

# The Toolkit



**Use of school grounds for  
playing out of teaching hours**

November 2015

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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

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# The Toolkit

## Preface

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.

**"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)

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 most 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 Toolkit

## Who's it for?

The *Use of School Grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit has been designed to help head teachers, governors 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 has been produced by Play Wales, the national charity for children's play.**

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 2012, Play Wales was asked to submit a paper regarding the use of school grounds out of teaching hours to the Cardiff City Council Playground Strategy Scrutiny Task and Finish Group. To inform the paper, Play Wales gathered case studies from a range of schools across Wales that successfully open their grounds for playing.**

To develop this toolkit, Play Wales established and consulted with a focus group of head teachers and external stakeholders during the drafting process and used their questions, responses and their experiences to address the most significant issues.

This toolkit has been produced by Play Wales, the national charity for children's play and funded by the Welsh Government.

It includes quotes from head teachers based on discussions as part of the toolkit development and case studies which demonstrate a range of models.

Funding from the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust has enabled Play Wales to establish a partnership with School of Education, Cardiff Metropolitan University (Early Childhood and Education Studies team) and Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences to research a project which piloted this Welsh Government funded toolkit.

We established links with three schools in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and recruited and trained the project team, which consisted of student volunteers on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood and Education programme at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Through semi structured interviews data was collected pre and post project from school staff, pupils and the project team.

# How should it be used?

This toolkit is divided into two parts:

- 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 Wales.
- 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 Welsh and 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.

### National Play Policy

The Welsh Government demonstrated its commitment to children's play in the national *Play Policy* (2002). 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 toolkit.

## 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>i</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.

## Statutory Duties

### Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area.

The Play Sufficiency Duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales.

As part of their Play Sufficiency Assessments, local authorities must assess to what extent schools provide play opportunities during out of school times. The 2013 Play Sufficiency Assessments and State of Play reviews undertaken by Play Wales found that, across Wales, school grounds and facilities were under used and not accessed by children for playing.

*Wales: A Play Friendly Country* is Statutory Guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas. One of the matters to be taken into account 'Space available for children to play (Open Spaces)' recognises that school grounds are potentially important areas where children and young people can play or pass through to reach other playable areas or places where they go.

Another matter states:

"schools provide an important opportunity for children to play during the school day and for periods before and after classes. They can also provide valuable play space at weekends and during holiday periods if the school is organised to allow for this. The Welsh Government recommends that local authorities advise schools to provide high quality play space and sufficient time for children to play during the school day and give full consideration to opening this provision during out of teaching hours."

## Education Act 2002

The Education Act 2002 has also made it easier for governing bodies to promote the extended use of school premises to provide a range of activities and services, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community.

## Participation

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 requires Local Authorities to make arrangements to promote and facilitate the participation of children and young people in decision making.

The National Participation Standards for Wales provide a basis of principles for involving children and young people in decision making. The standards explain what children and young people should expect when having their voices heard in relation to information, choice, non-discrimination, respect, benefits to children and young people, how children and young people receive feedback and how service providers improve quality.

## National Initiatives

### Healthy Schools

The Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (WNHSS) is part of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (HNHPS). It was set up to establish model schools in each country that would demonstrate the impact of health promotion in the school setting and share their experience. Schools need to demonstrate that they are firmly committed to an approach that develops the whole school as a health promoting workplace.

Providing the use of school grounds out of teaching hours to provide space for children to play contributes to the Healthy School approach.

**Community Schools** A community school is one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. Across Wales many schools adopt a community focus and provide some community services including adult education, study support, ICT facilities and community sports programmes.

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools** 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools include primary, secondary and special schools – both new build and refurbished. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools acknowledge that 'great grounds are inspiring, well-designed spaces that are easy to manage and maintain.'

Well designed school grounds contribute to a play friendly environment – and ensure opportunities to play are encouraged by ensuring that outdoor play spaces provide wide-ranging opportunities for all children of varying ages to experience a rich play environment.

There is detailed guidance on the process of designing play spaces in Play England's publication *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*.



## Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours

# Issues to be considered

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# Section 1 Open All Hours project

Analysis of the Open All Hours pilot project identified a range of themes such as communication and tension. From early on, it became clear that the project was supporting more children to play outdoors with other children after school whilst also contributing to the professional development of the student volunteers.

## The research

With our partners, we developed a research framework which identifies:

- The value of play
- Practical realities of keeping the gates open (insurance, boundaries)
- Risk and benefits (supervision, responsibility, freedom)
- Barriers (for all stakeholders)
- Outcomes (for all stakeholders)

## The Benefits

This pilot project highlighted benefits for a range of participants.

### 1. Improved social and community involvement

School managers, staff and their governing bodies reported feeling more confident to consider providing improved access to play for children living in their communities.

### 2. Giving people a voice to be heard

We talked with all of the children involved in the pilot and their message is succinct and sustained. They want to play, and they want their parents/carers to recognise that restrictions that are imposed on their time and space to play prevent them from playing. The children and parents alike enjoyed staying after school to play. When we asked, the children and young people told us that they wished to play more outside, with their friends. The parents we spoke to are seeking support to secure better play spaces for their children.

Children reported greater access in their own communities to places and spaces to play and gather with their friends.

Parents and community members are repetitively asking for and looking for low cost options to support their children to access play opportunities. This project provided parents with the information and confidence to support their children to play in their communities. Parents and other community members have become advocates for play, playing and childhood.

### 3. Improved life choices and chances

Playing contributes to children's health and wellbeing. Having welcoming places to play and gather within communities improves children's sense of community and belonging. Parents valued the social play their child experienced without adult intervention. Local organisations (such as tenants groups, local play organisations, and parent-teacher associations) that may wish to work with the schools to secure improved access to play for children have been identified.

## Key messages from the pilot project

Both schools and communities can be enriched when they engage with each other more fully. The project resulted in:

- Community access to facilities and opportunities already held within their community
- Improvements in child behaviour and social skills
- Improved local availability of play opportunities
- Better opportunities for children outside school hours
- Strengthened communities.

"The thought of actually benefiting the community by opening our gates and using our lovely field that we've got ... I just see that as one way that we can actually pay back to our community and the children..."

(Teacher at pilot school)

## Why we developed and delivered the Open All Hours project

Children's free time is increasingly scarce and opportunities for outdoor play are steadily decreasing. Many children are prevented from gaining the optimum benefit from playing due to environmental and cultural barriers – particularly those who are disabled or marginalised. Some of the barriers that children face in realising their right to play in their own communities are:

- Busy roads/traffic
- Bullying
- Disapproving adults
- Lack of provision locally
- Parents lifestyle
- Weather
- Strangers (perceived stranger danger)
- Parents fears
- Lack of provision
- Lack of information regarding provision
- Safer routes to play areas (away from busy roads)
- Lack of supervised play areas
- After school provision not affordable
- Poorly maintained provision
- Quality of the provision available
- Insufficient indoor provision



# Section 2 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.

In Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing and securing for sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, the Welsh Government defines a rich play environment as

"one which is flexible, adaptable, varied and interesting. It maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness, challenge, and choice. It is a trusted public space where children feel free to play in their own way, on their own terms.

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 3 Benefits

Throughout Wales 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 4 Addressing 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 5 Locking 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: Gaer Junior School, Newport

Gaer Junior School has approximately 180 pupils aged 7-11 from a mixed catchment and a Learning Support Centre that supports children from all over Newport. The school was officially opened in 1953 and shares a site with Gaer Infants School, a community centre and a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).

The school sits in 14 acres of grounds which include a meadow, as well as the woodland and wildlife area that are already very well established, together with a substantial field area for sports.

The school once had a historical unlimited access arrangement out of teaching hours; however, two years ago, gates were installed, offering limited access to the grounds and MUGA. The school governing body established an agreement with Newport City Council, setting out roles and responsibilities regarding repairs to the MUGA.

Head teacher John Webb said,

*"Our school represents the only flat area in the local community and it has historically worked with local sporting clubs to provide space. A few years ago, we worked closely with the community when lack of facilities for young people was identified as an issue. We accepted a MUGA and youth shelter on site, which are both used by local young people, and some from further afield. Since the facilities and new fencing have been installed, both our school and the infants school report less vandalism and damage; in fact, we have fewer broken windows now."*



### Section 6 The risk of vandalism and break-ins

"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."

"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."

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: Ysgol Llanddulas Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School, Conwy

The school was established in its current format in 1975. There are 135 children aged 3-11.

The school is located on a split site, with extensive grounds adjoining the nursery classrooms which are across the road from the main school. There is full community access to the school field.

Headteacher Paul Davies said,

*"Lottery Funding was used to install large play equipment on the school field, and the school has also developed a nature trail around the perimeter. The play equipment is used by the children during their break times during the summer months, and extensively by parents and children at the end of the school day. The equipment is also used by local children from the community after school, and this use runs parallel with school sports clubs and After School Club which run on the same site. There have been no issues with significant vandalism or anti-social behavior and the equipment is treated with respect."*

## Case Study: Tri-County Play Association Playable Spaces Project at Maerdy Community Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf

Dormant outdoor space owned by the school and located just outside the formal school boundary has been invigorated by a sensitive design to meet the needs of the school as well as the local community. The play space design is based on the design principles in *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*.<sup>vi</sup> The guide explains how good play spaces can give children and young people the freedom to play creatively and how they can be affordably maintained.

The local community is able to use the area after teaching hours, on weekends and during holidays, promoting a real sense of community usage. The area was identified as the best place to develop new play facilities by local community members.

A local housing association, RCT Homes, granted additional money to Maerdy Regeneration (a local community group) to fund an area within the space, which the budget would not have allowed otherwise. This funding has seen the inclusion of a ball play area, bringing in facilities for older children. By undertaking training the school has been supported to become more comfortable in maintaining and managing the play space, in conjunction with staff employed by Communities First working within the local community.



# Section 7 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.

### Case Study: Corporate Occupational Health and Safety Team, Vale of Glamorgan Council

Applying a common sense approach with affective communication has allowed a Local Authority health and safety officer to support schools to look at risk-benefit assessment without using a cumbersome matrix.

David Porter, Health and Safety Officer, provides advice and support to 61 schools across the Vale of Glamorgan.

He said, "Some schools struggled at times with health and safety because they found the process completing a numbered matrix as part of the risk assessment challenging.

"In January 2013 I recommended an alternative risk assessment form to the head teachers of the primary schools. This form is based on a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) template that focuses on the description of the activity and not on a risk matrix. The response has been very positive with many schools opting in immediately, with others looking to change when reviewing current assessments. This has led to an increase in the number of quality risk assessments."

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 reasonably practicable, 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.

### Case Study: Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Group – Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment

In 2009 Wrexham County Borough Council endorsed a new play strategy that incorporated an objective to: 'support those providing for play to enable children to experience risk and challenge'. As a consequence the play strategy action plan identified the need to develop a new risk management system aimed at enabling professionals who work with or on behalf of children to utilise a risk-benefit approach to facilitating opportunities for play.

The resulting framework was developed in partnership with experts in playwork and risk management from both Wrexham and Conwy, and is underpinned by a policy that recognises the value of children experiencing risk in their play. The framework incorporates both paper based and dynamic risk-benefit assessments enabling professionals to make informed value judgements balancing the need for safety with the need for children to engage with risk.

Since being developed elements of this risk-benefit framework have been recognised as good practice both nationally and internationally and the policy has been used to form the basis for the model risk-benefit policy included in the Welsh Government's *Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit* for supporting Local Authorities in meeting the new play sufficiency duty.<sup>ix</sup>



# Section 8 Supervision

Although staff are responsible for the supervision of children and young people during the school day, during playtimes, break times and lunchtimes, 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: Open All Hours Project – Play Wales, School of Education, Cardiff Metropolitan University (Early Childhood and Education Studies team) and Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences

Three student volunteers on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood and Education programme at Cardiff Metropolitan University received Introduction to Playwork training to enable them to facilitate staffed open access play sessions in two Cardiff schools and one in the Vale of Glamorgan.

To engage with children in the schools before the play sessions started, the students used tools from Play Wales' Right to Play Workshop. The workshop pack is available to download at:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayworkshop](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayworkshop)

A rota of students, and a support team consisting of staff from the university and Play Wales was established to supervise after school play sessions. In each of the schools the sessions ran six weeks in the summer term for children over the age of seven.

Each of the schools provided space to store materials and resources – loose parts such as tyres, rope, tarpaulins, large pieces of fabric and chalk. Although limited in quantity, the provision of loose parts acted as a springboard for play in each of the three schools. In two of the schools, parents stayed behind with younger children and expressed a desire to help to sustain out of hours access to school grounds.

*"Many parents stayed and supported the running of the project and they supported their children more than I had originally anticipated. My role developed as the project progressed and the children started to get to know me, and me them. They invited me into their play and I was able to engage in their play as well as having an observing and supporting role."*

*The community where the school was set had very limited space outdoors for children to play and in some cases there were larger families living in small flats with no outdoor space. I felt the project was important as the children were able to play outdoors and burn off some energy after being in school all day."*

*After speaking to a number of parents they informed me how their children's behaviour had improved when they were able to stay and play for an hour or so after school. It was also a chance for the parents to relax and watch their children play with the knowledge that their children were in a safe environment."*

Student volunteer

# Section 9 Legal context and litigation

“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 governors 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.”

Ultimately, the school's governing body 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 itself 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.

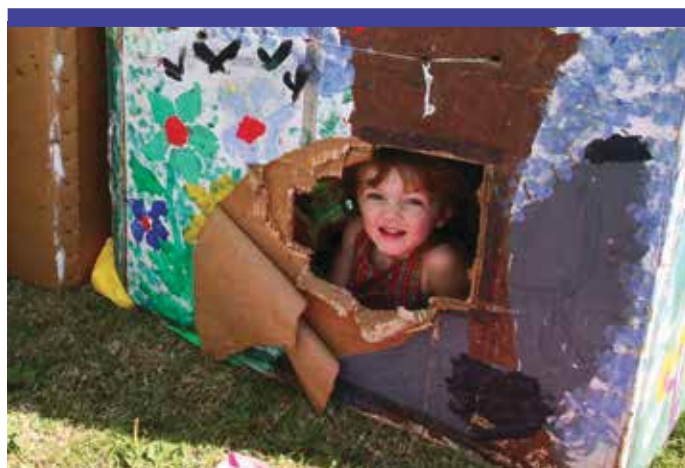
It is recognised that Local Authorities and schools have concerns about litigation, but the actual risk of successful litigation is very small.

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.



# Section 10 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: 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 self-insured 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.<sup>x</sup>





# Section 11 Project phase chart

This chart demonstrates the steps to take to implement after school play opportunities using the school grounds

Phase 1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Establish the model to use</b> Options analysis</li><li>• <b>Engage with governing body</b></li><li>• <b>Engage with all staff</b> Play space audit tool Risk-benefit assessment Maintenance and play space checks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Develop School Play Policy</b></li><li>• <b>Identify potential partners and agencies</b> such as residents groups, Parent and Teacher Association, play providers and local community groups to discuss involvement</li></ul>	<b>Issues to be explored:</b> Importance of play Benefits/challenges Locking gates Balancing risk and benefits Supervision Legal context, litigation & insurance Availability of toilets Play equipment Parents & local residents perceptions
Phase 2		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Engage with children</b> Right to Play Workshop Engaging with children tools Play Space Audit Tool</li><li>• <b>Engage with parents</b> Meet with friends or parents group Information to parents setting out the project</li><li>• <b>Engage with community</b> Use information letter to parents as a template</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Gates to be open</b> for play at times planned by the school and its partners</li><li>• <b>Continue engagement with school community</b> with head teachers, care takers, governors, children and parents</li></ul>	<b>Issues to be explored:</b> Importance of play Benefits/challenges Locking gates Balancing risk and benefits Supervision Legal context, litigation & insurance Availability of toilets Play equipment Parents & local residents perceptions
Phase 3		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Analysis with all partners</b> to identify how the project went. What were the benefits and challenges</li><li>• <b>Engage with all stakeholders, using questions such as:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do you think it is important to facilitate this opportunity for play? Why?</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What were the benefits of allowing children to use the school grounds out of school hours?</li><li>- Were there any challenges to allowing children to use the school grounds out of school hours?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- How were these addressed?</li><li>- What needs to change to make it work?</li></ul>

## Section 12 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 13 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.



### Case Study: Ysgol Cradoc Community Primary School, Brecon, Powys

Cradoc School was established in 1969 following the amalgamation of five small local village schools. There are 130 children aged 3-11.

The grounds are extensive, comprising two playgrounds and large grassy play areas, which are continually being improved. There is also a hockey/football pitch and a separate rugby pitch.

The grounds support a variety of habitats. An enclosed nature area has a rough meadow, a pond and a marshy area. There is also a developing woodland, vegetable garden, chicken house and a wildlife area.

Head teacher Darren Jones said,  
*"Allowing unlimited access to the community is a historical arrangement mainly due to the fact that the grounds represent the only recreational space in the community. Mostly, the school grounds have been used with respect."*

*"Children and young people who live in the community come and play alongside organised groups like the childcare club without any issues and we have not had issues with vandalism or damage."*

*"Most recently, we installed a container full of materials and equipment (loose parts) that can facilitate and enhance children's play. 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."*

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.

### Section 14 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.





## Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours

# Tools to assist

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# Tools to assist

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?**

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.



## Section 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.

### 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, wellbeing 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 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 (a few examples have been included).

### 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 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. School 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 can be used to engage with children. It is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)

The *Right to Play Workshop* pack is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayworkshop](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayworkshop)





# Section 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.

A *Play space audit template* is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)







### 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.

A Play audit template is available to download at:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)



# Section 5 Communicating with parents and the community

Once the school community has decided the best option with regards to the use of the school grounds out of hours, it is important to identify the best mechanism to communicate the nature of the project to parents and carers.

Key messages to parents and carers:

### About the project

Describe the project. If it will be staffed, reinforce that the role of staff will be to support freely chosen play and supervise the children when they are on the school grounds. Explain that the play sessions will be child led and that this means that children can follow their own ideas and interests.

Include the dates and times that the school grounds will be open and contact details for a named person should there be any questions or queries.

### Who can attend

Reinforce that the play sessions are free of charge.

Be clear about the ages or year groups of children who can attend without being accompanied. If younger children can attend as long as an adult accompanies them at all times, remember to mention this.

If the play sessions are open to children who live locally and attend other schools, make sure that it is understood that they are also welcome to use the grounds for playing.

### What parents and carers need to know

- Children can come to and leave the school grounds as they please
- It is not a childcare service
- Clarify whether or not children are supervised while on the school grounds
- Children have freedom of choice and the opportunity to play with their friends
- Clarify whether or not children have access to toilets or other parts of the school (such as cloak rooms)



- If there is supervision, you may wish to provide children with a registration form to take home. Parents should be requested to complete it and ask their child to return it to the school. The information provided will help to meet the needs of participating children.
- It is necessary that parents and children agree between them practical matters such as how children make their way home.

### Why you are supporting the project

Use this section to promote to parents and carers the importance of the project. Statements such as these may help:

- We believe playing is important to and for children
- We want to provide a space for playing that is neighbourhood based and nearby to where pupils live
- Our school grounds are already open for community use during leisure time and we wish to promote this locally, and to our pupils.

# Section 6 Working with the school community

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), 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.

It is worth contacting the Community or Town 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 have a Play Officer and there are regional play associations across Wales. 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 Liaison Officer or Police Community Support 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.

## 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.





### Community Agreements

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."



# Memorandum of understanding template

## Introduction

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.

(Insert school name and address)

## 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:

## 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 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

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, long-term, 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 8 Risk-benefit assessment template

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*. It is based on the Play Safety Forum’s *Risk-Benefit Assessment Form*.

School:			Date:		
Completed by:			Review date:		
Area / Description: Den Building					

Benefits	Risks	Relevant local features	What are you already doing	What further action is needed	Date action completed
Pleasure and fun. Physical play and problem solving opportunities. Exploring environment. Team building. Development of self-confidence and wellbeing. Co-ordination. Achievement of end result. Social inclusion. Engagement with natural environment and natural elements. Potential for incorporation into imaginative games. Mixing between different age ranges.	Cuts, grazes, bruises from constructing and handling of materials.  Cuts, bruises, broken bones from falling/ collapsing objects.	Only a small budget exists for increasing the play offer at this site.  Building on experience of imaginative play in school time.  Local housing and road nearby to call for help.	Providing lightweight material.		

# Section 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

Name of school:

Frequency of check (Daily/weekly):

Date	Problems/What has been done	Score (See Key)	Initials/Signed	Future Actions
	Picked up litter, removed broken glass, checked damaged swing seat	4		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**

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.

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- <sup>ix</sup> Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Group (2009) *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*
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- <sup>xi</sup> Welsh Government (2015) *Wales – A Play Friendly Country*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

## Images

All images are Play Wales property, with the exception of:

Page 20, 21, 26: New Model Army Photography

Page 25: Scrapstore PlayPod®

Page 30: Sioned Williams

Page 38 (top): Torfaen Play

## Resources

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Play Services  
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