Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

School Seismic Policy

Team:	School Design
Manager:	Director – School Design
Drafter:	Chief Advisor – Engineering and Resilience
Established:	August 2025
Last Revised:	N/A
Next Review:	August 2026

Purpose

1. The purpose of the School Seismic Policy is to enable the consistent and effective management of seismic risk in buildings across the state school property portfolio.

2. This policy provides a basis for compliance with the Building Act 2004 (including the Amendment Act 2016) and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Scope and application

3. The policy covers the management of seismic risk of school buildings, those owned (partially or fully) or leased by the Ministry of Education, including buildings under consideration of being acquired or leased for school purposes.

4. This School Seismic Policy covers the following aspects:

   a) seismic risk management of existing school buildings

   b) obtaining, updating, recording and communicating seismic information

   c) occupancy decisions relating to buildings with Low Seismic Ratings

   d) seismic requirements for the strengthening of existing school buildings

   e) seismic performance objectives and requirements for new school buildings

   f) requirements for future school property commitments.

5. The seismic risk associated with contents items is the responsibility of the school to manage under the Property Occupancy Document (POD) and is not covered by this policy.

6. Buildings where the Ministry of Education has no ownership (e.g. Board owned buildings) are excluded from this policy.

7. The application of the Policy to Public Private Partnerships and Charter Schools is dependent on existing contracts.

Policy Statement

Seismic risk management

8. Seismic risk management is ensuring seismic risk in buildings is managed effectively in a workable and proportionate way across the school property portfolio. It involves:

    i. obtaining, updating, recording and communicating seismic information for existing buildings

    ii. developing and implementing plans to manage seismic risks for existing buildings over time

    iii. Specifying seismic performance requirements for new buildings to improve the seismic resilience of the school property portfolio over time.

9. The *Seismic Risk Management Procedures for Existing School Buildings* outlines general procedures for managing seismic risk across the school property portfolio based on building seismic rating, building typology, seismic zone and planned non-seismic upgrades or interventions.

Updating seismic information

10. Seismic risk information shall be reviewed in accordance with the *Seismic Risk Management Procedures for Existing School Buildings* as part of normal asset or investment planning (e.g. 10-Year Property Plans, site-wide planning, or specific capital investment projects such as building extensions, weathertightness remediation and significant refurbishments).

11. School leadership and boards shall be informed where new or updated seismic information is obtained.

12. New or updated seismic information shall be recorded on the Ministry's asset management database.

Occupancy of existing buildings with low seismic ratings

13. Occupancy decisions relating to existing school buildings with Low Seismic Ratings shall be informed by:

    i. the 2018 Worksafe Position Statement (outlining the requirements for owners of earthquake-prone Buildings)

    ii. the July 2022 MBIE Seismic Risk Guidance for Buildings.

    An underlying premise is that very few buildings rating less than 34%NBS are not able to continue to be occupied within the timeframes set by the Building Act. The nature of the risk relates to the likelihood of a significant earthquake occurring, with the associated low probability of occurrence in any given year.

14. Where a rating is at or above 34%NBS, occupancy shall continue without further risk evaluation, unless specific engineering concerns have been raised.

15. For buildings rating less than 34%NBS, a specific Seismic Risk Evaluation and

occupancy decision-making process is to be followed, with outcomes recorded, communicated, and monitored.

16. The Ministry's occupancy decisions are informed by best practice guidelines and expert engineering risk advice from the Ministry's EAG. The EAG shall be made available to the school Leadership and Board to support their understanding of the seismic assessment and seismic risk advice.

17. Where a building has a Low Seismic Rating, or other identified structural shortcomings, the Chief Executive for School Property will make an occupancy decision on the advice of the EAG and following consultation with the school Board.

18. For buildings rated below 34%NBS, the Ministry shall provide the finalised seismic assessment to the local territorial authority following the communication of the assessments to the school and their community.

Seismic requirements for the strengthening of existing school buildings

19. Seismic upgrades are often complex, intrusive and costly. They can significantly disrupt school operations and require thoughtful planning and preferably coordination with other planned building interventions, such as refurbishments or weathertightness remediation.

20. To support informed decision-making, a range of upgrade shall be explored and documented. These options should include:

- The scope, scale and staging (where appropriate) of proposed interventions
- The expected %NBS rating outcomes
- Associated costs, timelines, and impacts on building use
- Identification of vulnerabilities addressed and those remaining

21. The Ministry does not mandate a fixed %NBS target for buildings. Instead, it requires that reasonable and proportionate strengthening be undertaken at the time of upgrade or refurbishment.

22. The only exception to this approach applies to buildings that are rated below 34%NBS, which must be strengthened to at least 34%NBS in accordance with the requirements of the Building Act 2004, and any additional recommendations outlined in the Seismic Risk Evaluation.

23. The seismic performance objectives and criteria for strengthening of existing buildings are also set out in the Designing Schools in New Zealand | Structural and Geotechnical Requirements.

Seismic performance objectives and requirements for new school buildings

24. The seismic performance objectives and criteria for new school buildings are set out in the Designing Schools in New Zealand | Structural and Geotechnical Requirements.

Future property seismic requirements

25. Prior to entering a new lease or acquisition of a building for school purposes, an

engineering review is required by the by the *Chief Advisor – Engineering and Resilience,* or *Engineering Advisory Group panel member*.

26. Seismic Assessment reports provided by a lessor or vendor shall be reviewed by the EAG to ensure the assessment:

    i. has been carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced engineer

    ii. is consistent with the latest industry guidelines (e.g. MBIE 2017 Engineering Assessment Guidelines) and subsequent amendments

    iii. provides a sufficient level of detail and confidence in the resultant %NBS rating.

27. For new acquisitions, new leases and lease renewals, buildings should have a rating of 67%NBS or above, unless it can be demonstrated that no suitable property of seismic rating greater than or equal 67%NBS is available, or is disproportionately costly, or available outside of acceptable timeframes.

28. In addition to the minimum %NBS rating for new leases, the following provisions should be included in lease agreements:

    i. a clearly defined process to follow if the seismic rating of a leased building falls below 67%NBS (either due to a change in seismic assessment guidelines, or new information about the building is obtained, or because of damage caused by a future earthquake)

    ii. determine whether the lessee has a right to terminate a lease in a building if a seismic assessment finds the leased building to have a %NBS score below that when the lease agreement was signed

    iii. a clearly defined process to determine the time frame for seismic strengthening works if they are required to meet the minimum %NBS rating outlined in the lease agreement, and arrangements to cover the costs for temporary relocation

    iv. a clearly defined and agreed-upon requirement for the lessor to commission a review of the leased building's risk profile, following any change in the national seismic assessment guidelines.

Responsibilities for the policy

29. The Chief Executive for School Property is accountable for ensuring compliance with this policy.

30. The General Manager – School Property Services is responsible for the implementation of this policy and related standards, guidance, and processes.

31. School Design is responsible for updating this policy in accordance with review timelines.

Status and review

32. This policy will be reviewed in one year then every three years thereafter, or following substantial legislative or organisational changes, including changes to the Worksafe Policy Statement or national Seismic Risk guidance.

33. The status of the policy and approvals are noted below:

	Status	Date
PPSC Consultation	Draft	16 March 2025
PPSC Approval	Final	11 June 2025
Published	Version 1	1 August 2025

Contact Information

Questions about this policy can be emailed to the School Design team using the mailbox school.design@education.govt.nz

Related Information

1. Seismic Risk Management Procedures for Existing School Buildings
2. Designing Schools in New Zealand | Structural and Geotechnical Requirements.
3. Building Act 2004
4. Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
5. WorkSafe Position Statement 2018
6. MBIE Seismic Risk Guidance for Buildings July 2022
7. BRANZ Managing Earthquake-prone Council Buildings – A Decision Framework 2021
8. MBIE Engineering Assessment Guidelines July 2017
9. Health and safety responsibilities for schools

Glossary

Importance Level	A categorisation assigned to all buildings under the NZ Building Code, related to the building occupancy and use. In general: IL3: school buildings with more than 250 occupants and buildings that may contain crowds (e.g. halls) IL2: school buildings with less than 250 occupants
%NBS	The seismic rating of a building expressed as a percentage of New Building Standard.

Low Seismic Ratings	A seismic rating below 34%NBS
Seismic Risk Evaluation	A building specific assessment comprising a technical engineering risk evaluation plus consideration of non-technical aspects and used to inform decisions relating to buildings with Low Seismic Ratings.
Seismic Assessment	There are several types of seismic assessment to establish a buildings %NBS rating: a) **Initial Seismic Assessment (ISA):** Recommended first qualitative step in the overall assessment process or as a sole method of seismic assessment for simple buildings, and in accordance with Part B of the national Seismic Assessment Guidelines. b) **Detailed Seismic Assessment (DSA):** Comprehensive quantitative assessment of the strength and deformation capability of a building in accordance with Part C of the national Seismic Assessment Guidelines. c) **Targeted Seismic Assessment (TSA):** A partial quantitative assessment of the strength and deformation capability of selected elements within a building, typically used to modify an ISA or to update an older DSA and generally carried out in accordance with Part C of The Guidelines.