

Outdoor play equipment guidance and checklist

1. INTRODUCTION

The school playground, particularly primary school, provides opportunities for young people to engage in active play and also and to experience quiet and environmental areas.

Opportunities for balancing, climbing, hanging and swinging will probably be planned both within the physical education curriculum and during play breaks outside.

2. SAFE USE OF EQUIPMENT

Supervision

- You should supervise children at all times whilst using outdoor play equipment and devise the risk assessments to determine the appropriate number of people required to supervise play areas (this should take into account observation points, line of sight etc.)
- Supervising staff should be familiar with the equipment, the rules for use, the ability of the children and the capacity/limitations of the equipment

General guidelines

Schools should follow the guidelines detailed below:

- Educate pupils on the use of climbing equipment
- Supervising staff must ensure that outdoor play equipment is in view, and that they can appropriately supervise it when in use. Equipment should only be used when supervised
- Inform parents the apparatus is for school aged children and not to be used before and after school
- Supervising staff are responsible for regular checks for defects and reporting any defects
- A rota for use of the equipment considering the age & number of children using it at any one time can be useful
- Supervising staff have a responsibility to ensure appropriate behaviour by the pupils
- Consider the weather - outdoor play equipment should not be used during wet/icy conditions. Also, hot weather can make children's hands more slippery than usual
- Equipment sited on grass should be kept out of use in wet/snow/frosty/icy weather and for appropriate length of time afterward to allow ground to be sufficiently dry/thaw
- Clear safety surfaces of moss/silt on a regular basis. Keep area free from leaves in Autumn

Pupils' Clothing/Footwear

- Suitable clothing - unfastened coats, woollen gloves, scarves, ties, etc can pose hazards
- Suitable footwear - slippery soles, open toed/sling back sandals, heels, untied laces, etc can pose hazards

Zoning of Activities

- Consider the range of activities occurring within the playground area:
 - Ball games/chasing games should be sited away from the climbing area.
 - In a nursery garden, wheeled toys in particular, should be used away from the climbing area.

3. PLAY EQUIPMENT STANDARDS

- All new outdoor play equipment must be designed, constructed, installed and maintained in accordance with European standards **BS EN 1176** and **BS EN 1177**.
- These European standards are not retrospective or a legal requirement but represent good practice in the event of an accident claim. Play equipment which was considered safe under BS 5696 will still be safe under the newer standards.
- The independent, competent person carrying out annual inspection and maintenance will advise if any alterations are required.
- To ensure compliance, the local authority recommends that only manufacturers/contractors with appropriate play industries registration be used by schools which are planning to install new outdoor play equipment. Schools should check that companies have API (association of Play industries) or BSI registration for equipment manufacture and installation here:
<https://www.playinspectors.com/check-an-inspector/>
- Scrambling and climbing elements must not exceed 3 metres, for children below 5, height should be a maximum of 1.6 metres.
- Height should not be the dominant feature on any item of equipment – interest, challenge and enjoyment should be achieved without the need for height itself.
- Structures must be spaced clear of each other to prevent one activity interfering with another, they must also be clear of walls, fences etc.
- Suppliers of new equipment must supply information relating to surfacing requirements, intended age range, risk assessment, installation, instructions, servicing and maintenance instructions

4. SAFETY SURFACES

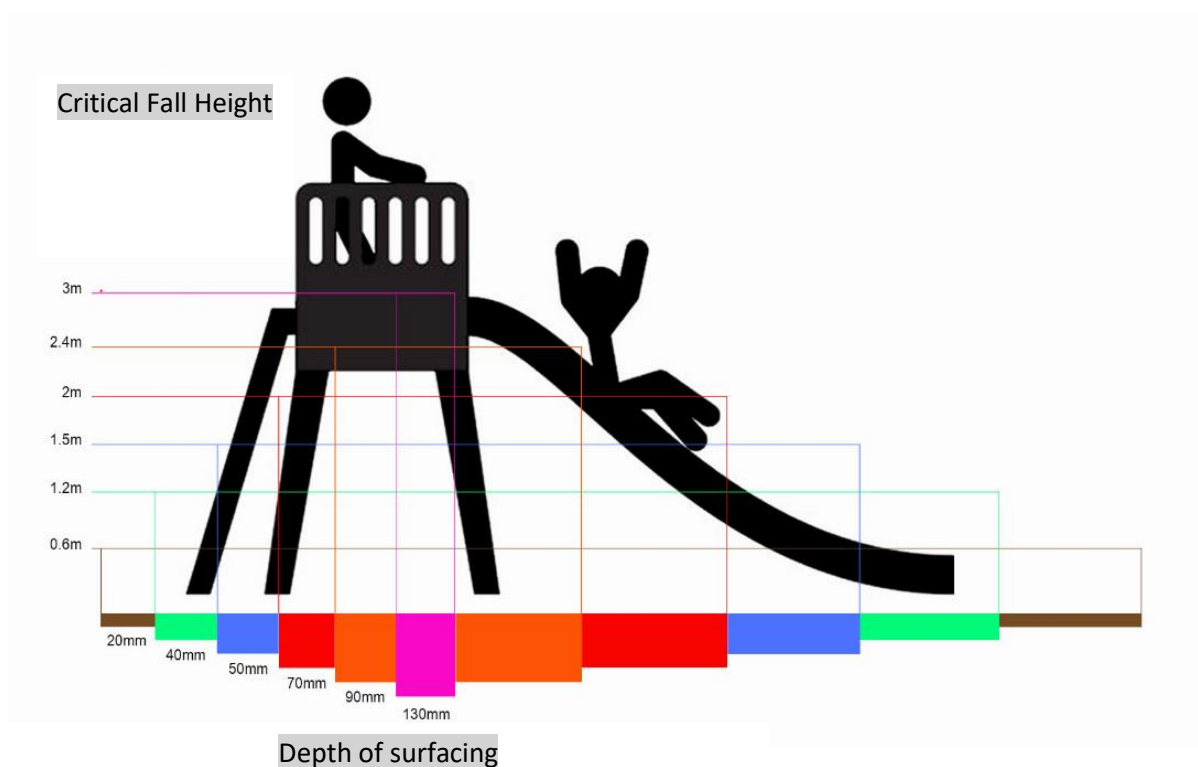
- All products must meet the appropriate BS EN Standards. Both portable and fixed climbing equipment that has a **fall height of 600mm** must be on an **impact-absorbing surface** if used outside. (Fall height is the distance from the clearly intended body support to the impact area)
- Impact absorbing surfaces cannot prevent accidents although they may reduce the level of injury. There are a range of surfaces available which provide impact attenuation including rubber mats and tiles, bark etc.
- The extent of surfacing around static equipment is dependent on the fall height, this should extend at least 1.75m beyond the outermost points of the base of the frame.
- When considering safety surfaces, take into account their likely effectiveness, durability, practicality and management. The type of surface under play equipment is just one of the design elements in a successful play area.
- Topsoil and turf do have limited impact absorbing properties.
- Bark should be a minimum of 300mm deep with a recommended particle size of 38mm max and 12mm min. Loose materials will spread if not suitably contained and you will need to be top up from time to time, therefore be sure to have additional bark available to top up to the original level.

What is Critical Fall Height?

Critical Fall Height is the maximum height of fall from play equipment to the ground. It is the distance from the ground up to the highest platform a child can reach or stand on.

Safety surfaces do not prevent injury, however when installed correctly they can significantly lessen the severity of any injuries caused by falling from height. It's important that safety surfaces below each item of equipment is correctly specified for that equipment's Critical Fall Height.

Safety surfaces should extend from the equipment edge by at least the same distance as the free fall height. For example, a CFH of 3m should have at least 3m of certified surfacing in each direction.



5. INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE

For new equipment a post installation inspection must be arranged. **BS EN 1176** recommends that all outdoor play equipment be inspected and maintained on a regular basis. Such inspection and maintenance is at **3 levels**.

Level 1 checks – Daily / pre use checks by staff (these do not require formal recording)

Concentrating on the following points:

- No evidence of obvious wear / damage
- Area safe from health hazards e.g., needles, glass, faeces etc.
- Impact absorbing surfaces no cuts, tears, wear or unstuck areas
- All fastening tightly secured
- No broken chains, stretched links or loose or twisted shackles
- Uprights unbroken and firm in the ground

*Where any defects / hazards are identified appropriate steps must be taken to prevent use until problems have been satisfactorily resolved.

Level 2 checks – termly inspection in house

A more thorough check of the equipment to be conducted termly (see appendix 1) and these records kept on site.

Level 3 checks – annual inspection

- A detailed certified inspection by an independent, competent person capable of inspecting to **BS EN 1176** and **1177**. You must formally record these checks and the records kept on site. You can check an inspector or company here:
<https://www.playinspectors.com/check-an-inspector/>
- Such checks ensure safety and identify any improvements required in terms of the European standards
- The competent person conducting the annual inspection will advise on the extent of surfacing required for both static and moving equipment
- Once completed, review the annual inspection equipment reports. Address outstanding issues especially if equipment has been marked as high risk.

6. DOCUMENTATION AND MONITORING

Playground records should include the following and must be available for inspection on the school site by authorised officers at any time and they should also be made available to the Governing Body as required:

- certificates of tests or compliance with standards
- inspection and maintenance instructions
- operating instructions from the supplier
- operator's own inspection and maintenance recommendations
- design and tender documents
- termly school inspection records, annual contractors report & repair/fix details

7. TIMBER PLAY EQUIPMENT ALERT

- Unfortunately, there was an incident in another local authority, where a significant structural failure element of timber play equipment occurred, resulting in the total collapse of the piece of equipment. Fortunately, there were no significant injuries.
- The failure was caused by biodegradation of the timber e.g., wet or dry rot probably due to the presence of fungus which was not obviously visible on the outside of the timber. (See attached images)
- Even when timber is treated, it can still be susceptible to rot especially in areas constantly exposed to moisture such e.g., points where posts are embedded in the ground.



What actions should you take?

1. Playground Equipment Essentials:

- Undertake daily visual inspections of all play equipment on your site noting any faults and identifying the level of risk (see level one checks above)
- Schedule at minimum a Quarterly/Termly Operational inspection of all play equipment. This more detailed inspection should be a mechanical inspection where routine maintenance is carried out. Please email: healthandsafetyteam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or healthandsafety@peterborough.gov.uk to arrange this inspection if you do not have a competent member of staff who can carry this out for your school.
- Undertake an Annual Compliance inspection of all your playground equipment (level 3 checks as above). This inspection can only be completed by an inspector accredited by the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII). If you do not have access to an RPII accredited Inspector who can do this for you, please contact healthandsafetyteam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or healthandsafety@peterborough.gov.uk

2. Review Annual Play Inspection Equipment Reports

- Ensure that outstanding issues have been addressed especially if equipment has been marked as high risk.
- If your annual Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII) play equipment inspection is overdue arrange it as soon as possible and action any findings. If you are sourcing your own RPII accredited inspector ensure that they are competent and accredited to carry out Annual inspections relevant to the equipment. You can check an inspector or company here:
<https://www.playinspectors.com/check-an-inspector/>

3. Ensure that all timber play equipment is inspected immediately.

- Look for obvious defects e.g., unusual holes, structural integrity i.e., is it loose or wobbly, fixings missing, etc.
- Cracks are a normal part of weathering but any crack over 10mm is a finger trap hazard and needs rectifying.
- Give extra emphasis to the points where posts are in contact with the ground and join to other elements. Look for unusual discoloration, cracking or persistent dampness. It is possible to find a post/beam whose exterior (treated wood) is intact, but the middle (untreated) wood is rotten. Unsoundness can be detected by the hollow sound made when the area is tapped with a non-metallic tool e.g., a rubber mallet. A sharp-pointed tool such as a narrow screwdriver, scratch-awl, or ice pick can be used to push into the wood, first in a good portion, then in the suspect portion to determine if the wood beneath the surface is firm or spongy; hard or soft.
- Remove any equipment with suspected defects from service and seek advice from your play equipment provider or the CCC/PCC Health and Safety Teams.

For more information and support on play safety:

[Advice and information - RoSPA](#)

[Break Times.docx](#)

[Playground.doc](#)

[Guidance Fixed Play Equipment termly checklist 2022.docx](#)

OUTDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT TERMLY SAFETY CHECKLIST

School Name.....

Area inspected.....

Date Inspected.....

Inspected by.....

Signature.....

ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT CHECKED	
1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

FEATURE	CHECK FOR	SATISFACTORY			COMMENTS / ACTIONS NEEDED
		Y	N	N/A	
Structure	Cracking, breaking, warping, loosening, and bending				
Surface finish	Protective coating missing, rust, cracks, splinters				
Consumable items e.g. ropes, chains	Missing, bent, broken, loosened, worn, open hooks				
Edges	Protrusions, sharp edges				
Pinch or crush points	Exposed mechanisms, joints or moving components				
Moving parts	Worn, lack of lubrication, seizure, or excessive motion				
Guards / handrails / swing barriers	Missing, bent, broken, loosened				
Access	Missing or broken rungs, steps, or treads etc.				
Swing and other seats	Missing, damaged, loosened etc.				
Impact absorbing surfaces	Ineffective by being compacted, displaced or not extensive enough to cover possible impact area				
Foundations	Cracked, loose in ground exposed				
Other items specific to your school					

