

## For playground success, The Association of Play Industries says: “Two heads are better than one”



Schools have a huge advantage in playground design. They have headteachers and staff with detailed knowledge of what pupils need. This, together with the specialist knowledge of a playground manufacturer, can produce excellent playgrounds – which help pupil development. The added knowledge and resources of parents and PTA can also be a big help especially with fundraising. Although budgets may always be limited, many things can be done that will fit the most modest funding and for best value, good teamwork in planning is essential.

### **Learning**

Successful play area design depends on much more than picking play equipment. The playground manufacturer will develop a good understanding of what is wanted from the school. The school needs to see what is possible, feasible, manageable and affordable. Together, with the PTA, parents, governors and especially the children, they take an important step towards a design that is a success for the children and the school. That includes meeting child development objectives, budgets, time plans, complying with safety standards and planning maintenance.

### **Forget catalogue shopping – here’s the secret of success**

Play equipment catalogues are attractive but be warned! They may seem like the obvious place to start planning a school play area but there are better places. Indeed, with a successful play area, ‘the whole is usually greater than the sum of the parts’. The secret of success does not lie in catalogues. The secret is that there is no secret. Success lies mostly in a well informed and well-developed, jointly created brief, the result of partnership and teamwork. That is why two heads are better than one.

### **Finding a playground maker**

When looking for manufacturers, a good place to start is the members’ list at the Association of Play Industries (API) [www.api-play.org](http://www.api-play.org). From here there are links to members’ websites to help in the search for examples of play projects for other schools. When requesting examples, schools should make clear the number of children, their age ranges and available or estimated budgets.

Schools need to define total requirements, not just its short-term needs. Planning a whole area, perhaps to be built in stages, age group by age group, can allow designers to produce the best relationship between areas. It helps achieve economies in total ground works, safer surfacing, paths, gates and fencing.

### **Success and Excellence Await**

Here are some examples of successful school playground development.

### **Case study 1: Manor School Teamwork Success**

The headteacher at Manor Infants in Farnborough had an ambitious plan to transform some under-utilised school grounds into a multi-sensory area. With assistance from the School Landscapes Project and Hampshire County Council planning department, the school wanted to create a multi-sensory area which would provide a myriad of colours, textures, sights and opportunity not just for play, but quiet areas for peer interaction. The selected playground manufacturer came up with and tweaked designs until everybody in the team agreed the mixture of materials and equipment was an inspirational

proposal on paper. Their challenge was to ensure it met expectations. The finished garden area has been brought alive by the combination of innovative materials, colours and an intelligent use of space to maximise the play opportunities and create the ultimate breaktime experience for the children. The headteacher is thrilled with the final results and said, "The garden is so fantastic, the children adore playing with the equipment and sitting in the quiet areas."

More: [www.fawns.co.uk](http://www.fawns.co.uk)



### Case study 2: Pirates of The Pomphett School

Pomphett School, Plymouth, wanted to use a sloped grass area by a playground that had been unusable. Together the designer and headteacher came up with the idea of using the slope as a 'sea wave' with a shipwreck in the wave. The shipwreck levels were adapted to fit the slope. This specially designed shipwreck sits at the top and blue wet-pour rubber extended down the slope providing a good all-weather, non-slip safer surface. Imagination, foresight and sharing ideas between the designer and headteacher created project success within the budget. More: [www.playlinedesign.co.uk](http://www.playlinedesign.co.uk)



### Case study 3: Bespoke Play Equipment

The Orchard School in Sandwell is a new-build special needs school for pupils ranging from early years to keystage 2, all with profound and complex learning difficulties. The play manufacturer

worked closely with the school and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's landscape architects.

Originally, timber play equipment had not been specified. In discussion with a timber-play manufacturer's team, things changed. It became apparent that they offered exactly the design potential needed. They were able to create bespoke equipment to enable pupils to play inclusively and gain from the educational benefits play equipment provides. Around the play structures are a range of activity panels including convex mirrors, musical chimes and shapeshifters.

More: [www.handmadeplaces.co.uk](http://www.handmadeplaces.co.uk)



Upton School: More [www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk](http://www.sutcliffeplay.co.uk)



Carleton Primary School trail: More [www.parkdaleplay.co.uk](http://www.parkdaleplay.co.uk)