School Evaluation of Physical Environment (SEPE): Frequently Asked Questions

This is a resource for Principals completing SEPE as part of their 10 Year Property Plans (10YPP).

1. **What is SEPE?**
   SEPE is an evaluation tool, in the form of a questionnaire, to assess how well the physical environment of a school supports its teaching and learning (fitness for purpose).

2. **What's the main difference between SEPE and ILEAT?**
   SEPE asks schools to describe their education vision and daily practice and then assess how well their buildings and site support them. (Research shows that the best physical environments for education provide good acoustics, lighting, thermal comfort and indoor air quality, and are aligned to the school's teaching and learning approaches.)

3. **Why is it important?**
   Alignment between teaching and learning approaches and the physical learning environment can positively impact learning outcomes, so it's important to check this at each school, and identify where there can be improvements.

4. **Is it compulsory?**
   All schools are required to complete SEPE early in the 10 Year Property Plan (10YPP) process. The information collected will help inform your plan. Alongside condition assessment data, SEPE will help prioritise projects so that 5 Year Agreement funding is spent effectively.

5. **When do I have to start using it?**
   SEPE will be rolled out to all schools from 1 July 2020. You will be required to complete SEPE early in your 10YPP planning process.

6. **Who is responsible for completing SEPE?**
   The principal is expected to approve the final version that gets submitted, but how each question gets answered is up to each school. At some schools, the principal will be able to answer every question from their desk, while at others it will make more sense to discuss answers with your teaching team, or make Heads of Departments responsible for answering the relevant block questions.

   Throughout the process, you will be able to speak to your Property Advisor for advice.

7. **How will I know how to complete it?**
   A training module will be made available on the Ministry's Learning Management System. This is a resource about SEPE for school leaders, Ministry-engaged consultants and Property Advisors and will take you through the process of completing the template.

8. **How do I fill it out?**
   SEPE has three sections and it's important to complete each one. The first section is about your school's educational vision and what that looks like in practise. This section is free text, so you can tell us in your own words, or copy and paste from existing documents that describe this.

Next up there is a section of 14 questions about the whole school site. These questions should be answered with the whole site in mind.

The final section is about each block, or building, on the site. There are ten questions for each block.

Each question in the site and block sections asks you to pick a rating from one to five (see key below for more info). There is also space to comment if you want to explain your answer. It is encouraged that you provide some explanation for lower scores, as this information will be valuable when it comes to planning projects or other improvements.

Key:

1. The item described in the question *does not support* your school's vision for education, and desired practices.

2. The item described in the question *slightly supports* your school's vision for education, and desired practices.

3. The item described in the question *moderately supports* your school's vision for education, and desired practices, but there is room for improvement.

4. The item described in the question *mostly supports* your school's vision for education, and desired practices.

5. The item described in the question *supports* your school's vision for education, and desired practices.

The column to the right of each question is there for you to provide more detail about the number you choose. You don't have to do this for 4s and 5s, but where you pick a lower number, please explain how that item is failing to support your educational vision and practices.

You can also use this column to explain different items within the question, or differences across the site/block.

9. **What if I have a large block where some areas perform well and others do not?**
Where storeys, rooms, or teaching styles differ within one block, it can be hard to assign scores for the whole block e.g. a 2-storey block that can get very hot upstairs but is comfortable on the ground floor; a block occupied by two departments that have very different views on pedagogy, and as a result how well the physical environment supports education.

In these cases, it is encouraged that you do the best you can with the numeric score, and use the notes section to explain.

10. Am I guaranteed a project for every low score in SEPE?
Not every low score will result in a project. But collecting that information will mean that throughout the 10YPP process, school leaders, Ministry-engaged Consultants (also known as 10-Year Property Plan Consultants) and Property Advisors can have meaningful conversations about what to prioritise.

SEPE is just one part of the 10YPP process, so it needs to be considered alongside condition assessment data and other inputs.

Collecting information about concerns, even when that doesn't result in a project, allows the Ministry to identify where there might be common issues across schools and look out processes outside the 10YPP cycle to address these.

It may also be that there are ways to address issues identified with the physical environment without spending any property money. For example, issues with noise could be managed through changes to timetabling or how a space is used. Your Consultant or Property Advisor may be able to help you with some suggestions.

11. Does anyone check my answers?
Your Property Advisor will review your answers and discuss with you any that require more explanation. They are also available while you complete SEPE if you need to ask any questions.

12. What happens with the results?
Once SEPE has been submitted, the results will be used along with condition assessment data for your school to form your 10YPP. Your Consultant will lead the development of the plan, and work with you and your Property Advisor.

Your completed SEPE will also be saved in K2, the Ministry's shared database, so that it can be downloaded and reviewed the next time you are completing a plan.

13. What does the Ministry do with the data?
As well as saving each school's completed SEPE template for future reference, the Ministry is also using the results to look for trends across regions, school type and building type.

This is a key part of reporting how well the Ministry is meeting the Government's objective of all schools providing quality learning environments by 2030.

14. What happened to the Innovative Learning Environment Assessment Tool ILEAT?
The Innovative Learning Environment Assessment Tool was introduced in 2010 as part of the introduction of priorities for Five Year Agreement Funding. Historically the 10YPP planner would complete it, in conversation with the school principal or representative.

Over the years, we received feedback that the ILEAT had room for improvement in terms of the questions it asked, how it asked them, and how it was used in the 10YPP process.

SEPE attempts to solve some of those problems so that schools leaders, Consultants and Property Advisors can have more meaningful discussions about the fitness for purpose of school property. It was developed in consultation with Learning Environments New Zealand, and piloted in a range of schools during 2019.

15. Do the answers influence how much funding my school receives?
Funding mechanisms are not affected by the answers in a school's completed SEPE. SEPE is a tool to inform decisions about improvements to the physical environment at schools, but those decisions are still to be made within existing funding frameworks.

16. Why are some of the questions things I have already told the Ministry?
Some of the questions may be similar to other Ministry or project documents you have completed. We are working on streamlining this documentation, but it's important that you record as much as possible in this tool for now.

We will look for opportunities to integrate SEPE with other work programmes where it makes sense to do so, such as in Post-Occupancy Evaluations, and in the Education Brief for major projects.

17. Why is SEPE in a spreadsheet and not online?
We are working to produce an app in the Property Portal for completing SEPE after this year. The Ministry's goal is to balance the need for robust and meaningful data, with reducing the administrative burden on all parties.

Continuous improvement is a key principle of SEPE. Not only are we working on this digitisation, but over time the questions may change too as we collect more evidence about what works in New Zealand's learning environments, and hear feedback from school leaders and Ministry staff.

18. I'm still confused. What can I do?
Extra support for completing SEPE can be accessed by:
- The SEPE training module for school leaders, Consultants and Property Advisors
- Speaking to your Property Advisor
- Emailing teharatau.mailbox@education.govt.nz