

Insight - a closer look at
Playground safety





Education

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Playground safety

The huge benefits to children of outdoor play outweigh the risks of accidents occurring, but even with a well-managed playground area a degree of risk is always present and there are thousands of accidents at playgrounds each year.

The majority of these accidents are not due to the play equipment itself and clear steps can be taken by schools to minimise liability in relation to play equipment in playgrounds.





Proving negligence

To prove that a school has been negligent in relation to a pupil having an accident, the claimant would have to prove that the equipment or surface was defective, or that the equipment was not inspected or maintained or that supervision was ineffective and that it was reasonably foreseeable that an accident would happen. It is therefore important that play areas are well managed.

Aspects of good playground management include:

- Use professional installers to build and install the play equipment.
- Ensure that the play equipment is appropriate to the age of the children at the school.
- Supervision of children on the play equipment is recommended to prevent misuse.
- Supervisors should be aware of children wearing unsuitable clothing for play on the equipment e.g. coats with hoods.
- Prevent use of the equipment if weather conditions make it unsafe e.g. a covering of snow.
- BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177 give guidelines to those responsible for playground equipment management.
- In loose fill surfaces the foundations should be 400mm below the surface or 200mm below the surface if they are tapered foundations.
- Develop a risk assessment for the playground equipment.
- Ensure that emergency services can access the play equipment.
- The manufacturer should give product documentation on a number of important factors such as play area surface details, standard compliance, installation instructions, maintenance and inspection instructions, intended age range etc.
- Prevent access to damaged play equipment; do not rely on a sign to prevent use of such equipment.
- Ensure that play equipment is not secluded so that it can be observed easily by supervisors.



Keeping documents

Keeping records is important for risk management purposes. In respect of play equipment, the following documents should be retained:

- Certificates of complying with standards
- Test certificates
- Manufacturers instructions on maintenance, operation and instructions
- Inspection and maintenance records
- Design drawings and specifications

In loose fill surfaces the foundations should be

400mm

below the surface or

200mm

below the surface if they are tapered foundations.





Inspection regime

Play equipment manufacturers recommend a frequency of carrying out inspections on play equipment. An inspection regime should be prepared and comprise of:

- Routine visual inspections to identify hazardous conditions due to damaged equipment, missing parts, exposed foundations or poor weather.
- An operational inspection of stability and wear should be undertaken at least every three months.
- A trained inspector should carry out a main annual inspection that checks on safety. Inspectors should be registered on the Register of Play Inspectors International.



Issue to inspect	Issue identified		Problem identified	Action required
	Yes	No		
Playground housekeeping is adequate.				
Playground equipment not damaged.				
Ground surface around equipment is of adequate depth.				
Surface material in adequate condition.				
Surface material does not include items that could injure children.				
No protective features missing from equipment.				
No sharp edges or points on play equipment.				
Play area free of trip hazards.				
Play equipment has no moving parts to injure children e.g. pinch points.				
Play equipment will not entangle clothing.				
Playground area is well drained.				
No obstacles in play area.				
Play equipment is secured to ground and stable.				
Play equipment fixings are secure.				
Play equipment metal work in good condition.				

The National Playing Fields Association suggests a particular sequence for carrying out routine visual inspections. The sequence is:

- 1** Check the perimeter of the play area.
- 2** Examine each rigid support.
- 3** Examine individual parts for wear and damage.
- 4** Focus on moving parts.
- 5** Check surfaces for sharp edges etc.
- 6** Examine the round surface.

An effective maintenance programme is required and this should be carried out by competent persons and follow manufacturers requirements.



Management system review

The management system should be reviewed on a regular basis and this process will help demonstrate that the school is taking reasonable care of the play equipment. The review process will focus on all risk assessments for the play area, maintenance records and inspection logs. Records should be retained for at least five years for use in the event of liability insurance claims.





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