



# Engage MAT

## Outdoor Play Equipment Policy and Checklist

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## Outdoor Play Equipment Policy

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1. Introduction .....	1
2. European Standards .....	1
3. Safety surfaces .....	3
3.1 Bark and woodchip .....	3
3.2 Rubber surfaces .....	3
3.3 Grass as a play area surface .....	3
4. Safe use of equipment .....	4
5. Supervision .....	5
6. Inspection and maintenance .....	5
6.1 Level 1 checks .....	5
6.2 Level 2 checks .....	5
6.3 Level 3 checks .....	6

## **Outdoor Play Equipment Policy**

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### **1. Introduction**

This guidance summarises safety standards for outdoor play equipment and sets out actions that must be taken by Headteacher so that children using outdoor play equipment on school sites are supervised and managed effectively.

The balance between challenge and safety is an important consideration for all play environments. The best facilities are those that, through careful design, management and maintenance, offer children good play experiences without compromising safety.

This guidance will allow schools considering the purchase and provision of outdoor play equipment to determine the practicalities and feasibility of the project at an early stage. It also identifies the key actions needed to ensure good management of outdoor play equipment.

### **2. European Standards**

Outdoor play equipment must be designed, constructed, installed and maintained in accordance with European standards BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177. These 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 older standards (such as BS 5696) will still be considered safe under current standards. The independent competent person carrying out annual inspection and maintenance will advise whether any alterations need to be made.

#### **P652 Outdoor Play Equipment Policy and Procedure**

The following paragraphs contain a brief summary of these standards, sufficient to inform head teachers of what is required. Any new equipment installed in schools must meet the below criteria:

- Scramble and climbing elements must not be any higher than 3.0 m. For children under five years of age the height should be restricted to a maximum of 1.6 m.
- Uprights must be firmly set into the ground to ensure stability. Any concrete used in footings must be set well below the surrounding surfaces and account must be taken of likely wear and erosion effects which may expose sharp or hard edges.
- All bolts and fastenings must be inset, plugged and have no sharp edges. There should be no openings likely to trap fingers, limbs or heads.
- Height should not be the dominant feature on any item of equipment. Interest, challenge and enjoyment can be achieved without the need for height for its own sake.

## **Outdoor Play Equipment Policy**

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- All footings and handling surfaces should offer sufficient grip for feet and hands and resist wear
- The diameters of tubes used as handholds must be suitable for the age and physical capabilities of the children who will use the equipment
- Surround surfaces should be non-slip, uniformly level and impact absorbing
- The extent of surfacing around static equipment is dependent on the fall height of the equipment – see below
- The independent competent person carrying out annual inspection and maintenance will advise on the extent of surfacing required for both static and moving equipment. Structures must be spaced clear of each other to prevent one activity interfering with another. They must also be clear of other obstacles such as walls, fences, etc. Suppliers of new equipment must supply a range of product information including details of surfacing requirements, intended age range, availability of spare parts, risk assessment of item, full installation instructions, servicing, inspection and maintenance instructions.

ESPO contract 115 is available for use by schools - a framework of suitably experienced, qualified and resourced suppliers for the design, supply and installation of outdoor playground equipment and associated safety surfacing.

All purchase and provision of new outdoor play equipment will be managed by the Trust in line with guidelines in the Engage Trust Financial Handbook.

### **3. Safety surfaces**

Maximum fall height from any apparatus must not exceed 3.0 m. Where the fall height is above 600 mm then an impact absorbing surface should be installed. The fall height is the distance from the clearly intended body support to the impact area.

Although impact absorbing surfaces cannot prevent accidents, they may reduce the level of injury. The type of surface under play equipment is a risk factor which must be considered when providing play equipment. It is, however, just one of the design elements in the development of a safe and successful play area.

When considering safety surfaces you should consider and seek competent advice on their likely effectiveness, inherent safety, durability, management and practicality. The most commonly used types of safety surface are described below.

#### **3.1 Bark and woodchip**

The bark area must be at least 300 mm in depth.

Granular pine bark provides the most effective safety surface. Spruce bark is also adequate as are woodchips.

## Outdoor Play Equipment Policy

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Recommended particle sizes for bark are 12-38 mm to avoid splinters and sharp edges getting into eyes etc. The ideal range for wood chips is 5-25 mm to eliminate dust, large chunks and long thin splinters.

Loose materials will tend to spread if not suitably contained. Surfaces will need to be topped up from time to time and allowances should be made for this on-going cost at the planning stage of the project.

### 3.2 Rubber surfaces

Rubberised safety surfaces include rubber grass mats (that allow the grass to grow through), shredded rubber 'bark', solid rubber tiles, recycled rubber or PVC tiles or continuous rubber wet pour.

The extent of surfacing around static equipment is dependent on the fall height. For example, where the fall height is 2.0 m surfacing should extend 1.83 m; where the fall height is 2.5 m surfacing should extend 2.16 m; where the fall height is 3.0 m surfacing should extend 2.5 m. A different calculation applies for moving equipment and advice should be sought from the supplier installing the equipment or the independent competent person carrying out annual inspection and maintenance.

### 3.3 Grass as a play area surface

There has been some debate over the use of grass on children's playgrounds and its effectiveness in injury prevention if provided as an impact attenuating surface.

Grass is a suitable material for use under and around lightly used equipment from which falls of less than 1 metre are possible. However, where continued scuffing takes place firm surfaces should be considered.

The following safety surfaces are **not** recommended:

**Pea gravel:** Surfaces composed of pea gravel can migrate onto grass areas and create hazards during grass cutting. Pea gravel can also create a slipping hazard (a walking on marbles effect) when it migrates onto hard standing areas. It is also potentially hazardous to children under five who may swallow it or get it stuck up noses and in ears.

It is recommended that when an existing pea gravel surface no longer meets the 300 mm depth requirement plans are made to replace the material with bark or rubber mats and tiles.

**Sand:** Sand creates a potential hygiene problem from animal faeces and urine. Also when wet it can lose its impact absorbing qualities.

## 4. Safe use of equipment

Play equipment should safely allow challenges and provide children with a safe outlet for natural energy and sense of adventure. Without inhibiting them, procedures need to be put in place to protect children from over enthusiasm.

## **Outdoor Play Equipment Policy**

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The following measures must be adopted for outdoor play equipment:

- Children must wear suitable footwear that will provide secure traction between them and the equipment
- Some equipment will be suitable when children are dressed for winter conditions. However, gloves and mittens are not suitable for play on climbing frames etc.
- Equipment should not be used during wet or icy conditions. This can make equipment dangerous as ice or mud can reduce traction and cause hands and feet to slip.
- Staff must be familiar with the apparatus and know what activities can be reasonably allowed as safe
- Play on equipment must be arranged in an orderly way, adequately controlled and suitably supervised
- Older children must be prevented from distracting or endangering younger ones. It may be necessary for separate times to be set aside for different age groups.
- The number of children allowed on each item at one time must be controlled and will depend on the type of equipment and the activity allowed
- Where equipment is sited on grassed areas it should not be used in wet weather and for some time afterwards to allow the ground to be sufficiently dry to avoid rapid wear of activity spots and the creation of ruts and muddy puddles.

### **5. Supervision**

Children must be supervised at all times while using outdoor play equipment.

Supervising staff should ensure that the children using a piece of equipment are controlled at all times. Supervising staff must be familiar with the equipment, the local rules for its use and the actions and behaviour which may reasonably be expected from children using it.

If support staff are employed for this purpose they must be fully insured, paid employees of the Engage Trust. If volunteer helpers are used to assist they must not be given sole charge of a group. The Headteacher must ensure that supervising staff are given adequate instructions and clearly understand their duties.

### **6. Inspection and maintenance**

BS EN 1176 recommends that all outdoor play equipment be inspected and maintained on a regular basis. Such inspection and maintenance will be at 3 levels:

#### **6.1 Level 1 checks**

Level 1 checks will be required on a daily or pre-use basis. Such checks will consist of a brief visual inspection of the equipment and surrounding area concentrating on the following points:

- No evidence of dangerous wear or damage
- Area is safe from any hygiene hazard, e.g. dog faeces, needles, etc.

## **Outdoor Play Equipment Policy**

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- Impact absorbing surfaces have no cuts, tears, wear or unstuck areas
- All fastenings are tightly secured
- No broken chains, stretched links or loose or twisted shackles
- Uprights are unbroken and firm in the ground
- Area is clear of glass, bricks, stones, litter or other debris

The above checks do not have to be formally recorded but staff should get into the habit of carrying out such checks.

### **6.2 Level 2 checks**

A more thorough check of the equipment must be carried out each term. This check should be formally recorded using the Outdoor Play Equipment Level 2 Inspection Checklist.- see Appendix 1

### **6.3 Level 3 checks**

The equipment must be inspected annually by an independent competent person capable of inspecting to European standards BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177. Again, these checks must be formally recorded and records kept for a period of 7 years.

The purpose of level 3 checks is to ensure that the equipment is safe for use; and to identify any improvements required in terms of the European standards.

Where safety deficiencies are identified by the competent person, these should be rectified immediately.

Where deficiencies are identified regarding the European standards, schools should endeavour to bring equipment up to standard within the medium to long term.

## Outdoor Play Equipment Policy

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### Appendix 1

#### Outdoor Play Equipment Level 2 Inspection Checklist

1. This checklist should be completed by a member of staff on a termly/quarterly basis.
2. Once completed the form should be kept on the premises to which it relates for a period of 7 years.
3. All negative answers must have a remedial action annotated overleaf.

Name of School/Premises	Date

Items of Equipment Checked
1.  2.  3.

Feature	Check for	Satisfactory Y/N
Structure	Bending, warping, cracking, loosening and breaking	
Surface finish	Protective coating missing, rust or other corrosion, cracks, splinters, broken or open joints	

### Outdoor Play Equipment Policy

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Consumable items	Missing, bent, broken, loosened, worn, open hooks, etc.	
Edges	Protrusions, sharp points or sharp edges	
Pinch, crush or entrapment points	Exposed mechanisms, junctures or moving components, etc.	
Mechanical devices and moving parts	Worn bearings, lack of lubrication, seizure or excessive motion, missing covers	
Guard or handrails/swing barriers	Missing, bent, broken, loosened	
Access	Missing or broken rungs, steps or treads loosening, etc.	
Swing and other seats	Missing, damaged, loosened, sharp corners, insecure fittings etc.	
Foundations	Cracked, loose in ground, exposed	
Impact absorbing(safety) surfaces	Ineffective due to being compacted, displaced or not extensive enough to cover possible impact area	
Drain holes	Blocked	

Item no;	Remedial action required	Date action completed

**Outdoor Play Equipment Policy**

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<b>Equipment inspected by;</b>	<b>Date:</b>
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