



# Scotland's Play Strategy

Valuing play, every day



The Scottish  
Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



# Play out of hours!

A toolkit for the use of school grounds  
for playing out of teaching hours

**Playing is central to children’s physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing and is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing.**

**For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives.**

Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community.

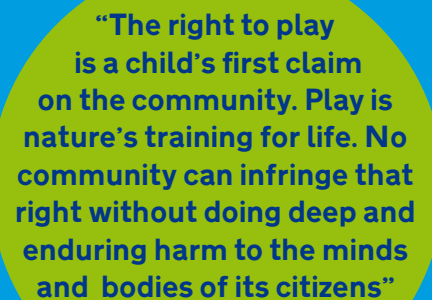
Existing school facilities, in most cases, offer significant opportunities to satisfy not only the learning needs of all learners, but many of the social and recreational needs for the community. School buildings, their contents and grounds, often represent the largest single asset of communities.

It is important that schools are realistic about what they can and cannot provide in terms of developing and extending opportunities for playing out of teaching hours. Schools across the country have managed to do so, and this toolkit is designed to help us learn from their experience.

The biggest barrier facing many schools may not be a practical one. It may be fear of failure or a perception that this is very different from what schools do and so will be very complex and expensive. Some schools will face greater challenges than others; and those schools in communities with the greater needs may face the greatest challenges.

However, the potential benefits in terms of community engagement and wellbeing, the positive effects on children and young people’s health and happiness; and enhancement of the local sense of community make it worthwhile.

We start by acknowledging that the primary function of schools is to provide for the education of its pupils and the role of a head teacher is to ensure that the entire school site is fit for purpose at the start of the school day.



**“The right to play is a child’s first claim on the community. Play is nature’s training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens”**

**David Lloyd George,  
1925**



# The toolkit

## Who's it for?

The *Use of School Grounds for playing out of teaching hours toolkit* has been designed to help head teachers, parent councils and local organisations to work together to consider making school grounds available to local children out of teaching hours.

## Why has it been developed?

This toolkit was originally produced by Play Wales, the national charity for children's play in Wales. It has been adapted, with their kind permission, to suit the Scottish context and legislative background.

It has been developed to support those who may be less than confident about offering this kind of provision and it is hoped to dispel some worries and offer a starting point.

This toolkit is intended to support the implementation of local guidance regarding the use of school grounds for community use.

## How has it been developed?

In 2013, Play Wales produced the *Use of School Grounds for playing out of teaching hours toolkit* which was funded by the Welsh government. It was produced after extensive consultation, focus group work, and case study gathering from a range of schools across Wales that successfully open their grounds for playing.

In 2014 Grounds for Learning was asked to submit a proposal to address the Play Strategy for Scotland's action plan, action 7.5, the aim of which was to ensure that opportunities for outdoor free play are easily accessible in the community and that school grounds are valued places for play in the local community. We applied to Play Wales to allow us to adapt the toolkit to suit the Scottish context. Grounds for Learning has adapted the concept for the Scottish audience in conjunction with the Play Strategy for Scotland implementation group. It has been funded by the Scottish Government.

## How do I use it?

This toolkit is divided into two parts:

**Part 1. Issues to be considered** – focuses on providing the rationale for the opening of school grounds. It identifies the benefits and addresses some concerns. This section includes case studies from across Scotland.

**Part 2. Tools to assist** – provides a range of tools to assist the process such as options analysis, school play policies and community agreements.







## What is it designed to do?

This toolkit is designed to provide clear and concise information for school communities and their partners to assess the feasibility of making school grounds available for children's play out of teaching hours.

It contains specific pieces of information intended to help understand and address particular issues of concern. It provides practical, step-by-step tools and templates for undertaking work linked to the opening of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours.

### What policy or legislation supports this toolkit?

#### Children's Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out 54 articles that define how children and young people should be treated and how governments should monitor the UNCRC. The UK Government have signed up to the convention. There are three articles in particular that are useful to consider when providing for children's play spaces:

#### **Article 31: The right to leisure, play and culture**

Children have the right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The United Nations has published a General Comment on Article 31. This is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning

of an aspect of the UNCRC that requires further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of the General Comment is to raise the importance of an Article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

#### **Article 12: Respect for the views of the child**

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

#### **Article 15: Freedom of association**

Children have the right to meet together.

#### **Play Strategy for Scotland (2013)**

The Scottish Government's vision for children and young people is clear: for Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up.

The Policy states that:

"Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live."

This recognition of the importance of play for society and communities underpins the content of this guide.

#### **Health and Safety**

Risk management is a key part of managing play spaces. This toolkit provides practical advice on conducting risk-benefit assessments, and developing policies and procedures as part of sensible risk management practices. Children's play necessarily involves opportunities to experience risk and challenge. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has supported this viewpoint by issuing

a joint high-level statement with the Play Safety Forum (PSF) to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play.<sup>1</sup>

The high-level statement – *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach* makes clear that:

- Play is important for children's wellbeing and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.

### Participation

In August 2012 the Scottish Children and Young People's Commissioner commissioned *Children and Young People's Participation in Scotland: Frameworks, standards and principles for practice* report from Stirling University.

This report was then developed into the 7 Golden Rules for Participation by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People through consultation with children and young people from across Scotland. This set of principles can help anyone working with – and for – children and young people. Research into participation has also been used to help make the rules as good as they can be.

The Golden Rules can remind adults what children and young people want from participation. They can also help children and young people to think about how adults can support them to participate. The rules are:

- Golden Rule 1: Understand my rights
- Golden Rule 2: A chance to be involved
- Golden Rule 3: Remember, it's my choice
- Golden Rule 4: Value me
- Golden Rule 5: Support me
- Golden Rule 6: Work together
- Golden Rule 7: Keep in touch

### National Initiatives

**Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland (2014 revision)** aims to tackle long term drivers of poverty and income inequality through early intervention and prevention. Play supports the reduction of child inequality and delivers outcomes for vulnerable children. This policy specifically identifies the provision of local solutions that include safe spaces and facilities for play and recreation.

**Health and Wellbeing in Curriculum for Excellence The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007** builds on the work of health promoting schools and Hungry for Success. It places health promotion at the heart of a school's activities and details a number of duties on local authorities such as to promote school meals and consider sustainable development guidance when providing food and drink. In 2010 Curriculum for Excellence was introduced. One of the 8 main curriculum areas is health and wellbeing where a number of experiences and outcomes are described including 'food and health'. Taken together with the Health Promotion guidance, the health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes outline the Government's expectations upon

individuals, schools and local authorities for promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Within the Act, the health promotion guidance for local authorities and schools is clear and under 3.6 *Environment, resources and facilities* it states that "The whole school environment should be conducive to health promotion. Schools with health promoting environments provide opportunities and space for physical activity, play, eating, socialising and privacy. They make these facilities available both during and outwith normal school hours and work with local community groups to explore ways of making their provision, including drop-in, available to the wider community. In a health promoting school, members of the school community demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the quality of the immediate and wider environment. Providing physical activity opportunities through wider school and community activity allows young people to be physically active in less formal settings and gives them more choice and influence on the type of activities in which they participate."

**Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill 2014** will assist communities to determine their own futures. Communities with play at the centre are more resilient and connected and offer a better quality of life for their residents.

**Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future (2009)** the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint school estate strategy sets out their shared vision for Scotland's schools:

"... which signal the high value we place on learning; which people and communities can enjoy using and can be proud; which are well designed, maintained and managed and which encourage continuous engagement with learning; which are far more than just 'educational establishments' whose quality of environment supports an accessible range of services and opportunities and which enrich the communities they serve and the lives of learners and families."

**Play Strategy Action Plan for Scotland (2014) action 7** is to:

- audit the current levels of community access to school grounds
- identify key influencing factors
- consider options for increasing community access to school grounds out of school hours
- ensure that opportunities for outdoor free play are easily accessible in the community and that school grounds are valued places for play in the local community
- work with Local Authorities to achieve high quality school grounds in new build schools, so that schools have well designed, inclusive, and where possible community-accessible play spaces, green spaces and gardens.

**Learning for Sustainability** The recommendations were accepted by the Scottish Parliament in 2013. One of the five key recommendations is that school buildings, grounds and policies should support learning for sustainability.

**Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Routemap Towards Healthy Weight Action Plan: section 2.18** Working together to find realistic ways of maximising physical activity within the school environment.

# Part 1: Issues to be considered

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## Section 1.1

# The importance of play

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing<sup>iii</sup> and is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing.

For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives.<sup>iv</sup>

Schools often offer ideal space for children to play and interact with one another. It is important to develop a strong play element in order to provide a healthy school environment.

Quality play provision offers all children the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

**Other children** – of different ages and abilities with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict.

**The natural world** – weather, trees, plants, insects, animals, mud.

**Loose parts** – natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished.

**The four elements** – earth, air, fire and water.

**Challenge and uncertainty** – graduated opportunities for risk taking; both on a physical and emotional level.

**Changing identity** – role-play and dressing up.

**Movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling, swinging, sliding and spinning.

**Rough and tumble** – play fighting.

**The senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.





## Section 1.2 Benefits

Throughout Scotland many school grounds offer a significant resource for children's play. School grounds often represent the only area of open space where children can play within their local community. Likewise, some schools offer the only flat surface locally where children learn to ride bikes and play with their scooters and skateboards.

In many areas, both urban and rural, school grounds offer neutral space in the local community. Having access to such a space can enhance the opportunities that all parts of the community around the school have for outdoor recreation and play.

Children and young people generally make more use of the outdoors and spend more time outside than adults, so, the positive effect of access to school grounds for them is potentially even higher than it might be for adults.

Both schools and communities can be enriched when they engage with each other more fully. Head teachers report that when schools engage with their local community it has a direct

impact on pupils' attainment and raises their aspirations to progress from school to further education, training and employment.

The benefits of using school grounds for playing include:

- Increased pupil motivation and self-esteem
- Opportunities which prevent young people progressing to greater levels of risk
- Additional facilities and opportunities
- Enhanced partnership working with the community
- Reduced pupil disaffection
- Improvements in child behaviour and social skills
- Improved local availability of play opportunities
- Better opportunities for children outside school hours
- Helping to regenerate and strengthen communities
- Improved collaboration with other agencies to promote better community safety.<sup>v</sup>



## Section 1.3 Concerns

From the outset it should be acknowledged that providing play opportunities within school grounds can be a challenge. Some schools and some communities may encounter more challenges than others. Every school is individual, and is ideally placed to be sensitive to the needs of its particular community.

From the outset, it should be recognised that there are common limitations that must be overcome when school facilities are used for activities other than the primary function of educating pupils. In general they are:

- Basic layout and usefulness of the facility
- Maintenance and operation costs
- Resistance from the educational, and wider, community.

The following sections provide an overview of possible solutions and case studies to challenges and concerns that may be identified by schools regarding the out of teaching hours use of school grounds.







## Section 1.4 Unlocking the gates

Whether the school gates need to be locked or not will depend greatly on the local situation at the school. Rather than questioning whether or not the gates are locked, it may be more useful to consider when they are locked and who locks them.

Even in places where school gates really do need to be closed after teaching hours, there is often a period of time before teaching begins in the morning and after teaching time in the afternoon where access could be allowed. In some places, an option may be to engage with a local group, for example the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or local Tenants Association to develop a community agreement which would allow schools to only lock their gates at a specified time.

It may also be possible for some schools to consider dual entry systems. For example, an enclosed hard surface area for ball games and wheeled play built into the outer boundary of the school site with an entrance on the school side and one on the community side. This provides an area for school use and for out of teaching hours use that does not involve having to leave the main gates open.

### Case study 1: St Monica's Primary School, North Lanarkshire

St Monica's Primary School in the North Lanarkshire Council area has become their first school to install a natural playground which has school access only during the school day and community access outside school hours. The grounds are large and comprise a tarmac area to the front of the school and a large gently sloping grass area to the rear. The grounds also include a grass football pitch and various raised planted beds. Until this project, the entire grounds were closed off at the end of the school day.

A CultureNL spokesperson said, "Allowing unlimited access to the community out of school hours is a new arrangement, mainly due to the fact that the grounds represent the only recreational space in that community. This is a shared responsibility with the school staff and the council's Land Management service. Mostly, the school grounds have been used with respect. Children and young people who live in the community come and play out with the school day and at weekends and we have not had issues with anti-social behavior or vandalism within the school grounds. It was a fine balancing act to develop a space which functions as a school playground and outdoor learning space as well as a community play area but we feel this site successfully combines these elements.

The school has recently purchased a fire bowl for use within school hours only. The school is also currently experimenting with various loose parts during the school day, and the use of loose parts within the play area by the wider community is something which has been discussed and may be explored further in the future.



## Section 1.5 Vandalism and break-ins

The causes of vandalism outside of teaching hours are often the result of a problem outside of the school boundary. Thus it follows that the issue of vandalism is a community issue that requires a community solution.

Often, the root cause of community vandalism can be attributed to poor provision for older children and teenagers in the local area. Surrounding a school in security fencing to prevent vandalism is therefore not only an expensive, oppressive and short-term solution that can make schools look uninviting and harsh, but it could also be actually contributing to the underlying cause of the vandalism.

Vandalism is more of a risk to some schools than others but for all schools there is a difference between protecting the school buildings from misuse and deliberate damage, and protecting the wider school grounds. If capital funding becomes available to substantially refurbish schools some of that funding may be used to alter the way the buildings are physically protected whilst adopting strategies and designs which still allow access to the wider grounds.

When asked, children and young people say that what they are looking for more than anything else are places to play outside, with friends after school. They are not necessarily looking for, or asking for, access to buildings.

Evidence suggests that when school grounds are used by the wider community, out of teaching hours and during holidays (even on an unsupervised basis) the risk of damage and break-ins is dramatically reduced. The children and young people who regularly use the school grounds are not the ones who vandalise it; they value the provision.

Opening school grounds for playing will immediately increase the presence of people there. Communities will value the space if it provides a place for them and the presence of people is a well-known deterrent to vandalism.

Opening school grounds can result in local communities feeling more involved in the school either by informal arrangements or by organised stewardship agreements. It follows that the potential risk of people from outside the community causing problems can also be reduced.

Allowing limited access to school grounds can be a solution. This can be achieved by opening part of the school grounds to allow public access.

Many schools already provide a varied programme of after school activities and clubs. Another way to allow limited access to school grounds is by actively promoting the use of the grounds for freely chosen play whilst other, more structured recreational activities are taking place as part of the after school itinerary.

### Case study 2: Cramond Primary School, Edinburgh

Cramond Primary is a non-denominational school built in 1975. The school serves the village of Cramond and the surrounding areas of northwest Edinburgh. They are part of the Royal High School cluster. The school roll is over 400 pupils. They have a custom built nursery on site with places for 50 pupils in morning and 50 afternoon places. The school building was extensively upgraded and extended in 1999 and then again recently in 2006.

The grounds are extensive, comprising a split level playground, both a nursery and wildlife garden along with an eco-garden area, with a story telling bench, tiered seating and stage, a pond and orchard. The grounds support a variety of habitats. Parent fundraising has long supported playground improvement at Cramond along with community grants. Extensive natural play facilities were installed in 2014 to transform muddy, grass slopes into challenging, fun, play areas. They now have the use of various surface materials from sand, to gravel to tyre walls. They have a tunnel, wild grass and rocky climbs along with a wooden Roman Galleon housing a rope bridge walk way and sunken sand pit. They have a large loose parts construction area to compliment the existing trim trail and football pitch, and we have a giant slide. As the gathering space inside the school (main hall) is so small – they love their ‘amphitheatre’ to play on, perform on and hold outdoor assemblies. The P7 leavers ceremony (and party) was held in Our Place. They have outdoor speakers too!

Head teacher Helen Donaldson said, “Since we developed the area from a pretty uninspiring site, to a play promoting area for all our pupils, we have actively encouraged the local community to access the site after school hours. Though the community always had access, the playground is now far more appealing for everyone. Sports Lottery funding was used to install large equipment and to terrace our slopes in order to increase usability of the area. There have been no issues with significant vandalism or anti-social behaviour and the equipment has been treated with respect. It’s an all-weather play space – very well used after school, in evenings and the weekend. Many generations of families use the space and it lives up to our vision of ‘our place’ – a place to just play and stay active. Our children (and adults) happily spend hours here, creating, building, jumping, building, climbing, running and chilling. It has had significant impact in reducing playtime incidents and pupils come in after break times invigorated and ready to learn.



### Case study 3: City of Edinburgh Play Strategy December 2014

In December 2014 the Education Children and Families Committee of City of Edinburgh Council endorsed a new play strategy that incorporated Edinburgh's Play values. Play in Edinburgh values the benefit of risk and challenge based on risk benefit assessment. It states that "Every child and young person in Edinburgh should be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks, and make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, stage, ability and preference."

The Education Children and Families Committee have clearly stated in their Policy Principles for access to primary school grounds for play out of teaching hours would be that:

- Children have access to the playground for freely chosen play (as opposed to community leasing of sports facilities or 'pay and play')
- A range of options are considered, depending on the individual school and community need, including: open access; access limited by time/and or space; playground access during current leasing hours; access through a stewardship agreement
- School gates are not locked as a default position, but consideration is given to whether they should be locked, when gates should be locked and by whom they are locked, and if they can be left open
- When improving school grounds for play, additional costs may be incurred and must be considered by the school community when raising funds
- Safety and risk is put into a real rather than perceived context using risk benefit assessment

Schools developing their grounds for play receive training for staff in Loose Parts Play and Dynamic Risk Benefit Assessment.

"We have had instances which caused concern – a bit of graffiti that was considered inappropriate for the school site. Because we have a good relationship with the Police Liaison Officer, she was able to work closely with us and another community network to help remove it."



## Section 1.6 Balancing risks and benefits

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), in conjunction with the Play Safety Forum (PSF), has issued a joint high-level statement to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play.<sup>vii</sup>

Risk management in play provision involves balancing risks and benefits in a strategic way. So, it is vital for providers to have a clear, explicit policy framework for play provision that states overall service goals, that informs the approach to risk and safety, and that underpins the reasons for decisions. A policy that makes explicit the need for challenging play opportunities, with an acceptable degree of risk, will help providers resist unjustified negligence claims. A risk management policy template is included in the Tools to assist part of this toolkit.

A policy framework provides the context for making risk-benefit assessments. Risk-benefit assessment brings together an informed analysis of both risks and benefits. *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*<sup>viii</sup> sets out a descriptive form of risk-benefit assessment that allows providers to state in writing all the relevant considerations behind a given judgment or procedure. The HSE was consulted in the production of this publication. It endorses the sensible, proportionate, reasonable and balanced advice to play providers on managing participant safety set out in the guidance.

When schools have the right equipment and materials, in the right place, with the right policies and procedures in place for inspection and maintenance, then the play provision will be as safe as is reasonable practical, which is what the law requires.

It is important to put issues of safety and risk into context. The main risk facing children and young people during a typical day is often getting to and from school and then travelling to the places where they play and socialise out of teaching hours.

Many children and young people actively seek adventurous, exciting play experiences with a degree of risk. Far from significantly increasing the risk of injury, having access to local school grounds out of learning hours can potentially contribute to keeping children safe. Providing challenging facilities can help to reduce accidents overall by offering experiences in managed environments that are safe from traffic and other serious hazards.





## Children's play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach

The HSE has worked with the Play Safety Forum to produce a joint high-level statement that gives clear messages tackling these misunderstandings. HSE fully endorses the principles in this Statement. The statement makes clear that:

- Play is important for children's well-being and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

### Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.

Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

### Striking the right balance does mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and

those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user

- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

### Striking the right balance does not mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

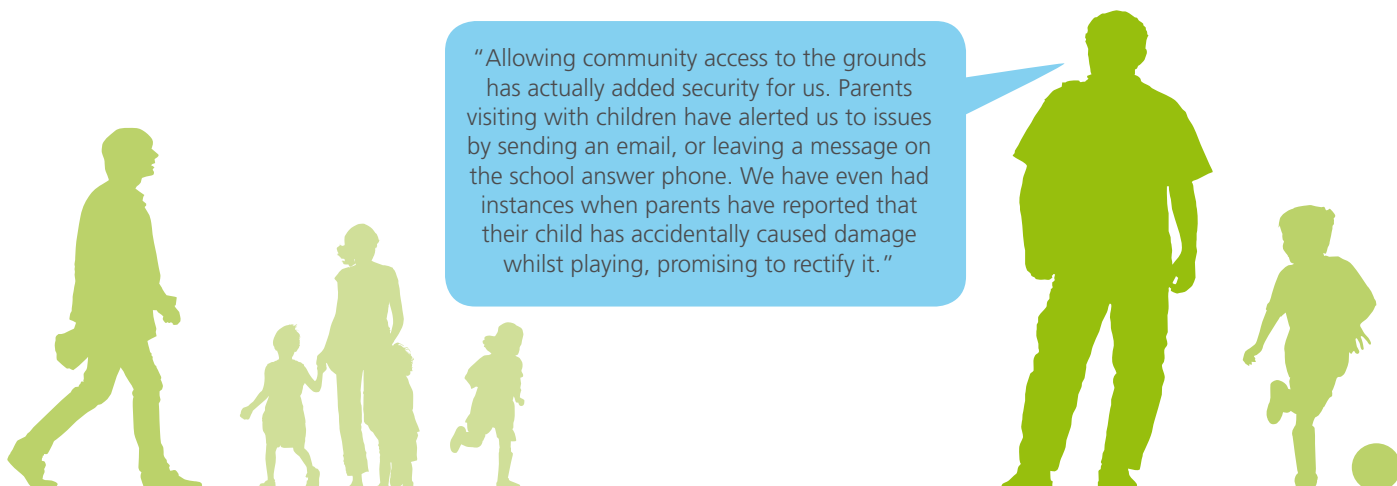
### What parents and society should expect from play providers

- Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.
- Play providers should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.
- They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

### It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play – and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge – are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

"Allowing community access to the grounds has actually added security for us. Parents visiting with children have alerted us to issues by sending an email, or leaving a message on the school answer phone. We have even had instances when parents have reported that their child has accidentally caused damage whilst playing, promising to rectify it."



## Section 1.7 Supervision

Although staff are responsible for the supervision of children and young people during the school day, during playtimes, break times and lunch-times, and when in supervised after school provision, this is not necessarily the case at other times of use. Where it is made clear to children and parents that provision is unsupervised and a properly made risk-benefit assessment has identified and removed hazards, then existing insurance policies can be extended to cover unsupervised use. This is how local councils gain insurance for un-staffed public playgrounds.

Partnership arrangements with other departments in the Local Authority and/or voluntary sector organisations can provide specialist support and sometimes staffing for provision. The play service within some local councils, and many local voluntary sector organisations have teams of playworkers who visit different sites during school holiday periods and early evenings in term time to promote open access use of school grounds and organise play sessions. Having staff on site for a limited time may help a school to stage its use of school grounds and may address parental and community concerns.

Unsupervised provision requires no additional staffing except for someone to lock the gates, if need requires, and partnership agreements with local groups is one way of addressing this.

### Case study 4: Aberdeen Play Forum

The Aberdeen Play Forum's (APF) Play Rangers support the use of Loose Parts in schools at lunchtimes (5 schools in 2015) and also deliver drop-in Loose Parts sessions for families in open spaces during the holidays. Last Easter Break APF held a session in each of the three GfL schools in Aberdeen City, where parents and children enjoyed playing together in their local school grounds. Staff in settings have noted that: children play more inclusively across peer groups, ages, genders and abilities; children are more engaged, which means less squabbling; richer play also means richer learning; after play children are in happier frames of mind, having had fresh air, exercise and fun. The team is currently embarking on a new support program for schools, which aims at schools managing the loose parts independently; the kit will also be available to out-of-school clubs which also use the school.



### Case study 5: The Zone, Dalmellington

The Go2 Play team of The Zone worked with Auchinleck Primary School East Ayrshire School (roll 220) from October 2012 through to July 2014.

This school itself is situated in an area with a raft of statistics available through the Scottish Index Multiple Deprivation for 2012, with 4 data zones in Auchinleck in the 15% most deprived data zones in Scotland for Income, Employment, Health and Education; in addition:-

- **Access** – amongst the 23% most access deprived areas in Scotland.
- **Housing** – amongst the 29% most housing deprived areas in Scotland.
- **Crime** – amongst the 6% most crime deprived areas in Scotland.

The Zone worked with the School on a weekly basis and to encourage play in the play grounds. Staff engaged with the children and got them playing with the equipment adapting it to suit circumstances. Over the time the Zone were in the playground, they started to develop good working relationships with the playground assistants, as well as the children.

The Head Teacher noted: "After the sessions we encouraged the children to play with the equipment in freeplay sessions or take part in team games. To ensure that the children continue to play in the absence of our Go2Play team we encouraged the children to lead on play. This led to the development of mini play rangers. We worked with P5/6 children to be play rangers during break times during the rest of the week when the team were not at the school."

"The pupils were encouraged to take ownership of playtime games and were trained by the Go2Play team to become mini play rangers, a role which the children took very seriously. This aspect also ensured sustainability."

The combined impact in the school has led to more fun and more active play, with children growing in confidence through their play interactions, in particular those who are mini play rangers developing confidence to instigate play for the younger less confident children.

# Section 1.8

## Legal context and litigation

Ultimately, the school is responsible for managing risks.

There is no specific legislation on play safety. The key legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984. In practice, this legislation implies a level of care for providers that is captured in the notion of 'reasonableness'.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 impose a legal duty on providers to carry out a 'suitable and sufficient assessment' of the risks associated with a site or activity, to document their assessments and to act accordingly.

The Occupiers Liability Act 1957, 2004 states that it is an occupier's duty to 'take such care as in all the circumstances of the case is reasonable to see that the visitor will be reasonably safe in using the premises for the purposes of which he is invited ... to be there'. The provisions of the Occupier's Liability Act 1984 regulate the position in relation to people other than visitors, i.e. trespassers.

The dangers or risks with which the occupier should concern himself are those arising from the state of the premises or from things done, or omitted to be done, on them.

When applying the Act, the courts have made an important distinction between a danger arising from the state of the premises, for example an uneven path, and an accident that occurred as a result of a risky activity undertaken, even if certain features of the premises facilitated that activity.

For instance, case law indicates that ordinary features of landscape are not going to be a danger arising from the state of the

premises. Premises will not be unsafe or dangerous simply because there are obvious risks, such as potentially falling from a height.

It is recognised that Local Authorities and schools have concerns about litigation, but the actual risk of successful litigation is very small.

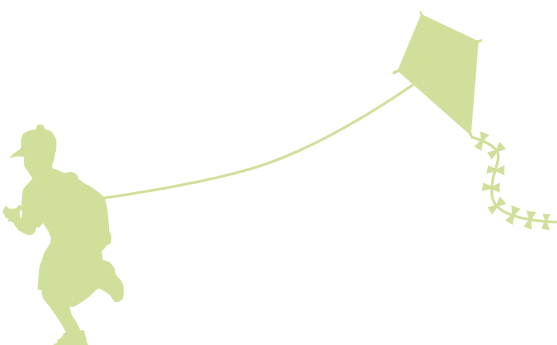
If schools have made an adequate risk-benefit assessment and provision is appropriate, in the right place, and the right policies and procedures are in place, then successful litigation is extremely unlikely. However insurance cover exists for the rare event a successful claim is made.

Play provision, like any other provision, does present risks, to children and adults through accidents and injuries, and also to providers through the risk of liability.

However, school grounds are comparatively safe places and have been so for some years if not decades. Local Authority risk managers and insurers report that claims from playground injuries represent a very small proportion of their caseload, and there is no evidence of any dramatic increase in numbers in recent years. This pattern should follow if school grounds were made more accessible.

Recent cases appear to suggest that the courts are keen to avoid the unnecessary overprotection of children or encourage the advancement of the compensation culture.

'When we were developing the site for use by the community out of teaching hours, there was concern that developing the space would increase the potential for claims, and increase liability. However, one of our team reminded us that the fact remained that this was always the potential, and given the lack of maintenance of the space prior to the development, the school was potentially at more risk of a claim to occur. We realised that the issues of liability and potential claims are the same, whether the space is open or locked.'







## Section 1.9 Insurance

Insurance plays an important role because it provides a financial safety net in the event of accidents or other losses. However, insurance is not intended to prevent accidents or losses, and should not be the driver of risk management or service delivery.

Risk-benefit assessment should be discussed with insurers, to ensure an agreed approach and to assist both schools and insurers in containing the number of claims that are placed.

Most schools are insured via the Local Authority through a group insurance scheme. Where schools successfully open their grounds for playing, specific insurance cover has been arranged to allow community use out of teaching hours.

### Case study 6: Wolverhampton City Council

Wolverhampton City Council's approach to risk is founded on the understanding that there is a balance to be struck between risk and benefit, and that it is the council's duty to make judgments that benefit the general public.

Wolverhampton City Council is predominantly selfinsured in respect of its liability risks (it carries its own excess of £250,000). It is council policy to defend robustly any claim where it does not consider itself liable, and to settle claims quickly where it judges that it has been at fault. The majority of claims are handled internally. Generally the council's insurers are not involved in the decision-making process.

The council developed a corporate, cross-sector play policy with the involvement of members, health and safety officers, parks, planners and the play service. Exploring attitudes to, and understanding about, risk in play formed an integral part of the process. The council recognised that a play policy alone would not be sufficient to embed a culture change. Many of those involved in delivering play opportunities tended to 'go for safety', and the 'fear factor' – about potential claims, and parental or other complaints – led to defensive practice. As a result, the risk and insurance manager and the play officer are creating a learning programme on risk and play for all staff whose decisions have an impact on play provision.



## Section 1.10 Toilets

Many local play areas, playgrounds and other public open spaces where children play, do not have toilets. As many of the children using the school grounds will live locally, they have the option of going home if they really need to. Information for children and parents regarding the use of school grounds can explicitly state the situation regarding toilets.



## Section 1.11 Play equipment

Some schools feel that the grounds have little to offer children and young people if there is no fixed play equipment on site. However, giving time, space and permission to play supports children to make the most of the environment. A well-landscaped green and natural space provides obvious positive features for play; however, a flat tarmac area can provide a good space, free from danger, where children and young people can ride bikes and scooters.

Loose parts are objects or components that can be moved around, adapted, built, unbuilt, mixed, or imbued with imaginary qualities – for instance: Paper, stones, sticks, water, sand, leaves, feathers, tools, nails, boxes, fabric, ropes, wood,

pots, animals, plants, metal, clay, mud, tables, chairs, blankets, everything and anything that can be moved or manipulated as part of play. The best play spaces contain a wide variety of loose parts and children are free to play with them as they wish.

Storage is an issue in many schools and it may be more of a problem for modern schools than for older ones. Some schools which provide loose parts for play use a garden shed for storage of play materials and equipment but this may not be practical in all areas. Shipping containers are ideal for securely storing a variety of play materials including big items such as den building material. These can be used at playtimes and lunchtimes and also out of teaching hours and on holiday playschemes. There is some cost involved but it can be a relatively low cost solution.



## Case study 9: Buckstone Primary School, Edinburgh

Buckstone Primary School was established in 1977. There are 425 children from primary 1 to 7.

The grounds are extensive, comprising two playgrounds and a large mature wooded area, which are continually being improved. There is also a hockey/football pitch on hard standing.

The grounds support a variety of habitats. There is a woodland, orchard, vegetable garden, and a wildlife area, as well as an older pupils "chillout" outdoor zone.

Head teacher Diane Palmer said, "Allowing unlimited access to the community is a long-standing arrangement mainly due to the fact that the grounds represent the one of the few recreational spaces in the community. Mostly, the school grounds have been used with respect. Children and young people who live in the community come and play without any issues and we have not had issues with vandalism or damage.

"We have recently introduced den-building and we installed a storage area full of materials and equipment (loose parts) that can facilitate and enhance children's play. The dens are only tidied up on a Friday and are left out during the week. The children have open access to this outside of teaching hours and other than on occasions finding stuff scattered around after a weekend, or long school break, there have been few issues with this additional facility."



## Section 1.12 Parents and local residents concerns

Inevitably whenever there is change there will be concerns raised, because people are used to the way 'it has always been'. Schools can address concerns by keeping local residents and parents informed and involved: by engaging with them from the earliest stage to encourage a sense of shared ownership. Those living close to the school are in an ideal situation to help keep an eye on a valuable community resource; one which they and their own children may use or have used in the past.

Parental concerns about children's safety when they are out playing and apprehension about accidents are common anxieties identified by schools. Involving and informing parents about why opportunities for play are being extended, how it is being done, and why will help alleviate these fears. Sometimes, parents feel that 'the school' will see them as 'bad' parents if they do not express a concern on such issues.

As a society we are increasingly hearing about and recognising the concept of 'lost childhood'. More and more parents whilst realising that their children need to play, get dirty and take risks often find it challenging to provide these opportunities. Many will be looking towards the school community to support them to respond to this challenge. Providing the right information for parents and the wider community will support them to understand why this provision is important.





# Part 2: Tools to assist

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This part of the toolkit has been prepared to support the school community to consider ways in which it can provide time, space and permission to promote freely chosen play for children in their own school grounds out of teaching hours. This approach may feel like a departure from current day-to-day work. However, the following question will provide a useful starting point – “When I was younger where were my favourite places to play and spend time with my friends?”

## Section 2.1 School play policy

Adopting a school play policy will make a significant contribution to providing a rich play environment for children. A school play policy states the value that the school places on children’s play and commits itself to supporting children’s play opportunities. The policy can be shared with the children, staff and parents and be included in the school prospectus. A school play policy should demonstrate how play contributes to other national and local policy documents.

Experience tends to show that these were not expensive, adult-led places, but outdoor places where as children we made our own fun and had our own adventures. Schools can play a part in recreating these environments within the school grounds.

### School play policy template

**This school recognises the importance of all the children who attend having sufficient time and good places to play freely as part of their day.**

To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Playing contributes to children’s health, well-being and happiness as well as to their learning and their ability to learn. Most importantly playing contributes to children’s ability to thrive and survive. Some children only have the opportunity to play with their friends at school.

A very positive contribution can be made to children’s lives by valuing their urge and desire to play and providing for a broad range of play opportunities within the school playgrounds before, during and after the school day.

This school recognises that children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations; while making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play. We will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

This school believes that adults’ attitude towards, and understanding of, children’s play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within and outside the school. This school will therefore seek out training opportunities and support research among its staff so that they are confident to facilitate children’s freely chosen, self-directed play.



## Section 2.2

# Undertaking an options analysis

The use of an options analysis template can help schools to determine the best decision, model and approach to take with regards to making school grounds available for play out of teaching hours.

The advantages and disadvantages for each option can be listed – scoring 1 point for each advantage and -1 for every disadvantage.

### Option 1: Offer Unlimited Access to Grounds

Issues to be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What other facilities/spaces for free play are available in the community?			
Is it safe for children to travel independently to the school site?			
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the community views?			
What is the impact on community relations?			



## Option 2: Offer Limited Access to Grounds

Issues to be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What after school programme of activities is currently on offer?			
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the community views?			
What is the impact on community relations?			

## Option 3: Offer Limited Access to Grounds through a Stewardship Agreement

Issues to be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What community groups exist which could support this initiative?			
What skills are there locally?			
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the community views?			
What is the impact on community relations?			

## Option 4: Do Nothing

Issues to be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the community views?			
What is the impact on community relations?			



## Section 2.3

# Engaging with children

In the same way that schools have appointed sports champions or curriculum specialists, a 'play champion' could take responsibility for ensuring the school considers the play needs of its pupils.

The first people to talk to are the children. Pupil Councils may provide the mechanism for this but it is important to involve the whole school. The children can help:

- Undertake an audit of how, and more importantly which, parts of the school grounds are already being used; before school, at playtime, break times, lunchtime, and after school. The children are best placed to identify the potential for play.
- Identify where else children and young people are spending their time in the local community off the school site and what they do there – this will help to plan priorities.
- Identify the routes children and young people use to get to and from school and what method of transport they use.
- Identify the barriers that might prevent greater use of the grounds out of teaching hours, such as roads and water courses and also perceived community boundaries, cultural and ethnic divides.

The Questions and notes for facilitators template on the next pages can be used to engage with children.



## Questions and notes for facilitators template

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) you have the right to say what you think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect you. These questions are to help us find out what you think

about the places where you play or spend time with your friends near where you live when you are not in school.

The sample answers are not exhaustive and facilitators can encourage more extensive responses.

### 1. How often do you go out to play with friends?

**Note for facilitator:** this provides information that can contribute to information about the amount of time children play in their community.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> I play out with friends most days         | <input type="radio"/> I hardly ever play with friends outside |
| <input type="radio"/> I play out with friends a few days a week | <input type="radio"/> I don't play with friends outside       |

### 2. When you go out to play, what do you like doing?

**Note for facilitator:** this is designed to help children think about what they like doing before answering the other questions. You may choose not to use it for analysis, but it can be a useful tool to think about what you can be providing.

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Riding bikes               | <input type="radio"/> Climbing things           | <input type="radio"/> Chatting and being with my friends             |
| <input type="radio"/> Building dens              | <input type="radio"/> Running and chasing games | <input type="radio"/> Playing ball games                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Playing hide and seek      | <input type="radio"/> Being in the trees        | <input type="radio"/> Playing armies and soldiers                    |
| <input type="radio"/> Making swings              | <input type="radio"/> Having adventures         | <input type="radio"/> Fishing  |
| <input type="radio"/> Rolling down hills         | <input type="radio"/> Exploring                 | <input type="radio"/> Looking for dragonflies and butterflies        |
| <input type="radio"/> Having a walk              | <input type="radio"/> Having a picnic           | <input type="radio"/> Making bike tracks and courses                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Looking for bugs and stuff | <input type="radio"/> Being in the fresh air    | <input type="radio"/> Looking for bears, dragons, fairies and things |
| <input type="radio"/> Playing in the mud         | <input type="radio"/> Playing in the water      | <input type="radio"/> Spending time with grown-ups in my family      |
| <input type="radio"/> Other stuff _____          |   |  |

### 3. Playing makes me feel ...

**Note for facilitator:** this is designed to help children think about what they like doing before answering the other questions. You may choose not to use it for analysis, but it can be a useful tool to think about what you can be providing

- |   |                                |                              |   |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Happy                 | <input type="radio"/> Active   | <input type="radio"/> Sad    | <input type="radio"/> Excited                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Brave                 | <input type="radio"/> Scared   | <input type="radio"/> Quiet  | <input type="radio"/> Glad to be with friends   |
| <input type="radio"/> Bored                 | <input type="radio"/> Peaceful | <input type="radio"/> Lonely | <input type="radio"/> Glad to be on my own      |
| <input type="radio"/> Adventurous           | <input type="radio"/> Afraid   | <input type="radio"/> Loud   | <input type="radio"/> Glad to be with my family |
| <input type="radio"/> Other feelings? _____ |                                |                              |   |

*Continued overleaf*

## 4. When I am playing out in my community

**Note for facilitator:** this is designed to help you determine to what extent children are satisfied with local play opportunities and experiences. You can suggest to children that they think about their answers to questions 2 and 3 and ask how much they can do.

- I can do most of my favourite things
  I can do some of my favourite things  
 I can do hardly any of my favourite things

## 5. Where is your favourite place to play when you are not in school?

**Note for facilitator:** this is designed to help children think about what might be possible – they should tick the places they like BEST even if there are none of these in their community.

- Garden or friend's garden
  The woods near my house  
 Community centre or leisure centre
  Streets near my house  
 Football field or sports pitch
  Beach, seaside, river  
 Local grassy area or field
  School playground  
 A place with bushes, trees and flowers
  Play area that has water or sand in it  
 Cycle or skate park
  Play area with swings, slides and other stuff to play on  
 Somewhere else? \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. In your community, which of these is true?

**Note for facilitator:** suggest to children that they think about those places in the question above and ask how many of these are available in their community.

- There are lots of my favourite places to play
  There are some of my favourite places to play  
 There are hardly any of my favourite places to play

## 7. When you go out to play

**Note for facilitator:** this is designed to help children think about to what extent they can travel independently through their neighbourhood.

- I can go out on my own
  I only go out with my brother or sister  
 I can go out with my friends
  I only go out with an adult  
 I don't go out to play at all



## 8. What stops you playing out?

**Note for facilitator: this is designed to help to identify some of the barriers to, or, reasons why children are not playing out in their community.**

- I'm not allowed to go out to play
- I don't like getting wet and muddy
- I'm too busy with homework
- I'm not allowed to get wet and muddy
- There's too much dog mess where I like to play
- I'm too busy with playing games on the Xbox/PS/Wii
- There's nothing to play with there
- I'm too busy with clubs like football or other things
- There's nobody to play with there
- I don't go out to play if it's raining or cold
- I don't go out to play as it's too dark
- It's hard to cross the road to get there
- I don't go out to play because of bullies
- I'm not allowed to cross the road to get there
- I don't go out to play because of other grown-ups
- Something else? \_\_\_\_\_

## 9. How can we help you to play more often?

**Note for facilitator: this is designed to help you to think about initiatives or plans that could address some of the barriers playing children face in their local area.**

- Find safer ways to cross the roads to go out/get around
- Talk to adults who tell us not to play out
- Help us deal with the bullies
- Ask dog owners to pick up the dog mess
- Help my parents understand that it's okay to play out
- Something else? \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2.4

# Play audits

To understand what could be offered, it is important to consider the local community and environment in which children live. Given time, space and permission to play, children will naturally choose to play wherever and whenever they wish. Once what is available to children is known, it can be assessed against how children need to play. Play audits provide a process to measure effectively if children's play needs are being met within a community.

### Adults as auditors

Schools will already have a good range of information about the geography, demography and culture of the community. Gathering information about other provision, such as scouts, will help to inform decisions about what is offered.

Monitoring how the school grounds are used during teaching hours will help to identify their potential for play. For instance questions that might be considered include:

- What happens before school starts and during play/break time?
- What do children gravitate towards?
- What parts of the grounds do children first occupy and what spaces do they avoid?

The use of, or lack of space and resources can be observed and recorded. An area that isn't used much might benefit from sensory

enhancement, an injection of colour or loose parts to more actively promote to children that this is a place where they can play.

The layout of a site, where things are, and how children have modified spaces and have moved things around, are all clues to children's need to play and individual preferences.

Regular observation of children can become a routine enabling the capture of children's natural play behaviour. Using a notepad, phone, voice memo and camera can all be useful methods for capturing the moment and need not be intrusive. The need to gather information should never significantly interfere with children's right to play. As well as planning when and where observations are undertaken, if the tools for observation are readily available, it is possible to capture and record events as they happen.

Whatever method is used for observations the following information should be recorded:

- What is being observed and why. For example, watching how children use a particularly popular piece of equipment to find out why
- The date
- The time
- The place
- A record of what is actually happening (not what we imagine is happening)
- A record of what is being said and by whom.

After the event it is valuable to reflect upon what has been observed, to begin to interpret what has been seen, and what it means in terms of the audit.





### Children as auditors

A child at play will naturally and instinctively interpret a space and make changes to it, or else simply move on because the space doesn't offer, or has ceased to offer, what they need. For those responsible for auditing play spaces, the most reliable source of information will be the children. When auditing a play space it is important to remember that this is an adult activity and not children's. It is important not to infringe on children's time, but if they are to feel the play setting belongs to them, their participation is beneficial in supporting a sense of ownership.

Some children simply enjoy having a role to play. Their natural curiosity will cause them to ask what is being done when they see adults counting resources and they may want to help. Without duress and with some guidance there are a number of ways children can inform the audit of the play space.

Looking at maps with children can be a good way to look at the geography of an area and begin to understand how children are playing within it.

Other methods that include children:

- Drawing pictures of what they like to do
- Interviewing other children about their interests

- Producing and completing questionnaires with their peers
- Taking photos of what's happening in the play space

Going out into the community, sensitively observing children playing and chatting to them will also help gather information from children.

It is important to remember that with any children's involvement with auditing they do not feel they are being promised something that can't be delivered. Asking children a range of questions and encouraging participation will help children see the possibilities. This is a mapping stage that also involves interpretation of the space and what happens within it to support decision-making processes.

If at any point through the process mixed messages are conveyed, over the future development of the setting or resources, children will feel disengaged and their sense of ownership damaged. Children across different stages of understanding will interpret things varyingly, so keeping participation developmentally appropriate will help reduce the risk of misunderstandings happening.





## Section 2.5

# Identifying the potential for a space to promote play

### Play space audit checklist

A play space audit is a valuable tool to use when identifying the potential for playing. If children already use the space for playing, there will be evidence of this. The Play space audit template is designed to help identify where children are playing, what they are doing and how often they use the space for playing. It should be noted that apparent signs of neglect such as litter, broken branches on trees and graffiti are, in fact, often signs of positive use by children.

A play space audit also helps in other ways. Firstly, it forms part of the participation and engagement process and can help the gathering of evidence to support what the community and children are saying. Secondly, conducted at regular intervals (for example six monthly) it can be used to help monitor how the space is being used and how often.

### How to conduct a play space audit

The Play space audit template on the following pages is intended for an observation that should take a minimum of 30 minutes. Ideally, this should be undertaken during different times of the day to see how different age groups use the space. For example, undertake an observation at the weekend or after school and another one during the day to observe pre-schoolers using the site with their parents or carers. Choosing when to undertake observations will depend on the site.

There are a number of play behaviours that are described in more detail below to help with the observation. There will be

play behaviours that can be identified without needing to see children playing. For example, if children gather and meet on boulders or seated areas, there will be signs of wear from scuffing feet or holes dug with toes or sticks.

If the space is an appealing place for children it is likely there are a number of factors that contribute to this. Children say that issues such as how well lit the space is, how close it is to homes, and whether or not there are places to shelter contribute to a sense of feeling safe and appeal to a broad age range. If this is the case the space will need to be designed in a way that provides for that wide age range and provides for a changing demographic.

All children have different play needs and wishes that can change with time. Separating people into age and other groups is not necessarily beneficial (although some may need particular support to meet their own needs). Interaction between all age groups and members of society is a vital process that supports all children and young people to feel more confident about playing out. Building relationships with other children and young people gives an opportunity to share knowledge of the people and geography of neighbourhoods and to share lore. For example, traditions of playing, rules of games, places for play such as an old lamppost which has been used for generations as the base when playing games such as hide and seek or *What's the time Mr Wolf?*



## Things to look out for

### Walking and travelling through space

If there is a pathway running through the space it may be that children play as they move through it even if they aren't intending to stop. Behaviours can include jumping off kerbs on bikes or scooters, swinging off trees, jumping over things, running down a bank, free running/parcour. Actions which change the way children travel through the space, such as re-routing a pathway, can be considered as they may encourage better or more play opportunities.

### Sitting and gathering

Even without formal seating areas there will be places where children choose to gather; evidenced by signs of wear on the ground near seating areas, under climbing frames, at the base of trees/boulders or items brought in to the space such as pieces of carpet, crates or buckets that could be used as chairs. Where there are no current obvious opportunities for formal seating areas, or gathering places, creating these will help to make the space a more social place that can be used by a wide range of ages – from families with younger children to older children gathering and chatting with their friends. Seating should be placed in circles, U or L shapes to encourage social play – placing benches in a line does not reflect how people like to gather and socialise.

### Riding (bikes, scooters, skateboards)

Children's use of bikes in the space can be observed whether they are used as transport to the space or being ridden in and around the site. What features are being used to ride down, jump, skid on? Is there evidence of construction by children – such as mud ramps and timber and any improvements that have been made to support wheeled play opportunities in an informal way?

### Use of natural features (e.g. trees, bushes, mounds, hills)

Use of existing natural features should be considered. Informal access points into wooded areas, and signs of litter or items brought in to the space under trees/bushes could show den building activity or secret spaces. Wear on bark or bases of trees and broken limbs on trees show evidence of children climbing trees, as do planks of wood, rope and fabric up in the trees.

### Playing with the elements

Evidence of children having access to a range of natural elements to play should be considered. Children have a fascination with the natural world and should have the opportunity to experience water, earth (mud), fire and air. The grounds

should be considered for access to any or all of these.

It is important that these elements can be incorporated using a sensible risk management approach.

### Use of the senses (taste, smell, sight, sound, texture)

Children moving through the space can be observed. Rusting leaves, sand, touching bark, feeling cold metal, rolling in grass, playing with shadows all provide opportunities for sensory play.

### Movement

Evidence of how children move when they are in the space should be considered. There should be a range of opportunities to move in different ways in the play space, for example running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling, swinging, sliding, dancing and chasing.

### Rough and tumble

Children learn about their own physical limitations, strength, controlling anger and boundaries through rough and tumble. This can come in many forms including play fighting, cops and robbers, chasing, and hide and seek. It will be clear from laughter, smiles and other facial expressions that this is a game and the children are treating it as such.

### Risk and challenge (physical)

Are children experiencing increasing levels of challenge? This doesn't need to be high risk activity, it can be as simple as a young child building up from jumping off the bottom rung of a ladder to the second and then the third. Where there are opportunities for children to take physical risks they will generally look for ways to improve and increase the challenge. For example, a bike ramp made of bricks and planks of wood will soon have more bricks added as children's confidence grows.

### Playing with props/loose parts

Evidence of children bringing props in from outside to enhance their play may be seen; this could be rope for a swing or wood for a den, toy cars to build a road in the mud or using natural elements such as stones, flowers, leaves, berries to build small worlds, potions or simply to create a pile or sort and categorise items.

### Playing with identity

Children will play with who they are and what they look like. This could be role play games, such as mummy and baby, doctors and nurses, soldiers, power rangers or changing how they look with mud on their faces, dressing up games or pulling faces.



## Play space audit template

### School details and observations

<b>Name of school</b>	
Observation day and date	
Observation period e.g. half term/after school/during school day/weekend/evening	
Time of observation period and weather	
Observation made by	
<b>Key features</b> Brief description of main features including access points (such as slopes, trees, shrubbery, vantage points, areas to hide, things to climb up or clamber over, seating and gathering points, level areas; as well as any manufactured play equipment features that may have been installed). Note any specific areas of usage shown, for example by worn grass, broken branches, bike tracks, litter, graffiti. <i>These can be further detailed below in any activity observations made.</i>	

### Play space usage

Usage by children and adults (numbers)	Male	Female	Approximate age (eg., Under 5, 5-8, 8-13, 13-15, 15+)	Total
Children/young people in a group				
Solo children/young people				
Accompanied by adults				
Adult only				

### Activity

Activity observed by presence of children and young people

If not present, record of signs of children and young people being there and making use of site

<input type="radio"/> Walking, travelling through the space	_____
<input type="radio"/> Sitting and gathering	_____
<input type="radio"/> Riding bikes, scooters, skateboards	_____
<input type="radio"/> Use of natural features (trees, bushes, mounds, hills)	_____
<input type="radio"/> Playing with elements (water, earth [mud], fire, air)	_____
<input type="radio"/> Use of senses (taste, smell, sight, sound, texture)	_____
<input type="radio"/> Movement (running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling)	_____
<input type="radio"/> Rough and tumble	_____
<input type="radio"/> Risk and challenge (physical)	_____
<input type="radio"/> Playing with props/loose parts	_____
<input type="radio"/> Playing with identity	_____



## Section 2.6

# Working with the school community

The school Parent Council, local tenants and residents association and other local groups are good points of contact to identify potential volunteers to help with the opening and closing of gates, if this has been identified as a potential approach.

### Tools to assist

It is worth contacting the Community Council and other organisations in the area, including other departments of the local authority to identify what other play provision might be available locally and what support they might be able to offer.

Most Local Authorities in Scotland will have someone who is responsible for Play, but if not, there are regional play associations across Scotland. They can potentially help with advice about the range of play provision that can be developed and promoted using the existing grounds. They may be able to offer short-term staffed sessions to promote the opening of school grounds. Staffed play provision in particular may be able to provide advice on concerns over fears of damage and

vandalism. They may also help to organise a play event in the school grounds to help promote playing and to answer questions that might arise.

Holding a community meeting is a good way to help parents and others to understand what the plans are for out of teaching hours use. Here, ideas can be shared and the space that will be available for children for their own free play can be discussed. It can be established that the space will be unsupervised and that the buildings will not be open.

Engaging with a Police Community Officer will ensure that it is well understood what the space is for. They will be keen to know of all the spaces in the community that children have permission to play and gather in and will also be keen to help protect that provision.

This may also provide a good opportunity to promote the importance of play to parents and the wider community and allay any fears they may have. This meeting will also provide an opportunity for the school to discuss the importance of play in school time with parents and the wider community.

Schools can use and adapt the *Top tips for a playful community* to help promote play locally and support parents.



### Community Agreement

When considering the options for the opening of schools grounds, it is likely that a number of individuals and groups will come together to plan the arrangements. A Memorandum of Understanding offers a way for sharing an understanding of what is proposed; to open outdoor facilities for community use. It doesn't need to be a complicated document.

It is important to ensure that it is clear what each party or person is tasked with and who takes overall responsibility for critical elements such as insurance, maintenance and inspection.

"We've managed to open part of our grounds because we worked with an established Community Network. This group of people is both keen and used to taking on responsibilities. They have good community links, but also support staff which has helped maintain continuity"



## Top tips for a playful community

To encourage parents and carers and local communities to support children playing out confidently beyond any organised event, these top tips may help:

### Prepare children to be road safe

Streets make up the major part of public space within communities. Children can be prepared from an early age by telling them and showing them ways to keep themselves safe on and around roads.

### Look to everyone's driving habits

Parents are often concerned about traffic when giving children permission to play out. As drivers, everyone can drive at safe speeds in the same way everyone would wish others to drive in the residential streets where children play.

### Help children get to know their community

If adults and children are less reliant on travelling by car in their local communities, children will get to know their local streets. Walking to and from local facilities such as the shops, school and the park can help everyone identify solutions together with children to keep themselves safe.

### Be community friendly

Everyone can get to know local people, neighbours and other families, and agree with each other to keep an eye out for children. This fosters a sense of a safe community, allowing more children to play out more, and to be safer doing so.

### Trust children

Agreements can be made with children on where and how long they go out to play. If they know their local area, their address and phone number, and whom they can call on, and tell the time, it helps to make those arrangements.

### Be realistic

Keeping everyone's worries in perspective and knowing neighbours and local residents who can be called on for support and help if there are any concerns. The benefits of playing out far outweigh the risks.

### Make a change

Everyone can campaign locally for changes to their community that may make local areas places where children can play out confidently. The importance of playing out can be shared within communities by word of mouth or holding community events and letting others know about them.





## Memorandum of understanding template

### Memorandum of understanding

The aim of the project is to work together to ensure that the grounds of \_\_\_\_\_ school are suitable and accessible for children and young people in the community to use for playing out of learning hours.

#### Purpose of Memorandum of Understanding

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to define the method of working and roles and responsibilities of member organisations working in partnership to oversee, support and ensure the maintenance of contributing to its longer term sustainability.

The role of the partnership is to support the maintenance regime at \_\_\_\_\_ school to ensure that the space is able to continue to support and be effective at meeting children and young people's play needs. Through making risk-benefit assessments, any unnecessary hazards that may arise will be minimised by supporting the required actions needed to do so, including making checks, repairs, and environmental modifications.

The members of the group have made a commitment to contribute to an environment of openness, active participation and understanding of the specific needs of each organisation and area.

#### Parties making the agreement

Any other parties working to support children's playable space are:

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#### Methods of working

1. \_\_\_\_\_ will take primary responsibility for the management of the school grounds and will work with partners ensure it is well maintained and suitable for access to support children's play needs. This will include ensuring a budget to support any maintenance regime.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ will provide a caretaker to ensure a daily/weekly visual inspection of the school grounds. This will include the removal of any unnecessary litter and a visual inspection of any play equipment installed for wear and tear. Any concerns will be recorded appropriately, with identified actions needed. This will form part of any risk-benefit assessment made.
3. Risk-benefit assessments will be made and held on record by \_\_\_\_\_ and identified actions shared with appropriate staff and external parties supporting the maintenance regime.
4. Meetings, (that will take place every \_\_\_\_\_) will be held with appropriate external parties supporting the maintenance regime, and will include sharing of any identified actions required for supporting the maintenance regime.
5. Meetings will identify the resources needed for taking any identified actions required to support the maintenance regime.
6. Appropriate external parties will be required to contribute to any risk-benefit assessments made.
7. Appropriate external parties will contribute to the maintenance of the playable space by ensuring identified specific actions are made (e.g. grass cutting, hedge trimming)
8. Appropriate external parties will take action to support contributing to a budget and/or resources necessary to support the maintenance regime.

#### Roles and responsibilities

Organisation – Who?	Role – What?	Responsibility

**Declaration** We the undersigned agree to the arrangements in this document.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Section 2.7

# Risk management

As part of responsibilities relating to inspection and maintenance of the play space, it is necessary to conduct regular operational risk-benefit assessments. It is likely this will be a condition of the insurance.

The primary purpose of a risk-benefit assessment is to show that any potential risks have been identified and control measures put in place to manage those risks.

### Risk-benefit assessment

Risk-benefit assessment is an approach to risk management that also takes into account the benefit to the child of having access to a particular risk. This is a rational consideration in children's play provision.

For example: the risks associated with a climbing frame are slips and falls from the equipment. There are controls that might be put in place to minimise the risks arising from falling.

However, before establishing controls, consideration should be given to why children should be allowed to climb to height. This is where benefits apply. Likely benefits include: building physical

strength, balance and co-ordination; children learning to assess risks for themselves and experiencing feelings of excitement.

Building risk-benefit assessment into the risk management approach shows that all these factors have been considered, which increase the playability of the play space.

### Risk management policy template

The Risk management policy template overleaf can be adapted to meet the needs of the school. The policy sets out the risk-benefit approach to managing risks and allows the inclusion of school procedures, frequency of inspections and routine maintenance programme. Having a risk management policy goes beyond requirements for conducting a risk assessment, to give a robust framework for how organisations manage risks over time and use the knowledge gained to update and improve operational (paper-based) risk assessments.



## Risk management policy template

### Risk management policy

This policy has been developed to provide a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management of risk at \_\_\_\_\_ School to ensure greater clarity of understanding around this issue.

In doing so, the policy aims to present some challenge to the existing risk averse nature of our society which can limit children's play experiences.

The policy is supported by the High-Level Statement produced by the Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety Forum.

The High-Level Statement – *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach* statement makes clear that:

- Play is important for children's wellbeing and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits.
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.

#### Risk management systems

Risk management in this policy is used to refer to all elements involved in the management of risk that can, and should, incorporate much more than paper risk assessments alone. Where all these elements are appropriately supported there is potential to develop more robust and better informed risk management systems.

#### Providing for risk and challenge in play provision

\_\_\_\_\_ School recognises that childhood is full of new experiences, which necessarily involve some degree of risk taking, whether it be physical or emotional.

Childhood is a continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the inevitability of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury. We have a duty of care to try and protect individuals accessing our services and facilities from the potentially, longterm, damaging effects of being exposed to serious and unreasonable physical and emotional harm. However in doing this we must not overlook, or seek it at the expense of, also enabling children to actively participate in their own personal development of health, wellbeing and resilience, as a result of engaging in situations with uncertain outcomes.

#### Risk-benefit assessment

Decisions about what is reasonable and the desirability

of children's engagement and involvement will be made using a risk-benefit approach. This process involves considering the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potentially negative outcomes and then making a judgement about whether the potential for injury is proportional to the benefits. That is, do the potential benefits justify allowing risk of injury to remain?

For the purpose of risk-benefit assessments, benefits can be physical, emotional, social or environmental (and are likely to be a combination of all of these). Risk of injury can be identified by considering the likelihood of any potential injury occurring together with the potential severity of that injury.

#### Reasonable controls

During the risk-benefit process it may be necessary to identify control measures in order to reduce risk of injury to an acceptable level. However, the control measures that can reasonably be implemented will depend on the resources available. The cost of any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risk of injury involved.

Prior to the implementation of control measures consideration should also be given to any potentially negative impacts that may result from making that intervention. For example, it is important that children's need to use their environment in novel and unexpected ways is not constrained in the search for providing absolute protection from injury.

#### Key points:

- There is intrinsic value in children experiencing uncertainty and personal challenge through their play.
- Children need to feel free to experience risk and challenge of their own choice. They will only be able to do this if we allow some degree of uncertainty to remain.
- The play provision we create aims to support children to experience reasonable levels of risk for themselves.
- There is a need for balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of uncertainty.
- We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of injury children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.
- Controls will be reasonable and realistic whilst ensuring unnecessary risks are minimised.
- Risk management incorporates a number of different elements which work together to form a continuous cycle, improving our practice.
- Children are capable of managing some risk for themselves and their competency will develop as their experience grows.<sup>ix</sup>

# Section 2.8

## Risk-benefit assessment

This risk-benefit assessment template/example is designed to include value-based risk benefit assessment as described in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) endorsed *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*.

The Play Forum worked example can be found at <http://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/PSF-Risk-Benefit-Assessment-Form-Worked-Example.pdf>

### Risk-benefit assessment template

Name of school: *Any School*

Date: *11/6*

Completed by: *KM*

Review date: *1/10*

Area/description: *Den building*

Benefits	Risks	Relevant local features	What are you already doing?	Any further action needed?	Date action completed
<p><i>Pleasure and fun.</i></p> <p><i>Physical play and problem solving opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>Exploring environment.</i></p> <p><i>Team building.</i></p> <p><i>Development of self confidence and wellbeing.</i></p> <p><i>Co-ordination.</i></p> <p><i>Achievement of end result.</i></p> <p><i>Social inclusion.</i></p> <p><i>Engagement with natural environment and elements.</i></p> <p><i>Potential for incorporation into imaginative games.</i></p> <p><i>Mixing between different age ranges.</i></p>	<p><i>Cuts, grazes, bruises from constructing and handling of materials.</i></p> <p><i>Cuts, bruises, broken bones from falling/collapsing objects</i></p>	<p><i>Only a small budget exists for increasing the play offer at this site.</i></p> <p><i>Building on experience of imaginative play in school time.</i></p> <p><i>Local housing and road nearby to call for help.</i></p>	<p><i>Providing lightweight material.</i></p>	<p><i>Regular visual inspection of den building materials for e.g splinters should be undertaken.</i></p> <p><i>Built dens to be dynamically risk assessed regarding upper height limit. Upper height maximum to be decided upon and agreed with users and monitored.</i></p>	<p><i>21/5</i></p>





## Section 2.9 Maintenance

A regular programme of maintenance will be required for the play space. How this is arranged will depend on the local situation and level of use.

Regular daily or weekly checks which are quick and easy to undertake will already be taking place. These checks involve checking for signs of deliberate misuse, vandalism and removing litter or dangerous items.

### Maintenance considerations

Below are some factors to take into account in relation to maintenance.

- Can a local organisation who can take responsibility for maintenance be identified?
- What general maintenance will be required? Litter picking, mowing and general repairs can all be undertaken by the local community.
- What specialist maintenance will be required? Replacement of worn out parts on play equipment is best left to a specialist.
- How much are the maintenance plans going to cost? Once the budget has been allocated it will need to be built into fundraising activities.

### Signage

Signage can play an important role in providing information to users for the purposes of reporting accidents and damage. Signage can include:

- Contact details to report damage or accidents. The sign can include the phone number or email address for the school.
- Pictogram 'No Dogs' and 'No Smoking' signs.
- Where there are overhead electric cables nearby 'No Kite Flying' signs are recommended.

Signage should also be welcoming and child-friendly. If possible work with pupils to design signage that reflects the community and the children who live there.



## Routine play space checks template

As a guide if the school grounds usually score 1 or 2 they may only require weekly checks, if it's 4 or 5, daily checks may be needed. We can use this tool to monitor levels of maintenance needed and also seasonal changes.

### Play space checks

Name of school:

Frequency of check (Daily/weekly):

Date	Problems/What has been done	Score (see key)	Initials/Signed	Future Actions
3/5	Picked up litter, removed broken glass, checked damaged swing seat	4	KM	Recommend move to daily checks over the summer. Add damaged swing seat to routine inspection checklist

**Key – (Scoring) Allocate a number of 1-5 to represent the level of damage/maintenance required at each visit.**

1 = Little or no litter, no damage

2 = Some litter, signs of regular use and wear

3 = Moderate litter, some removal of dangerous objects

4 = Significant litter and/or damage

5 = Signs of very heavy use, lots of litter, dangerous objects to remove, significant regular maintenance needed

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**Inspiring Scotland**

## Resources

- Play Strategy for Scotland *Our Vision (2013)*
- Play Strategy for Scotland *Our Action Plan (2013)*
- National Children's Bureau (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*. London: National Children's Bureau
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- Welsh Government (2012) *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit*. Cardiff: Welsh Government
- Play Services [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playservices](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playservices)

## References

- <sup>i</sup> Health and Safety Executive (2012) *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach*. Health and Safety Executive and Play Safety Forum
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- <sup>v</sup> Wales Assembly Government/Welsh Local Government Association Task and Finish Group (2002) *Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools*
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- <sup>viii</sup> Ball, D., Gill, T., Spiegel, B. (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*. London: National Children's Bureau
- <sup>ix</sup> Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Group (2009) *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*
- <sup>x</sup> *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*

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