from its original intent. The design champion keeps the long-term picture in view, asking at each decision point: does this still serve our educational goals?

The design champion does not need technical expertise. They need a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve, the confidence to ask whether decisions are moving toward or away from that goal, and the standing within the organisation to raise concerns when quality is at risk.

Govern across the full lifecycle

Governance structures need to remain active and relevant as the project moves through its stages. The nature of governance changes at each stage:

Governance structures vary

Independent schools operate under a wide range of governance structures. As a result this guide cannot prescribe a single governance model. What it can do, is name the questions your school should be able to answer before a project begins:

- Who has the authority to approve this project — the board, a system body, a finance committee?
- At what financial thresholds does approval need to escalate upward?
- Who is your school's nominated project sponsor?
- How does your board receive progress information, and how often?
- Is there a subcommittee or advisory structure with relevant capital project expertise?

If any of these questions cannot be answered clearly, that is the first governance problem to solve — before design engagement begins.

With governance structures in place, the final step before design begins is to ensure your team has everything they need to understand the site and its constraints. See section 1.7.

1.8 Provision for contingency

Every project budget should include a reserve set aside for risks and unknowns that cannot be fully identified before construction begins, such as unforeseen site conditions, market price movements. In construction this reserve budget is typically called a contingency. It is not the same as scope. It is not there to fund upgrades, additions or 'nice to haves' that emerge as the project develops.

The amount of contingency required varies with project complexity, site risk and the stage of design at which the budget is set. Your quantity surveyor can advise what is appropriate for your project. What matters more than the amount is how its use is governed.

Before construction begins, agree who has authority to approve expenditure of contingency, and at what value that approval must escalate to the Board. The same governance thresholds you've established for other project decisions should apply here. Track what has been drawn down and why, so your school always knows how much genuine risk buffer remains.

If contingency is spent early on scope changes rather than unforeseen issues, your project has less protection when a real risk happens. Protecting contingency is protecting your project's resilience.



1.9

Share what you already know about your site before design begins

One of the most consistently underestimated assets on a building project is the knowledge that already exists within your school, about your campus, your site, your buildings and infrastructure, and how your community uses the school day to day.

This knowledge is often held in people's heads rather than in documents. It lives with:

- **The facilities manager** who has been maintaining the buildings for fifteen years
- **The groundskeeper** who knows where the drainage fails after heavy rain
- **The business manager** who remembers the heritage condition attached to the last development approval.

When these people leave, that knowledge leaves with them. And when a design team arrives without it, they may make decisions based on assumptions that turn out to be wrong with consequences that surface during construction, when they are expensive to resolve.

Capturing and sharing what your school already knows is one of the highest-value, lowest-cost investments you can make before design begins.

Involve your facilities manager from the start

Your facilities manager should be in the room at the beginning of project definition, not brought in at handover. They understand your site's constraints and characteristics better than almost anyone. Their early involvement helps the design team avoid costly surprises and ensures that the operational realities of running built assets are understood before design decisions are locked in. Specifically, your facilities manager can tell the design team:

- Where services run — electricity, water, gas, data, stormwater, sewer
- What infrastructure is ageing, undersized or at capacity
- Which materials have failed in the past and why
- What maintenance costs are highest and where
- How the campus operates under pressure — events, peak traffic, access constraints
- What has been promised to the community and not yet delivered

None of this is in the drawings. Most of it is not written down anywhere. And all of it is relevant to a design team trying to understand what they are working with.

Document what you know

Before engaging a design team, make a deliberate effort to collate and document existing site knowledge. This does not need to be a comprehensive survey — that is the design team's job. It is a collection of what your school already holds. Gather:

- **Existing drawings, reports and asset registers** — however incomplete or out of date
- **Known site conditions** — drainage patterns, services locations, contamination history, heritage overlays, asbestos registers
- **Maintenance history and recurring issues** — what gets fixed repeatedly, and why
- **Operational patterns** — how the campus is used across the day, week and year, including events that affect access and traffic
- **Planning and development history** — conditions from previous approvals that have not yet been discharged, covenants, easements, overlays

Note - If your school doesn't hold this information in-house, or wants a more thorough picture before design begins, QIS BGA funds a Site Potentials and Constraints Assessment.

Plan for construction in a live school

Most school projects are delivered while the school is operating. This creates a set of constraints that are unique to the education sector and that need to be understood and planned for before design begins.

Consider and document:

- Which spaces will be affected during construction and how alternative arrangements will be made
- Traffic management — contractor access, parking, pedestrian separation from the construction zone
- Noise and dust management — which spaces are most sensitive and when
- Contractor induction requirements — child safety, supervision protocols, site access rules
- Community communication — how parents, students and neighbours will be kept informed
- Programme alignment — what can be built during school holidays, what requires term-time management

These are not afterthoughts. They are design constraints that should be in the brief and understood by the design team from the outset.

The management of construction in a live school environment is covered in detail in Stage 03 of this guide -Delivery



DQG Worksheets 

Click here for Site Information Register Worksheet

Stage 01 Checklist

The checklists below bring together key questions from this chapter in one place. Use them once you've read this chapter, to prompt action, test your thinking and confirm key recommended actions have been addressed.

Defining what you want

1.1 Strategic direction

- ☐ Have we confirmed this project aligns with our strategic plan and master plan?
- ☐ Can we clearly articulate why this project, why now?
- ☐ Have we prepared a short statement of strategic intent?
- ☐ Have we considered how this project relates to others in our capital programme?
- ☐ Have we confirmed the school has the organisational capacity to deliver this project well at this time?

1.2 Priorities to place

Have we:

- ☐ Reviewed the Priorities to Place Blueprint and understood how attitude, vision, principles, design quality, master plan and project delivery build from one another?
- ☐ Identified our school's relevant applied values expressed through our teaching, community and identity, as the starting point for this project?
- ☐ Confirmed a process to ensure our vision, principles and design quality considerations will be developed sequentially, rather than in isolation from one another?
- ☐ Shared the blueprint framework with our leadership team and board, so everyone understands how our values will translate into a built outcome?

1.3 Vision and principles

Have we:

- ☐ Articulated a clear vision for this project – what it needs to achieve and why?
- ☐ Written down our project principles – the non-negotiable qualities this project must have?
- ☐ Shared and agreed the vision and principles with the school's leadership team and board?
- ☐ Connected this project's vision and principles to our school's broader values and educational philosophy?

1.4 Design quality

Have we:

- ☐ Worked through the Function, Quality and Contribution prompts with our leadership team and written down our responses?
- ☐ Identified attributes where Function, Quality and Contribution overlap, and where our building's most distinctive qualities might come from?
- ☐ Identified and prioritised the qualities that matter most but are hardest to quantify?
- ☐ Confirmed these design quality considerations are ready to carry into our brief?

1.5 Project Brief

Have we:

- ☐ Articulated the educational purpose of this project clearly?
- ☐ Defined the spatial requirements – rooms, sizes, adjacencies?
- ☐ Set performance requirements for acoustic, thermal and lighting quality?
- ☐ Written down our design quality considerations – what Function, Quality and Contribution mean for this project?
- ☐ Established sustainability targets?
- ☐ Confirmed the budget and programme?
- ☐ Documented any key site constraints and opportunities we are aware of?
- ☐ Separated our needs (non-negotiable) from our wants (aspirational)?
- ☐ Defined what success looks like and how we will evaluate it after occupation?
- ☐ Had the brief reviewed and formally endorsed by the school's leadership team and board?
- ☐ Distributed the brief to the full project team – including the builder?

Stage 01 Checklist

Organising yourself to deliver

1.6 Team selection

Have we:

- ☐ Defined the scope and scale of the project before going to market?
- ☐ Sought evidence of relevant experience and educational outcomes – not just completed buildings?
- ☐ Assessed how each candidate approaches client engagement with non-expert clients?
- ☐ Completed due diligence on fees relative to scope and complexity?
- ☐ Checked references with previous school clients – and spoken to them directly?
- ☐ Understood how each firm manages cost risk and variations?
- ☐ Agreed on the lead consultant role and coordination responsibilities?
- ☐ Engaged a quantity surveyor independently of the architect?
- ☐ Considered whether early contractor involvement would benefit this project?

1.7 Governance

Have we:

- ☐ Identified and documented our project governance structure before engaging the design team?
- ☐ Named a project sponsor with clear day-to-day authority and accountability?
- ☐ Agreed and documented decision-making authority – who approves what, at what thresholds?
- ☐ Established a clear process for reviewing and approving design stage sign-offs?
- ☐ Agreed a variation approval process with documented thresholds?
- ☐ Agreed how contingency will be governed and reported?

- ☐ Defined how the project team will report to the school – frequency, format, recipient?
- ☐ Protected the Principal's time by defining what requires their specific involvement?
- ☐ Considered naming a design champion for this project?
- ☐ Confirmed our governance structure with any system-level body whose approval is required?
- ☐ Agreed how the Board will receive progress information throughout the project?

Note: there is no checklist for section 1.8.

1.9 Site knowledge and project preparation

Have we:

- ☐ Collated existing drawings, reports and asset registers for the site?
- ☐ Documented known site conditions – services, drainage, contamination, heritage and asbestos?
- ☐ Involved the facilities manager in project definition discussions from the outset?
- ☐ Captured maintenance history and recurring issues that may affect the design?
- ☐ Mapped operational patterns – events, access, traffic, programming – that will affect construction?
- ☐ Documented outstanding planning conditions, easements or covenants from previous approvals that must be addressed?
- ☐ Sought early construction market intelligence on costs, lead times and buildability?
- ☐ Planned for construction in a live school environment – traffic, noise, access, communication?
- ☐ Fulfilled our obligation to disclose known site information to the design team?

2

Design

From brief to building -
stay engaged and
participate effectively
as ideas take shape

Overview

The design stage transforms your brief from words into a spatial outcome. It is where the decisions and requirements you documented in Stage 01 are brought together and to life. It is where your instructions are interpreted, integrated and tested against site, regulation, budget and programme conditions, and translated into drawings that will instruct construction.

Your role begins to shift here - In the definition stage you set direction. The design stage you test whether that direction is being followed. This requires active participation:

- Participating in design reviews
- Asking good questions
- Understanding what is being traded off
- Stating when something is not right.

At concept stage, the character of the building is still open. By the time technical design is complete, and documentation is ready for tender, most decisions are locked in. The window for meaningful input closes progressively. This is why early and sustained engagement is valuable.

Use this part of the guide alongside design reviews and team meetings. At every stage, return to the brief and design quality principles established in Stage 01. Remember they are your project compass all the way through to documentation and delivery.

Stage 2 Steps

Understanding the design process

- 2.1 How the design process works
- 2.2 Know when and how to engage

Navigating the design stages

- 2.3 Concept design – Where a brief becomes a building
- 2.4 Schematic design – Where the concept is resolved into detail drawings
- 2.5 Develop drawings and tender – Ready to build



2.1

How the design process works

Understanding how the design process works, and what is being decided at each stage, is one of the most valuable things a school can do before design begins.

The design of a building follows a structured, sequential process that supports creative and collaborative problem-solving. Done well, it navigates the competing demands of any built project and finds workable compromise –between educational, spatial, technical, financial and environmental needs -to produce something that is functional and buildable, on time and on budget. Understanding this process tells you when your input matters most, what questions to ask, and when you can push back.

Design moves through a series of sequential stages -decide, coordinate, document. Each one adds detail and resolution to the last, and as it does, the scope for change narrows and the cost of making change increases.

Key stages of the design process

Stage	Role
Concept Design <i>Decide</i>	Concept design is where you decide, the building's character, spatial organisation, environmental approach and relationship to the site. This is the stage where your input is most powerful and where changes cost the least. If something isn't right, this is the moment to say so.
Schematic Design <i>Coordinate</i>	Schematic design is where the design is coordinated — all the building's structural, mechanical, electrical and hydraulic systems are brought together and tested against each other. The planning application is typically submitted at this stage. By the end of schematic design, the main design should not change. Your role shifts from shaping to protecting — confirming that the coordinated design still reflects your brief and that nothing important has been lost in the process of making everything work technically.
BGA Funding Application	For schools accessing BGA funding, a formal funding application falls within the design stage -typically after schematic design is sufficiently developed to support a submission. Documentation must meet specific BGA evidence requirements, and drawings and reports need to clearly distinguish between funded and self-funded scope. Discussing BGA documentation requirements early with your design team will help avoid delays and rework at this stage. Incomplete or poorly structured documentation slows approvals, reduces funding confidence and can affect the quality of the project that funding supports. For current guidance on BGA funding programs and documentation requirements, visit www.bga.qld.edu.au/funding-programs
Develop Drawings & Tender <i>Document</i>	Develop drawings and tender is where the design is documented — translated into the detailed construction drawings and specifications that tell a builder exactly what to build, to what standard and at what cost. The project then goes to market. Your role is reviewing, signing off and entering a construction contract you fully understand.

2.2

Know when and how to engage

A school that participates throughout the design process is a school that gets the building it briefed for.

Decisions made early in the design process are the least costly to revisit and often the most consequential for embedding priorities for the building's educational performance in the design. By the time documentation is complete and tendered, most decisions are locked in. Changes after this point are expensive, disruptive, extend project timelines and sometimes not possible.

This is why sustained engagement matters. Not just attending the concept design presentation and then stepping back, but maintaining participation and interest at every stage, raising concerns as soon as they arise rather than waiting for the next formal review.

A school that participates throughout the design process is a school that gets the building it briefed for.

When project priorities can come under pressure

- Value engineering exercises that cut cost without a clear understanding of what is lost educationally
- Design decisions driven by construction programme rather than educational performance
- Specification changes during documentation that reduce durability or acoustic performance
- Loss of key spatial relationships — adjacencies, views, acoustic separation — in later design stages
- Pressure to increase density or reduce space standards to manage cost overrun
- Changes to materials or finishes that affect the building's contribution to identity and place

When any of these arise, return to the brief. Ask the design team to explain clearly what is being traded off and whether the trade-off is genuinely necessary.

The next three sections guide your school through each stage of the design process — concept design, schematic design, and develop drawings and tender.

Each section follows the same structure:

1. **What the design stage should show you** -What you should expect to see
2. **Useful questions** -The questions that will help you test alignment with your brief
3. **Options and trade-offs** -How to evaluate choices
4. **Signing off** -What to confirm before authorising the next stage to begin
5. **Checklist** -A practical summary to work through

Your role evolves across the design stages -from actively shaping at concept, to protecting alignment at schematic design, to reviewing and confirming at documentation and tender.

The sections that follow reflect that shift.

2.3

Concept design – Where a brief becomes a building

This is the stage to invest time in. If you are going to push back, ask hard questions or request that options be revisited, this is where it costs the least and achieves the most.

Concept design is where your brief becomes a building for the first time — where educational intent is translated into spatial and architectural form, and where the fundamental character, organisation and environmental strategy of the building is established. Everything that follows is a refinement of what is decided here. The building's relationship to the site, the arrangement of spaces, the structural approach, the environmental strategy, the way natural light enters the building — these are concept stage decisions. Once they are set, they can be difficult and expensive to change.

What concept design should show you

A concept design should give you enough to understand the essential character and logic of the proposed building. You should be able to see:

- How the building sits on the site – its orientation, access, relationship to existing buildings and landscape
- How spaces are organised - what is next to what, and why
- How the building feels to move through - the location of entries, circulation, outlook
- What the environmental strategy is - how the building will be ventilated, daylit and shaded
- What the structural approach is - and whether it allows for the flexibility the brief requires
- What the building will look like and be made of — its character, the materials proposed, and how these relate to the school's identity and place.
- If a concept design presentation cannot answer these questions clearly, it is not ready for review. It is reasonable — and important — to say so.

Useful questions

You don't need to be an expert in architecture and design to review a concept design effectively. What matters is whether the design responds to your brief and reflects your values.

- Does this design respond directly to our brief and design quality principles?
- Does the spatial organisation make sense educationally - do the right spaces relate to each other?
- Does the design make the most of the site - orientation, outlook, connection to landscape?
- Is the environmental strategy clear - how will the building be heated, cooled, ventilated and lit?
- Is the structural approach rational - does it allow for the flexibility we need now and into the future?
- Does the design feel like our school - does it express our identity, values and connection to place and Country?
- Has the designer demonstrated how this scheme can be delivered within budget?

If the answer to any of these is unclear, that is not a failure of the process, it is the process working as it should. In concept designs are meant to be tested, discussed and refined.

Understanding options and trade-offs

Good primary project consultants present options not just a single solution. When reviewing alternatives, understand not just what is different between options but what the educational and operational consequences of each choice are. When reviewing alternatives useful questions to ask are:

- What is the educational rationale for this design decision?
- What do we gain - and what do we give up - by choosing this option?
- How does this decision affect long-term running costs and maintenance?
- Is this decision easily reversible, or does it lock in a permanent outcome?

Signing off concept design

Before moving into schematic design, formally sign off the concept. Once endorsed, significant resources are committed to resolving the detail. If the concept is fundamentally changed after this point, much of that work is wasted and programme and cost consequences can be significant.

Sign off when you are satisfied that:

- The design responds to the brief and the design quality principles
- The spatial organisation supports the school's educational programme
- The site is being used well
- The environmental strategy is sound
- The forecast cost is realistic (i.e. it has been prepared by a quantity surveyor) and is within budgetary parameters.
- The design feels like it belongs to your school.

If you are not satisfied on any of these points, say so clearly before signing off. A difficult conversation at concept stage is far less costly than a difficult conversation during construction.



2.4

Schematic design – Where the concept is resolved into detail

Schematic design is where the broad design direction is resolved into detail.

The design team now coordinates all the building's systems — structural, environmental, hydraulic, electrical — and translates the concept into drawings and specifications sufficiently detailed to be priced and built.

Your role shifts here. The big decisions have been made. The focus now is on maintaining alignment, protecting the qualities that matter most, and catching problems before they become expensive.

It is also the stage where cost pressure most often arrives. As costs are tested against the actual market, gaps between the cost plan and the budget can emerge. How those gaps are managed -what is cut, what is protected, what is redesigned -has a direct and lasting effect on the building's performance.

What schematic design should show you

At each design review, you should be able to see:

- That the concept has been maintained -key spatial relationships, adjacencies and design intent are intact
- How the building's structural, environmental, hydraulic and electrical systems have been coordinated
- An updated cost plan tested against the current design
- Any changes from the endorsed concept, clearly identified and explained
- That the design is progressing toward a level of detail sufficient for documentation and tender

If changes have been made without clear explanation or formal documentation, it is a good idea to raise this promptly.

Useful questions

- Are the key spatial relationships from the concept design maintained?
- Has anything changed since the endorsed concept — and if so, what and why?
- What does the current cost plan show, and where is pressure emerging?
- Have any specification changes been proposed — and what are the educational and whole-of-life consequences?
- Is the Design Intent Document being respected?

Options and trade-offs

At schematic design, options typically arise not from design alternatives -as in concept stage -but because of cost and buildability considerations. Some trade-offs are advantageous. Others may compromise educational performance in ways that are not immediately obvious. Before accepting changes ask:

- What specifically is being removed or changed?
- What is the educational consequence of this change?
- What is the whole-of-life cost consequence — will this save money now but cost more to maintain or operate over time?
- Does this change affect the building's Function, Quality or Contribution as defined in the brief?
- Is there an alternative way to achieve the same without compromising quality?

If a proposed change compromises something explicitly named as a priority in the brief, that is a conversation that needs to happen at the right level of authority.

Watch for these - the most common ways quality erodes at this stage:

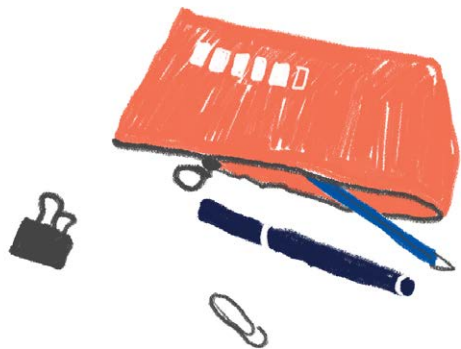
- Acoustic separation between spaces reduced to save on partition costs
- Ceiling heights lowered to reduce structural costs
- Glazing areas reduced to save on façade costs - affecting daylighting and connection to landscape
- Covered outdoor areas removed as a scope reduction
- Material specifications substituted for cheaper alternatives that will perform less well over time
- Flexibility designed out - spaces becoming more fixed and less adaptable than the brief required
- Sustainability features cut - solar panels, water harvesting, passive ventilation strategies

Each may seem minor in isolation. Collectively they can produce a building that is significantly less than what was briefed for.

Signing off

Before moving from schematic design into documentation, confirm that the developed design reflects the endorsed concept and remains aligned with the brief. Sign off when you are satisfied that:

- The developed design is consistent with the endorsed concept
- Key spatial relationships, quality features and design intent have been maintained
- The cost plan is realistic and reflects the developed design
- All outstanding concerns have been raised, discussed and resolved
- Any changes from the endorsed concept are documented and understood
- If unresolved concerns remain, address them before authorising documentation to proceed.



2.5

Develop drawings and tender – Ready to build

This is where design intent is translated into instructions a builder can price and construct.

This is the final step of the design stage, where the ideas and decisions agreed at schematic sign-off (see 2.4) are translated into detailed construction drawings, specifications and contract documentation. These are the instructions that tell a builder exactly what to build, to what standard, and at what cost.

Once this documentation is complete, the project goes to the market for pricing, and the outcome is a construction contract your school signs.

It is normal for this stage to feel highly technical.

Drawings become dense, specifications can run to hundreds of pages, and the language shifts from design ideas to construction detail. You do not need to become an expert in reading all of this. What matters is that you feel able to ask questions, however basic, and receive clear advice from your team until you understand what is being proposed and why.

A good design team will welcome this, and can explain a plan or specification in plain terms — for example through a walk-through, a model or a 3D visualisation, rather than relying on drawings alone.

Who helps in this phase

Your project manager, quantity surveyor, architect and lawyer are key collaborators at this stage. On smaller projects some of these roles may overlap — see 1.6 for how your team is typically structured.

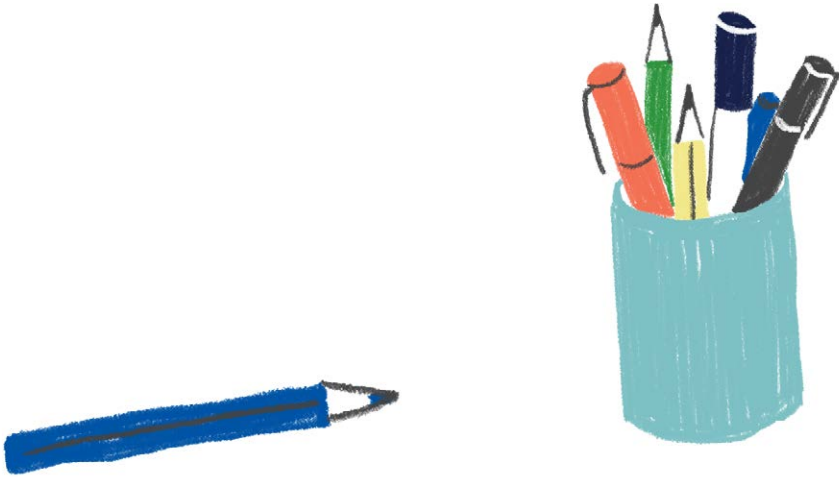
Role	Typical contribution
Quantity surveyor	Checks that the documentation is complete and realistically priced, reviews tenders line by line, and flags provisional sums, gaps or latent conditions.
Project manager	Typically runs the tender process for you — preparing the tender list, managing timelines, and coordinating the design team's sign-off on the documentation package.
Architect / lead consultant	Makes sure the drawings and specifications from every discipline are coordinated, consistent and true to the brief.
Lawyer	Reviews the building contract before it is signed -including the contract sum, programme and variation process - particularly wherever standard terms have been adapted for your project.

Useful questions

- Does the documentation still reflect your brief and design quality priorities from Stage 01?
- Which builders are on the tender list, and do they have relevant experience with projects of similar scale in an operating school? Ask to see past work and speak to previous clients.
- How will tenders be judged? Typically this is based on experience, capacity and references, not price alone — the cheapest tender is rarely the best value over the life of the building.
- Have any changes been made to the design since schematic sign-off, and if so, why?
- Is the documentation complete enough to support a fixed-price tender, without extensive further instruction during construction?
- Do we understand why tender prices have come in where they have — for example, above, below or in line with the cost plan?
- Has the BGA funding application been submitted, with funding confirmed, before we commit to a contract?
- Have we sought legal and project management advice on the building contract before it is signed?

You do not need to feel confident reading drawings and specifications to be a good client at this stage. You need to feel confident asking questions until you understand what you are about to commit to, and confident in your team's answers.

For detailed guidance on running a compliant and effective tender process, refer to the QIS BGA Procurement Guidelines.



Documentation -
What to expect

This following table has been developed to help explain the diverse types of visual documentation you can expect from your design team, across the concept and schematic design stages of a project.

Things to think about
Expect more technical detail as the project progresses - Documentation moves from loose and exploratory at concept design to more precise at schematic design.

Match the format to the audience - Renders, walkthroughs and physical models work well for board and community presentations, whereas plans and diagrams are usually suitable for working design review.

2.3 Concept Design

Documentation type	What it typically shows	Why it's useful	How it can typically be presented
Concept sketches & diagrams	Early hand-drawn or digital diagrams showing spatial ideas and site strategies.	Show early ideas, design logic and rationale before the form is fixed and detail developed.	Presentation deck, design report or in workshops.
Site & massing diagrams	How the building sits on the site –its orientation, points of access, relationship to existing buildings and landscape.	Explore the design response to site opportunities and constraints.	2D site plans, often supported with simple 3D diagrams.
Concept floor plans	2D drawings showing the arrangement of spaces, entries and circulation.	Explore and test options for spatial organisation -what's next to what, and why.	Printed or digital plan drawings, not construction detail.
3D massing model	A simplified digital 3D model showing the building's overall form and scale, without detail.	Helps with the understanding of scale, height and the visual impression of the building from key viewpoints.	3D views or a short digital walkthrough.
Renders (Computer Generated Images)	Photorealistic computer-generated images showing proposed materials, light and character.	Tests whether the design 'feels like' your school -useful for community communication.	Still images, usually in a presentation or report.
Fly-through / walkthrough	A moving, often narrated digital tour through the proposed building or spaces.	Helps non-technical audiences understand how it will feel to move through the building.	Video or an interactive on-screen tour.
Physical or 3D-printed model	A physical scale model of the building and/or site.	Useful for community engagement and testing scale and site relationships.	Physical model, often displayed at a school event or meeting.

2.4 Schematic Design

Documentation type	What it typically shows	Why it's useful	How it can typically be presented
Coordinated CAD drawings	Detailed technical drawings showing how structural, mechanical, electrical and hydraulic systems have been coordinated.	Confirm the design is technically resolved and buildable, not just conceptually sound.	Scaled technical drawing sets, usually PDF or printed.
Sections & elevations	Vertical 'cut-through' drawings showing building height, internal levels and external appearance.	Show what the building will look like from outside and how spaces connect vertically.	Scaled drawings, typically presented alongside plans.
Updated renders & materials board	Refined visuals and a curated set of samples -colours, textures and finishes –to reflect the intended resolved design.	Confirm nothing has been lost in translation from concept to schematic and supports the testing of finishes.	Still images plus a physical or digital sample board.

2.5 Tender

Documentation type	What it typically shows	Why it's useful	How it can typically be presented
Final construction drawing set	Fully coordinated, dimensioned drawings across disciplines, drawn to a level of detail sufficient to build from.	Shows visually that the design is complete.	A numbered, dated drawing register, usually issued as a PDF or printed set.
Finalised materials & finishes sample board	The confirmed palette of materials, colours, textures and finishes, locked in from the options tested at schematic design.	Lets you see and potentially touch what will be built, removing ambiguity before it is locked into the contract.	A physical sample board, or a curated set of material images.
Construction staging & site logistics diagrams	Plans showing how the site will be staged, accessed and separated from the operating school during construction. On BIM-enabled projects, this can extend to a 4D model that visually sequences the build over time.	Helps schools visualise and plan for the practical realities of building on a live campus, before construction starts.	Simple site plans or diagrams, often shared with staff, students and the community ahead of works starting.
Building Information Modeling/ Management (BIM)	A single, information-rich 3D model combining architectural, structural and services design, used to check all systems physically fit together before construction starts.	Identifies and resolves clashes between systems - for example, a duct running through a structural beam -on screen.	An interactive 3D model, viewed together with your design team, or extracted as reports and coordinated drawings.
Virtual reality (VR) walkthrough	An immersive, headset-based walkthrough of the coordinated model, giving a life-size sense of scale and spatial experience.	A final, check of scale and layout. Useful for non-technical stakeholders and board sign-off.	A VR headset session, or a simplified screen-based version.
Final renders / community visuals	Refined, photorealistic images of the completed design.	Useful for confirming the design one last time, and for sharing with your board, community or funders. .	Still images, typically used in board papers, newsletters or fundraising material.

A note on BIM and VR
Not every school project will use these. Their use tends to scale with the size and complexity of the project -more likely on large new buildings, less likely on a smaller upgrade or refurbishment. If your project doesn't use BIM, the same coordination checking between architectural, structural and services drawings still happens, typically by the design team overlaying and cross-checking 2D drawings by hand instead of in a single 3D model. You can ask your design team which approach they are using.

Stage 02

Checklist

Understanding the design process

2.1 How the design process works

Have we:

- ☐ Understood the key stages and decisions to be made through the design process?
- ☐ Confirmed where a BGA funding application sits within our project timeline, if applicable, and what evidence it requires?
- ☐ Briefed our design team early on BGA documentation requirements, to avoid delays or rework at the funding submission stage?
- ☐ Confirmed with our design team which decisions will be locked in at each stage, and when we need to respond by?

2.2 Know when and how to engage

Have we:

- ☐ Committed to attending and actively participating in every design review, not just the initial concept presentation?
- ☐ Agreed a process, internally and with our design team, for discussing concerns as soon as they arise, rather than waiting for the next scheduled review?
- ☐ Confirmed who is responsible for maintaining continuity of engagement across the whole design process?
- ☐ Agreed how we will respond when a trade-off is required?

Stage 02

Checklist

Navigating the design stages

2.3 Concept Design

Have we:

- ☐ Reviewed the concept design against our brief and design quality principles?
- ☐ Confirmed that the spatial organisation supports our educational programme?
- ☐ Satisfied ourselves that the site is being used well?
- ☐ Understood the environmental strategy - ventilation, daylighting, thermal comfort?
- ☐ Confirmed the structural approach - for example column spacing and spans, and floor to ceiling heights - support the flexibility to reconfigure or adapt spaces as teaching practices and curriculum requirements evolve?
- ☐ Assessed whether the design expresses our school's identity, values and sense of place?
- ☐ Reviewed the cost plan and confirmed the concept is achievable within budget?
- ☐ Formally endorsed the concept design before authorising design development to proceed?

2.4 Schematic design

Have we:

- ☐ Attended all design review meetings and reviewed meeting minutes for accuracy?
- ☐ Confirmed key spatial relationships from the concept design are maintained?
- ☐ Reviewed all cost plan updates and understood where pressure is emerging?
- ☐ Requested clear explanations of any specification changes and their consequences?
- ☐ Assessed all proposed cost reductions against the brief and design quality principles?
- ☐ Ensured any changes to scope, specification or programme are formally documented?
- ☐ Confirmed the Design Intent Document is being respected?
- ☐ Raised any unresolved concerns before authorising documentation to proceed?

2.5 Documentation and tender

Have we:

- ☐ Confirmed all consultant disciplines have coordinated their drawings and signed off on the documentation package?
- ☐ Reviewed all specification documents and confirmed they are consistent with the drawings and the brief?
- ☐ Confirmed latent conditions have been identified and addressed?
- ☐ Minimised and clearly identified all provisional sums?
- ☐ Confirmed documentation is sufficient to obtain a fixed-price tender?
- ☐ Reviewed the tender list and confirmed all tenderers have relevant school project experience?
- ☐ Assessed tenders against experience, capacity and references - not price alone?
- ☐ Understood why tender prices have come in where they have?
- ☐ Confirmed the BGA funding application has been submitted and funding confirmed?
- ☐ Sought legal and project management advice before entering the construction contract?
- ☐ Confirmed the contract sum, programme and variation process are clearly understood and agreed?

For more information on tendering, please refer to the QIS BGA procurement guidelines.

3

Delivery

From drawings to built reality.
The focus now is on ensuring
that what was agreed is what
gets built.

Overview

Construction is the phase where risk is highest and a school's direct influence is most constrained. Design intent has been formalised in documentation and contracts. The decisions that shape the building's character, quality and educational performance have largely been made.

Stage 3 Steps

Navigating the delivery stages

- 3.1 Understand roles and responsibilities
- 3.2 Maintain oversight
- 3.3 Communicate with clarity and confidence
- 3.4 Prepare for ownership

Navigating the delivery phase

Delivery is the phase where the school's role changes most significantly.

In definition, you set direction. In design, ideas were explored and tested. In delivery, your role is governance, maintaining the authority, oversight and accountability to ensure what was agreed is what gets built, and that any changes are properly assessed and authorised before they happen.

This requires less creative input and more disciplined oversight. The professional team manages the construction process. Your role is to maintain clarity about what has been agreed, ensure that any changes are properly assessed and authorised before they happen, and keep the project connected to its original purpose when pressure to compromise arrives.

Construction in a live school environment adds a further layer of complexity. Managing the safety, continuity and community expectations of a school that is operating while building is underway requires deliberate planning, clear communication and strong site governance. All of which need to be established before the work begins.

Three habits that support effective participation during construction:

- Read everything you receive from the project team
- Ask questions when something is unclear
- Raise concerns promptly.

If necessary seek specific subject matter expert advice

3.1

Understand roles and responsibilities

What governance means in practice

Governance is the framework of authority, oversight and accountability your school maintains throughout construction. Ensuring the right decisions are made by the right people at the right time.

What it means in practice	
Decision authority	Knowing who can approve what and ensuring decisions are made at the right level. Variations, scope changes and programme adjustments all require clear authorisation.
Information flow	Receiving timely, accurate reporting from the project team, including cost reports, programme updates, site meeting minutes, and reading them carefully enough to ask informed questions.
Quality oversight	Maintaining visibility of what is being built and whether it reflects the agreed documentation. This does not mean the school is on site every day, it simply means the right questions are being asked at the right time.
Record keeping	Maintaining a clear record of all decisions, variations and communications throughout the build. If a dispute arises, the quality of your records is your protection.



The construction team and their roles

Understanding who does what during construction helps prevent confusion and ensures decisions involve the right people:

Who	What they do during construction
Builder / Contractor	Constructs the building in accordance with the documentation. Typically, responsible for site safety, programme management, subcontractor coordination and quality of construction.
Super-intendent	Administers the construction contract on behalf of the school. Typically, the architect or project manager. Assesses variations, certifies payments and manages the contract.
Project Manager	Manages the school's interests throughout construction -programme, cost, reporting, variations and communication with the builder. The school's primary point of contact.
Architect	Monitors design intent during construction, responds to requests for information from the builder, and reviews drawings and material samples.
Quantity Surveyor	Manages cost reporting, assesses variation claims and certifies progress payments. The school's independent financial check on the construction process.
Note on the team	These roles don't always mean five separate people. On smaller or less complex projects, your architect may also act as Superintendent, and your project manager's responsibilities may overlap with the Superintendent's too. What matters is not how many people are involved, but that each key activity -construction, contract administration, school representation, design oversight and financial checks -is clearly assigned to someone, so nothing falls through the gaps

3.2

Maintain oversight

Active oversight during construction does not mean the school is managing the build. It means the school is informed and engaged enough to notice when something is not right and respond before it becomes a problem.

Make the most of site meetings

Regular site meetings are the primary mechanism for school oversight during construction. They are where the project's progress is reported, problems are surfaced and decisions are made. Consistent attendance, careful reading of minutes and prepared questions are the habits that make site meetings productive rather than routine.

Understanding variations and their impact

Variations are inevitable. They arise from latent conditions, design coordination issues, school-requested changes and builder claims. What matters is how they are managed. Each variation should be assessed for its cost, programme and quality implications before approval, and its cumulative effect on the budget tracked throughout the build. A single variation may seem minor. Collectively they are one of the most common causes of cost overrun and design intent erosion on school projects.

Common pressures during construction

Construction is rarely straightforward – You are likely to experience pressures on time, cost, design intent and relationships. Programme delays, cost over runs, coordination problems create pressure and can generate variations. Understanding that these pressures are not failures of the project but normal features of construction and its complexity is the first step to managing them well. Clear governance structures, documented decisions and consistent communication are the most effective mechanisms for management.

Common pressure points

Time
Programme delays often lead to pressure to reduce quality or scope to recover time. Resist any scope reduction that compromises educational performance without a proper assessment of consequences.

Cost
Cost overruns surface during construction, particularly where documentation was incomplete. Every cost increase should be assessed against the contingency and the overall budget before approval, and contingency status, what has been drawn down, on what, and how much remains, should be reported to the Board at every stage gate.

Change
Site conditions, latent issues and coordination problems generate variations. Every variation should be formally assessed and documented before work proceeds.

Scope creep
The gradual addition of items that individually seem minor but collectively add significant cost is one of the most common causes of budget overrun. Every variation should be evaluated not just on its individual merit but on its cumulative effect on the project budget and design intent.

Relationships
Pressure and stress can generate adversarial dynamics between builder, architect and client. Clear governance structures, documented decisions and consistent communication are the best defence against relationship breakdown.

3.3

Communicate with clarity and confidence

Construction in a live school environment is a challenge. A building site operating alongside classrooms, playgrounds and a full school programme requires deliberate, proactive communication, not reactive damage control. The schools that manage this best treat community communication as a project management responsibility, not a public relations exercise. They plan it before construction begins, resource it appropriately, and maintain it consistently throughout the build -including when things go wrong.

Establish your communication framework before construction begins

Before work begins, agree who will be the school's nominated point of contact, what the regular communication rhythm will be, how disruptions and unexpected events will be communicated, and how neighbours and the local community will be kept informed. Document these agreements before construction starts.

Align the programme with the school calendar

One of the most important aspects of construction in a live school environment is the alignment of the construction programme with the school calendar. A programme that has not been developed with the school year in mind will create avoidable disruption to learning, to events, to community activities and to the daily operation of the school. Where possible the noisiest and most disruptive works should be planned for school holidays. Critical periods -exams, major events, enrolment days -need to be identified and protected before construction begins.



What to do when the unexpected happens

Unexpected events during construction are normal. Latent conditions, weather delays, material lead time blowouts, variation disputes and community concerns are all features of construction. What distinguishes schools that manage these well is not that they avoid problems it is that they respond to them with clarity, honesty and speed. Communicating early, being specific about what has happened and what is being done, and documenting decisions carefully are strategies that can protect both the project and the school's relationship with its community.

Having a prepared communication response to common construction events, such as delays, noise complaints, safety incidents, and latent conditions, is an effective strategy to ensure your community are informed effectively and know what is happening and what is being done about it.

Use construction as a community learning opportunity

Construction offers a genuine opportunity to engage the school community in the process of shaping their environment. Schools that use construction well as a learning experience report stronger community ownership of the completed building. Regular project updates, site visits for senior students where safe, integration into curriculum and recognition of the construction team's contribution all contribute to this.

3.4

Prepare for ownership

The transition from construction to ownership and use of a building is a process that should begin months before a building is complete.

The school community -students, teachers, facilities staff, cleaners, administrators -need time to understand the new building, learn how it works, and develop patterns of use that will allow it to perform as it was designed to.

From construction to ownership

When	Things to do
Mid-construction	Begin transition planning. Identify who will manage the building operationally, plan staff induction, confirm building systems will be commissioned and tested.
Practical completion	Receive the complete handover package including defects inspection report, commissioning certificates, as-built drawings, O&M manuals, warranties, and confirmation that insurance, maintenance and cleaning contracts are in place.
First weeks	Keep a record of questions staff and students ask.
8 weeks post moving in	Facilities review -check building systems and operational patterns are settling as intended
12 months post moving in	Post-occupancy evaluation -assess educational and spatial performance against the original brief (see Stage 04).

Begin transition planning during construction

From the middle of the construction programme, the school should begin preparing the community for occupation — identifying who will manage the building operationally, planning staff induction, preparing students and staff for the change, and confirming that building systems have been commissioned and tested. Early involvement of facilities staff and key teaching staff before occupation is finalised can still influence fitout and commissioning decisions.

Know what good handover requires

At practical completion, the school should receive a complete handover package -defects inspection report, commissioning certificates, as-built drawings, operation and maintenance manuals, warranties and guarantees, and confirmation that all insurance, maintenance and cleaning contracts are in place. The defects liability period and notification process should be clearly agreed and understood before the builder leaves site.

Close the operational gap

Buildings that are technically complete but operationally unfamiliar are consistently under-used in their first months. Teachers default to familiar patterns. Facilities staff manage systems conservatively. The building's full potential -the flexibility, the environmental performance, the spatial relationships that were designed into it -take time to become familiar. A structured staff induction, eight-week facilities review and a planned 12-month post-occupancy evaluation to assess educational and spatial performance against the original brief are the tools that close this gap (see Stage 04).

Use construction as a learning experience

One of the most underutilised opportunities in school capital projects is the construction phase itself -as a source of organisational learning that strengthens every future project. Schools that treat delivery as a learning experience consistently report stronger outcomes over time. Encouraging the project team and facilities manager to document key decisions, variations, surprises and lessons during construction generates the most valuable input to the post-occupancy evaluation and to the brief for the next project.

Transition to ownership as the close of the learning loop

The transition to ownership is not the end of the project, it is the beginning of the evaluation phase. Everything the school has learned during definition, design and delivery is about to be tested by the people who use the building every day. The questions staff and students ask in the first weeks of occupation and use -why is this space like this, how does this system work, why can't we do this here -are the early evidence base of the post-occupancy evaluation. Capture them early. They are the most honest and most useful when they are gathered fresh.

Stage 03 Checklist

This checklist covers the key actions across each of the four areas of delivery. It is not exhaustive but offers a practical prompt.

Navigating the delivery stages

3.1 Understood roles and responsibilities

Have we:

- ☐ Confirmed our governance structure is active and understood by all project team members?
- ☐ Named a project sponsor with clear day-to-day authority and accountability during construction?
- ☐ Established a regular site meeting schedule with circulated minutes?
- ☐ Confirmed the variation approval process and documented thresholds?
- ☐ Established a record-keeping system for decisions, variations and communications?
- ☐ Briefed the facilities manager on their role during construction?

3.2 Maintained oversight

- ☐ Attended all site meetings and reviewed minutes for accuracy?
- ☐ Tracked all variations and their cumulative effect on budget and design intent?
- ☐ Confirmed that each variation has been assessed against the Design Intent Document before approval?
- ☐ Reviewed cost reports at each update and understood where the budget stands?
- ☐ Visited the site at key construction milestones?
- ☐ Confirmed with the superintendent that construction quality meets specification?
- ☐ Raised all concerns promptly through the project manager rather than directly with the builder?
- ☐ Maintained a clear record of all decisions and communications?

3.3 Communicated with clarity and confidence

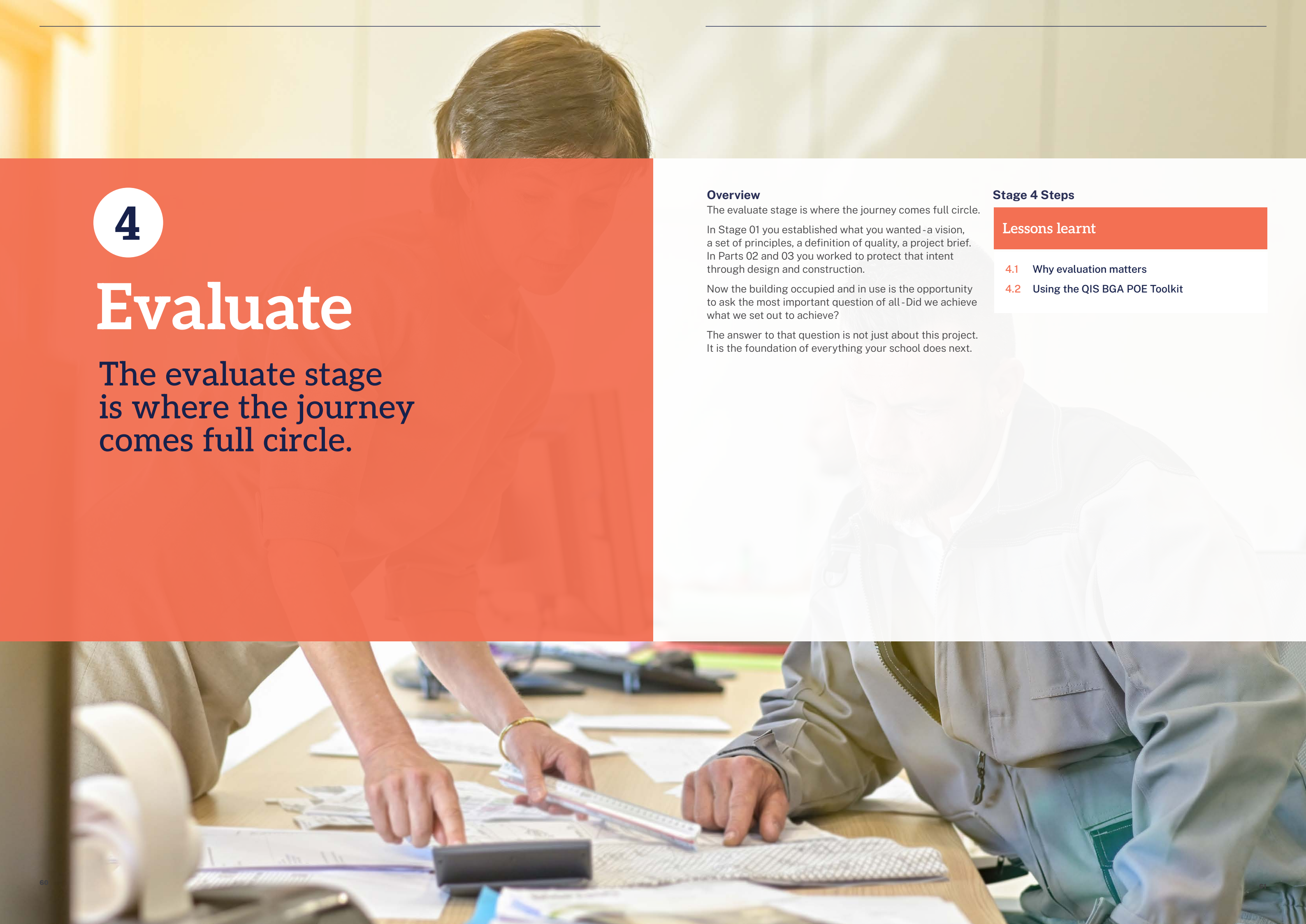
- ☐ Established a communication framework before construction began — contact, rhythm, escalation process?
- ☐ Aligned the construction programme with the school calendar and protected critical periods?

- ☐ Identified spaces and access routes that must remain available and documented these in the site management plan?
- ☐ Communicated the start of construction and what to expect to the full school community?
- ☐ Established a process for communicating disruptions and unexpected events promptly and honestly?
- ☐ Kept neighbours and the local community informed of works that affect them?
- ☐ Considered how students can be engaged with the construction process as a learning opportunity?
- ☐ Maintained consistent communication throughout the build — not just at the beginning and end?

3.4 Prepared for ownership

- ☐ Identified who will manage the building operationally and ensured they have been involved in the project?
- ☐ Considered whether key teaching staff can experience and provide feedback on spaces before occupation is finalised?
- ☐ Planned and delivered staff induction into the new building before occupation?
- ☐ Prepared students and the school community for the change?
- ☐ Confirmed that all building systems have been commissioned and independently tested?
- ☐ Received a full set of as-built drawings, operation and maintenance manuals, warranties and guarantees?
- ☐ Confirmed the defects liability period and notification process with the builder?
- ☐ Ensured all insurance, maintenance and cleaning contracts are in place?
- ☐ Established a feedback mechanism for the first term of occupation?
- ☐ Planned an eight-week facilities review?
- ☐ Planned a 12-month post-occupancy evaluation in accordance with Stage 04 and the QIS BGA POE Guide?





4

Evaluate

The evaluate stage is where the journey comes full circle.

Overview

The evaluate stage is where the journey comes full circle.

In Stage 01 you established what you wanted - a vision, a set of principles, a definition of quality, a project brief. In Parts 02 and 03 you worked to protect that intent through design and construction.

Now the building occupied and in use is the opportunity to ask the most important question of all - Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?

The answer to that question is not just about this project. It is the foundation of everything your school does next.

Stage 4 Steps

Lessons learnt

4.1 Why evaluation matters

4.2 Using the QIS BGA POE Toolkit

4.1
Why evaluation matters

Post-occupancy evaluation is one of the most consistently under invested activities.

Buildings are completed, occupied and used but rarely assessed in a structured way against the intent that drove their design. The lessons that would make the next project better are rarely captured. This is a significant missed opportunity.

The post-occupancy evaluation process offers a valuable tool to help schools and their project teams understand more clearly what works, what doesn't, and why. Over time, it helps schools become better clients, write better briefs, ask better questions of their design teams and make better decisions under cost pressure.

Evaluation also closes the Priorities to Place Blueprint - the framework introduced in Stage 01 (page no. 21). The blueprint begins with attitude and values and ends with a built project. Evaluation asks whether the built project genuinely expresses those values — and if not, what needs to change.

What evaluation tells you
During design and construction, feedback is filtered through the professional team. During evaluation, you hear directly from the people who use the building every day - students, teachers, facilities staff. Their experience is the most honest measure of whether the brief was achieved, whether the spaces support teaching and learning as intended, whether the building performs acoustically and environmentally, and whether it feels like it belongs to the school community.

When to evaluate
The QIS BGA POE Toolkit identifies three key evaluation moments. The first is recommended within one month of occupation - capturing early lessons from the design and delivery process while the experience is fresh. The second and third occur at least twelve months after occupation - once the building has been through a full school year and patterns of use are established.

Do not wait until problems arise to evaluate. A structured evaluation at twelve months will surface issues that can still be addressed and generate insights that are most valuable when they are captured early.



4.2
Using the QIS BGA POE Toolkit

QIS BGA has developed a dedicated Post Occupancy Evaluation Toolkit for Schools to support schools through the evaluation process.

The toolkit is practical, accessible and self-guided — it does not require external expertise to use, though schools may choose to engage their design team or project manager in the process.

The toolkit contains three parts, each designed for a specific evaluation moment and purpose:

Part	Purpose	When
Part 1 Early lessons learnt: Design and delivery	Captures insights and lessons from the design and delivery process — from the perspectives of both the school as client and the design and delivery team.	Within one month of occupation
Part 2 Evaluating educational contribution	Evaluates how effectively the building supports its intended educational purpose, from the perspective of its users — students, teachers and staff.	At least twelve months after occupation
Part 3 Technical performance	Evaluates the technical, operational and functional performance of the building against design intent.	At least twelve months after occupation

Using evaluation findings to strengthen the next project

The most important output of any post-occupancy evaluation is not a report, it is a better brief for the next project.

When the evaluation is complete, return to the original project brief and design quality principles. Ask:

- Where did the building deliver on what we asked for?
- Where did it fall short?
- What do we now know about Function, Quality and Contribution that we didn't know when we started?

The answers to these questions become the opening pages of your next brief.

The Priorities to Place Blueprint begins again - informed this time by direct experience of what it means to translate purpose into place.

POE Toolkit

Click here to view the online QISBGA POE toolkit

Stage 04

Checklist

Lessons learnt

This checklist covers key actions across the evaluation stage.

As a team ask, have we:

- ☐ Planned and completed Part 1 early lessons learnt evaluation within one month of occupation?
- ☐ Identified a POE Champion within the school to lead the twelve-month evaluation?
- ☐ Downloaded and familiarised ourselves with the QIS BGA POE Toolkit?
- ☐ Briefed participants — students, teachers, facilities staff — on the evaluation process and their role in it?
- ☐ Completed Part 2 educational contribution evaluation at twelve months?
- ☐ Documented findings in a structured report and shared with the school board and leadership team?
- ☐ Returned to the Design Intent Document and original brief to assess where intent was achieved and where it was not?
- ☐ Identified the key lessons for the next project brief?
- ☐ Discussed the opportunity to undertake a review of the technical performance of your completed project, with the key professionals in your project delivery team, at least 12 months post activation.
- ☐ Confirmed whether any issues identified in the evaluation fall within the defects liability period and notified the builder accordingly?
- ☐ Committed to repeating the evaluation process for future projects?



A closing note

The development and delivery journey for built projects is a complex one. It involves significant financial commitment, complex professional relationships, competing pressures and decisions that will shape the experience of students and staff for decades. The purpose of this guide is not to make that complexity disappear. It is to ensure that when faced with complexity your school is equipped to navigate it with clarity, confidence and purpose.

Every section of this guide has been informed by the experiences of the QIS BGA team, built environment professionals and Queensland independent school leaders who gave their time, shared their knowledge. The questions it asks and the tools it provides have all been informed by insights from these lived experiences.

Use this guide and return to it.

- Share it with your board, your business manager, your incoming principal, your design and construction team.
- And when your building is complete and the students' and educators are using it, evaluate the project honestly, capture what you learned, and carry it forward to inform new projects.
- Shaping the built environment is not just a project to be managed it is a journey of influence, learning and discovery.
- The lessons learnt from every project can be used to make the next one better.

The QIS BGA suite of resources is designed to support schools at every stage of this cycle. For the full suite of resources, visit www.bga.qld.edu.au



Appendix

Appendix A

About the development of this guide

The way buildings are designed and constructed has profound implications for the health and wellbeing of their occupants and for the natural environment. Buildings are major contributors to climate change, through both their construction and operation, and they can strengthen or undermine community cohesion and shape the behaviours of those who inhabit them.

As part of the continued development of learning resources that support participatory, capable school clients, QIS BGA embarked at the start of 2025 on the second stage of this journey, following on from the production of its Master Plan Guide, Sustainability and Post Occupancy Evaluation Toolkits. This next stage extended that same collaborative process to design quality and delivery. Once again drawing on the experience of school leaders, business managers and built environment professionals to ground the guide in the realities of school capital projects in Queensland.

Our Journey

The following table maps out the simple five-step process adopted to first understand and then develop a resource to support schools as they navigate the complex capital project design and delivery process:

What	Why
Lessons learnt - personal experiences and case study retrospectives	- Explore participants' individual perspectives and experiences of the design delivery process. - Discuss as a group the positive and negative experiences.
Support school needs — what is the ideal process to deliver enhanced value for schools?	Explore participants' collective perspective on an ideal process to support elevated project value and enhanced school involvement in the delivery of design quality and the project process.
Define design quality	Explore participants' individual perspectives on what design quality is and how we can support schools to define it for their projects.
Achieve design quality in delivery	Explore participants' collective perspective on how schools can achieve and support quality through project delivery.
Define the essential toolkit resources for schools	Focus on confirming how information can be best shared with schools through resources, checklists and cheat sheets at critical points in the project process.



Key findings - Issues

Across the workshops, a number of key and consistent themes emerged as recurring points of difficulty and opportunity for schools:

- Many projects begin without enough upfront site or technical information, which drives cost, time and quality risks later on. A problem compounded by limited clarity, among both schools and consultants, about what the BGA can fund and when.
- Schools often struggle to prepare a robust brief or recognise its value as a living project management tool, and “design quality” itself is inconsistently understood, too often associated with aesthetics or cost rather than function, performance or user experience.
- Assembling and managing the right project team is a further challenge, with schools frequently lacking the experience to select and manage consultants, which can lead to mismatched skills or poor collaboration.
- Time pressures, unrealistic expectations and governance gaps add to the strain.
- The risk that this guide duplicates content already covered in the Master Plan Guide or Sustainability Toolkit, so integration with existing BGA resources matters, as does ensuring the resource itself is usable, updatable and accessible for all schools.
- Schools often ‘restart’ with each new project rather than building on what they have learned before - underscoring the need for a framework that supports ongoing learning and feedback.



Key findings - Opportunities

Enhance understanding of design and the delivery process to empower schools to protect design quality, manage risks, and get the best long-term value for their communities.

Through the workshops three key areas were identified where a guide could make the most difference for schools:

- Understanding and consistency** - Give schools practical standards and processes for effective project delivery, and a consistent language for talking about project quality.
- Funding application success** - Set out the key materials and steps schools need to prepare a BGA capital funding application, and help them identify the right time in their project journey to submit one.
- Capability and capacity** – Support stronger collaboration and communication between schools and their project teams, and build the capability of school leaders, staff and students to contribute meaningfully to the design and delivery of new facilities.

Shaping the guide

These issues and opportunities were translated into a clear set of objectives and priorities for the guides focus:

- First, define and champion design quality in a way schools can understand and own.
- Second, define the project properly from the outset. Early information and clarity matter most, and the project brief should be used as a living framework for quality and project alignment, not a static document.
- Third, get the tone right. The guide and its toolkit should be empowering rather than supervisory, offering schools and their design and delivery teams resources that align thinking, and reduce risk and effort rather than adding to compliance burden and project complexity.

The overarching objective is to set schools up for success without requiring them to become project delivery experts.

Appendix A

About the development of this guide

Workshop participants

This guide has been shaped by the knowledge, experience and generosity of a wide community of Queensland independent schools and built environment professionals.

The content of this guide emerged directly from a series of collaborative workshops undertaken as part of the QIS BGA Design Quality and Delivery Guide development programme. School leaders, business managers, architects, project managers and built environment professionals gave their time, experience and insights to test ideas, challenge assumptions and ground this guide in the realities of school capital projects in Queensland.

QIS BGA extends its sincere thanks to all who participated.

Project Team

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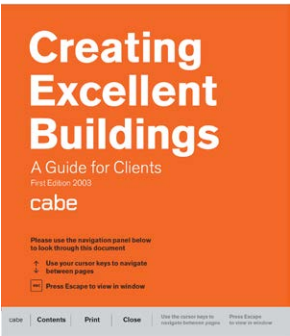
Workshop Participants

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Westpac	Kerrie-Anne Glancy
Westpac	John Robertson
Westside Christian College	Craig Schmidt
Wiley	Angela Tohl

Appendix B

Reference sources and other resources

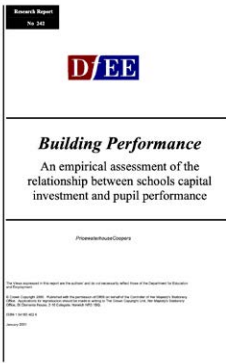
This guide draws on established research and published guidance from the following sources:



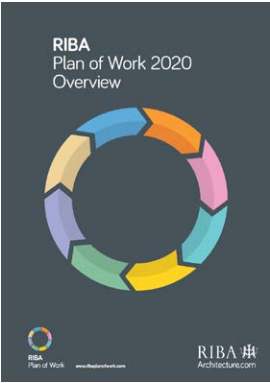
CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Creating Excellent Buildings: A Guide for Clients (2003)



Design Quality Indicator (DQI) Construction Industry Council (UK), www.dqi.org.uk - The DQI is a registered assessment tool managed by the Construction Industry Council (UK). The prompts in this guide are intended to support brief development only and are distinct from a formal DQI assessment.



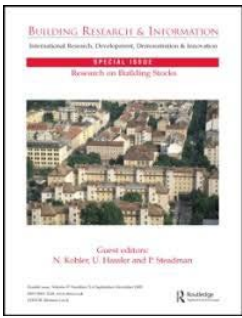
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Appendix C

Glossary of useful terms

Useful definitions of some key terms used throughout this guide.

Term	Definition
As-built drawings	Final drawings updated to show the building exactly as constructed, including any changes made during the build. Part of the handover package your school should receive at practical completion.
Commissioning	Testing a building’s systems — mechanical, electrical, hydraulic — to confirm they work as designed before the building is handed over.
Contingency	A budget reserve set aside for risks and unknowns that cannot be fully identified before construction begins. Not the same as scope — it isn’t there to fund upgrades or additions (see section 1.8).
Defects liability period	A fixed period after practical completion during which the builder remains responsible for fixing defects identified in the completed building.
DQI (Design Quality Indicator)	A registered assessment tool managed by the Construction Industry Council (UK), which this guide’s Function/Quality/Contribution framework draws on. This guide’s prompts support brief development and are distinct from a formal DQI assessment.
Fixed-price tender	A tender in which the builder commits to a set price for the works, based on complete documentation. Reduces cost uncertainty but relies on the documentation being sufficiently detailed.
Function, Quality, Contribution	This guide’s framework for defining what design quality means for your school: Function (how well a building works), Quality (how well it’s built) and Contribution (what it gives back to its users, community and place) (see section 1.4).
Latent conditions	Site or building conditions that could not reasonably have been discovered before construction began — contamination, unrecorded services, or structural issues hidden behind existing finishes, for example.

POE (Post-Occupancy Evaluation)	The structured process of assessing a completed, occupied building against the intent that shaped its design. Covered in Stage 04, supported by the QIS BGA POE Toolkit.
Practical completion	The point at which a building is complete enough for the school to take possession and begin using it, subject to any outstanding defects being resolved during the defects liability period.
Procurement	The process of engaging the professionals and contractors who will design and build your project, including how they are selected and contracted.
Provisional sums	An estimated cost allowance in a contract for work that cannot be accurately priced at tender. Should be minimised and clearly identified, as they carry cost uncertainty into construction.
Purpose to Place Blueprint	This guide’s framework for translating a school’s values and educational purpose into the vision, principles, spatial strategies and decisions that ultimately produce a built place (see section 1.2).
RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects)	A UK-based professional body for architects. Its Plan of Work is one of the industry-standard frameworks this guide’s Project Roadmap aligns with.
Spatial relationships	How different spaces connect to, sit alongside, or are positioned relative to one another -proximity, adjacency, sightlines and ease of movement between them. Good spatial relationships make a building easy and intuitive to use.
Superintendent	The party who administers the construction contract on behalf of the school, assessing variations, certifying payments and managing the contract. Often the architect or project manager (see section 3.1).
Value engineering	A cost-reduction process applied during design or delivery to remove cost without, in principle, reducing value. In practice, it can erode educational quality if changes aren’t tested against the brief and design quality principles.
Variation	A formally approved change to the scope, cost or programme of a construction contract, made after the contract has been signed.
Whole-of-life cost	The total cost of a building over its full lifetime — design, construction, operation, maintenance and eventual replacement — rather than just its upfront capital cost.

