

**“Active children tend** to be happy children. We must ensure that children are given opportunities to play out in safe places. With stimulating facilities in their local communities, childcare or early years settings and during their school breaks because the fun of playing out is an essential part of early physical and emotional development,” says former Education Minister Catherine Ashton. Adding an equipped play area to your school playground requires:

- Involvement of staff, pupils and parents
- A survey of your playground to identify a suitable area
- Selection of a playground equipment manufacturer

#### Steps to safety

1. Form a playground committee who represent various points of view: pupils; teachers; administrators; support staff; parents; a play officer from your local council; perhaps, someone with fundraising experience; and, most importantly, a project chair and secretary.

2. Visit colleagues in other schools. Learn from their experiences.

3. Obtain written materials on playground safety in order to know what guidelines and standards should be met. Have a look at some websites:

- Association of Play Industries: [www.playindustries.org](http://www.playindustries.org)
- National Playing Fields Association: [www.npfa.co.uk](http://www.npfa.co.uk)
- RoSPA's site: [www.rospace.co.uk](http://www.rospace.co.uk) (the play safety section)

4. Think about the developmental needs of your pupils. There are three age-appropriate bands: up to six, six to eight and eight to 14 years that need to be considered. Decide how the play area will be used. For example in free play, in physical education, with school classes, during lunch periods, during and after school, in conjunction with sporting events, at weekends or during play supervised by your staff. Usage will help you determine needs and choices.

5. Plan for children with disabilities. All children, disabled and non-disabled should have access to some playground equipment. DfEE Circular number 20/99 gives guidance on the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act for schools. The Education Act 1996 also safeguards the interests of children with special educational needs and caters to some extent for the access and related needs of children with disabilities. There is a wide range of children's play equipment that can only be used within a controlled and supervised environment, such as a school. For example Sutcliffe Play markets a cradle swing seat with a front opening fastener that enables carers to more readily place



# School rules

Choosing play equipment and surfacing for your school.



children safely into the seat; SMP Playgrounds markets a bed swing accessible to even the most severely disabled children. Make sure you get a copy of the industry guidelines and checklist for DDA. Available from The Play Inspection Company [www.playinspections.co.uk](http://www.playinspections.co.uk)

6. Decide how to address the following issues:

#### *Inspections and risk assessment*

Think about accident-causing situations and how they can be handled; who will create and file maintenance inspection sheets on a regular basis and where will information be kept? In view of the difficulties and problems associated with the inspection of play areas, the API in association with the Institute of Leisure & Amenity Management, RoSPA and NPFA has set up the Register of Play Inspectors International Ltd to offer qualifications for playground inspectors: [www.playinspectors.com](http://www.playinspectors.com)

#### *Insurance company requirements*

*Supervision*  
Training requirements for playground supervisors

7. Ask your pupils what kinds of activities they would like to do such as balancing, climbing, jumping and socialising. Ask them what equipment they think would help them be able to do those tasks.

8. Obtain catalogues from playground equipment and surface companies. You'll find a list of companies that are members of the Association of Play Industries on the API's website [www.playindustries.org](http://www.playindustries.org). Increasingly, Local Authorities and commercial organisations require all companies tendering for, or undertaking, work involving play projects to be API members. This reflects positively on the strict conditions of membership, which include that all provisions and services must comply with the appropriate British or equivalent European Standards or Codes of Practice. All members must adhere to the Association's strict code of practice. A mediation panel and self-regulatory monitoring scheme ensure standards of service and quality of product and installation are maintained.

9. Allocate a budget, which should include the cost of the safer surfacing, as well as the equipment, installation and maintenance and possible fencing costs.

10. Set some objectives you hope the play area will meet. These might include:

- The play area must have separate areas to accommodate different age groups served
- Younger children must have opportunities to manipulate various textures and have space for wheel toys
- Older children must have opportunities to develop social and physical skills, climb, explore and build arm strength

11. Invite up to three companies to submit a quotation including a plan and how they meet your goals. Request and follow up references.

12. If necessary, develop a fund raising plan and schedule. Use the Internet to search for possible sources of finance. Seek advice from the DfEE and National Playing Fields Association. Ensure you can recover the VAT.

13. Award your contract. Don't forget to plan for regular maintenance of the equipment and surfacing.

14. Instruct supervisors and children on proper use of the equipment. Review at least once a year.

15. Plan a celebration when the project is completed.

16. **Let the children play! ■**

*For a copy of the current API Directory of members or further information contact:*

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