

18 July 2024

Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Minister,

**Every Child's Need for Everyday Play:
Meeting request to discuss 'Pathway to Play' campaign**

Congratulations on your recent election win and new role. We are excited to hear of your plans to deliver change and focus on preventative measures as a key driver in improving our children's educational outcomes. As Chair of the UK Association of Play Industries (API), the lead body in the play sector, I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss how we can support you in prioritising universal access to community play opportunities for all children to support their holistic development.

The Critical Importance of Play in Schools

Our [Pathway To Play campaign](#) highlights the urgent need for policy recognition of the value of outdoor play and integrating it into the school environment. Research indicates a dramatic reduction in children's outdoor play overall compared to previous generations. We firmly believe that integrating outdoor play and learning into the National Curriculum is crucial in tackling the nation's physical inactivity epidemic, childhood obesity and rising mental health issues.

The Case for Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is an essential aspect of childhood, a basic need like sleep, nutrition and education. However, the misconception that outdoor play is a 'nice to have' rather than a necessity has led to significant policy oversight in ensuring adequate play opportunities within the school system. The consequences are dire: overall, children spend more time indoors, tethered to screens and missing out on vital physical, emotional and social development opportunities.

The Role of School Playgrounds

Play is fundamental to the development of pupils physical and mental health. Free, outdoor play boosts learning, concentration, physical literacy, creativity, resilience, confidence and social skills. There has been a huge decline in public playgrounds in recent years and the 'pull' indoors from screens means that, for many children, school playgrounds represent their only opportunity for outdoor play. With 1 in 3 children overweight or obese by year 6 and child mental health problems at record levels, high-quality outdoor play equipment in schools is now more important than ever.

Our Call to Action

We are calling on the government to make a commitment to:

- **Increase physical activity levels in schools:** Integrate outdoor learning into the National Curriculum and fund school play spaces and equipment.
- **Conduct a national audit:** Assess the quantity and quality of school play areas
- **Ensure long-term sustainability:** Provide dedicated funding for the installation and upkeep of high-quality school play spaces.



Association of Play Industries

Under the auspices of the Federation of Sports and Play Associations Ltd.

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Registered address: FSPA, Network House, Stubs Beck Lane, Cleckheaton BD19 4TT, Registration No. 216719

Meeting Request

I have attached our latest report, [Every Child's Right to Everyday Play: The Case for Playgrounds](#) and hope you find this useful. As you will know, the cost of prevention is often significantly lower than the cost of cure. I am hoping that I can appeal to the economic logic of allocating a (relatively small) amount of government funds to the provision of school play spaces. In a relatively small timeframe, this investment would pay significant dividends.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to prioritise outdoor play as a non-negotiable aspect of childhood development. By investing in school playgrounds, we can ensure that all children, regardless of their background or location, have access to the benefits of outdoor play.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to discussing this important issue with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Gummer

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Chair, Association of Play Industries

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