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Intranet

March 2006



PLAY SAFETY - OUTDOOR AREA FOR LEARNING The Foundation Stage

Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended)

Introduction

This procedure is intended to support Head teachers, Governors and employees in developing high quality learning opportunities for children out of doors in safe, secure specially designated areas.

When considering the location in a school for a Foundation Stage Unit advice should be sought from the Project Officer Landscape Development (Corporate Property) and Early Years Team at an early stage. The indoor accommodation and outdoors should be viewed as a single unit.

Risk Assessment

Adults need to:

- undertake a full Risk Assessment of likely hazard areas / equipment (only significant findings from such an assessment need to be recorded).
- ensure the area meets current standards (ref. British Standard BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177).
- establish appropriate behaviour for children near potential hazards.

Children need to:

- be aware of potential hazards.
- know about appropriate behaviour near potential hazards.

The key to successful health and safety is *risk reduction*.

A RISK ASSESSMENT should address the following:

- has the area been designed safely? (See Annex 1)
- is an activity / area potentially hazardous?
- are adults effectively deployed for the number of children indoors / outdoors?

**Published by: Health and Safety Team, Human Resources
Children, Young People & Families**

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- is the equipment fit for purpose, properly maintained and checked daily?
- how are potential hazards to be monitored? e.g. by an adult; by use of CCTV cameras; by use of a security mirror.

NB. The installation of CCTV cameras and recorders, with appropriate signage required under the Data Protection Act, offers excellent monitoring evidence of a) health and safety issues and b) children’s learning.

- What particular consideration has been given to children with special educational needs?
- What is the potential impact of the prevailing weather conditions?
- Periodic monitoring will be necessary to ensure that safe systems are being maintained.

Such monitoring will need to be recorded.

- Teaching staff need to make a risk assessment about whether, at any given time, an adult is needed to support or extend children’s learning outdoors. This should be part of short term planning when decisions are made about where the employees will be for their adult-focused, adult initiated or child initiated activities.

- There may be times when there are two adults outside fulfilling two roles. One may be involved with a group e.g. observing plants or exploring water and guttering. The other, perhaps because there are large numbers of children involved, may be organising the use of the climbing frame or the sharing of bikes and tricycles. In most cases, if children have learned about appropriate behaviour, an adult present in a *purely supervisory role* should not be necessary.



- If a risk assessment has taken place there is no need for an adult to be in the outdoor area as long as the children can be seen and adequately monitored from inside. Adults can review that risk assessment as necessary throughout the day, in the light of the childrens’ needs, learning and behaviour. For example, a group of children may be working very well outside without an adult present, but when another child joins them, the dynamic changes and an adult may then be required, perhaps to help that child join in the play successfully, or to redirect the activity in another way.

- If, in the Headteachers assessment, they are competent to do so, an NNEB or a Teaching Assistant can be responsible for a group of children in an outdoor area for learning.



For Further Information and Advice:

Specialist:	Landscape Development Projects Officer	Tel – 07733003544
	Early Years Team	Tel – 01865 428096
General:	Health & Safety Team	Tel – 01865 816464

Design Specification requirements

- Young children need a minimum 9m² each, therefore 270m² for a class of 30.
- For outdoor areas shared by more than two classes, 7m² per child thereafter may be adequate, as there will be more flexibility inherent in the overall space.



Number of classes	Number of children	M ²
1	Up to 30	270m ²
2	30 – 60	270m ² + 210m ² = 480m ²
3	60 – 90	480m ² + 210m ² = 690m ²
4	90 - 120	690m ² + 210m ² = 900m ²

Quantity isn't everything – the **quality of the space** is just as important. The key is to make best use of what you have – if you have more or the chance to expand do so – space is precious to young children and as a general rule you can't have too much.

- Approximately half and not more than two thirds should be of solid construction
- There must be direct access to the outdoor area from the Unit.
- The outdoor area must be securely fenced.
- The design of the outdoor area should include:
 - paving
 - resilient surfaces conforming to BS EN 1177 suitable for a basic layout of equipment conforming to European and British Standards BS EN 1176
 - landscaping

Details of each of these requirements plus some additional desirable features are indicated below:

Fencing

The Unit outdoor area must be separated from other areas by a wall, fence, hedge or similar secure boundary. This boundary should be at least 1.2 m high and should incorporate a gate for pedestrians and double gates for maintenance equipment. In practice, the type of fencing specified should reflect the location of the school in urban or rural environments and the need for planning and security considerations. In an urban school a weldmesh fence with a hedge or shrub border might be appropriate, whereas in a more rural environment a wooden, round topped palisade style of fence reinforced with planting, hedging or trees may be more suitable.

It must be remembered that the fencing is there to create a safe secure area for young children with easy supervision, not to keep intruders out. In every case a sympathetic landscaping scheme will assist in softening the harshness of the boundary and help create a natural habitat for wildlife.

Paving can consist of a variety of different materials and textures to encourage the child's perception of those found in everyday situations. A pathway (minimum width 1.2 metres) constructed of brick paviors, tarmacadam or resilient play surfaces with play markings for roads and roundabouts would allow the circulation of wheeled toys and vehicles through soft landscaped areas on a route linking up to the main hard area. Attention should be paid to the gradient of the ground and the implications for the speed of wheeled toys. Advice needs to be obtained from the Projects Officer Landscape Development, Corporate Property.

It is important to bear in mind that whatever surfaces are chosen they must be constructed with an anti-slip surface with no raised lips or edges of paving or blocks. It must be well drained and laid to falls to avoid flooding. The surface should be suitable for use by young children using wheeled toys and bicycles. There should be at least one area of solid construction which allows space for circular games, dancing and other organised and informal activities (minimum 5 – 6 metres²).

Resilient Surfaces

Young children have a curriculum entitlement for opportunities for large-scale physical movement, including climbing. The provision of a resilient (impact absorbing) surface ensures that this is possible. It is required for all play equipment with a fall height greater than 600mm.

Refer to the Health & Safety procedure on 'Play Equipment Safety' for further information:

(<http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/LandC/Resources/healthsafe/p/playeq.pdf>).



Landscaping

The landscaping must be agreed with the Projects Officer Landscape Development of Corporate Property and the Early Years Team. Details of the educational requirements are expanded in the School Grounds Brief. This area should be predominantly of "solid construction", e.g. grass.

Every site will have its own particular characteristics and wherever possible advantage should be taken of natural features such as trees, shrubs and contours of the ground. Where none exist, on a flat site for example, it is even more important to create an imaginative and informally structured landscape for the children.

Shaded Areas

The health concerns of UV rays must also be addressed and there needs to be provision for shade at different times of the day. The aspect of the building & canopies will help in this respect but trees and shrubs will also assist in providing shady corners. See 'Sun Safety Policy' <http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/LandC/Resources/healthsafe/s/SunSafety.pdf>

The Mound

The creation of a small mound is optional, however it enhances the imaginative play capabilities of this area. It is important that the mound is constructed in accordance with advice and specification from the Project Officer Landscape Development.

Sandpit

The inclusion of a purpose built sandpit is highly desirable. Opportunities to explore sand and water play are an integral part of the development of the Foundation Stage curriculum.



The design and construction of sandpits must be agreed in consultation with the Project Officer Landscape Development.

Sandpits should be constructed with a minimum depth of 500 mm to contain British Play Sand. They must be adequately drained and suitably covered to avoid fouling by animals, or have a sonic animal deterrent fitted within a suitable range. Leaves and debris need to be regularly removed. The design of covers for sandpits for the Foundation Stage throughout the County has been a difficult problem to resolve.

Whatever type of cover is specified consideration must be given to the following points:

- It must be robust enough to resist vandalism or damage caused by children.
- It must not be constructed of heavy materials to avoid the risk of injury to staff who have to remove and replace them.
- It must allow drainage to prevent “puddling”.
- It must be inexpensive to replace.

Consideration should be given to the construction of a sandpit enclosed by a low wall wide enough and low enough for the children to sit or work upon. A secure external tap meeting the requirements of by-laws should be located near to the sandpit, which can be controlled internally for security.

Equipment Storage

Equipment storage needs to have a large double-sized door (minimum 1.4 metres), with ramped access and be large enough to accommodate play furniture.

The ideal size for equipment storage facilities is 3.6 metres x 2.4 metres.

This design allows young children to collect and return their play equipment safely and avoids the need for manual handling of equipment by staff. It has resulted in less lifting type injuries to Foundation Stage staff.

