

Highland Schools Fixed Playground Equipment Policy

August 2026

Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. Scope.....	3
3. Strategic Alignment.....	3
4. Roles and Responsibilities.....	4
5. Installation and Procurement	4
6. Inspection Regime.....	5
7. Maintenance and Reporting	5
8. Risk Management and Safety	6
9. Council Funded Projects.....	6
10. Externally Funded Projects	6
11. Project Support- Amenities Services.....	7
12. Community Engagement and Feedback	7
13. Review and Monitoring.....	8
Appendix A: How to Propose, Develop and Implement a Successful Project for a Local – Your Checklist	9
Appendix B: Project Notice Form.....	18
Appendix C: School Step by Step Guide for Upgrading School Playgrounds	20



1. Purpose

To ensure the safe, inclusive, and sustainable provision, inspection, and maintenance of fixed playground equipment across Highland schools, supporting outdoor learning, physical activity, and wellbeing.

This policy applies to:

- School funded playground projects.
- Externally funded projects (e.g., Parent Councils, community groups).

This policy establishes mandatory safety, inspection and approval requirements. No fixed playground equipment may be installed, used, or left accessible unless it complies fully with this policy.

All projects must follow the principles of this policy. Council-funded projects achieve compliance through established pathways, while externally funded work must also follow the Council's Externally Funded Projects Procedure.

2. Scope

This policy covers all fixed playground equipment on Highland Council school grounds, including climbing frames, swings, slides, trim trails, outdoor gym equipment, goal posts, sensory and inclusive structures.

It does not apply to temporary or movable equipment, which is managed under separate health and safety arrangements.

3. Strategic Alignment

- This policy aligns with:
 - Highland Outdoor Learning Strategy (2012–2015).
- Learning for Sustainability Strategy (2014).
- Highland Playpark Strategy (2023–2033).
- Active Highland Physical Activity Strategy (2025).
- BS EN 1176 Series Standards for playground equipment safety
- BS EN 1177 Impact-attenuating Playground Surfacing
- RoSPA inspection and risk management guidance

It also acknowledges the wider planning context set by the Town and Country Planning (Play Sufficiency Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023.

Compliance with this policy supports statutory duties relating to health and safety, play sufficiency and risk management.



4. Roles and Responsibilities

Education Senior Leadership Team:

- Provides strategic ownership and oversight of this policy.

Head Teacher / Responsible Premises Officer (RPO):

- Holds overall responsibility for equipment safety and inspection compliance.
- Must ensure inspections are completed, recorded, and acted upon.
- Ensures defects are logged on Concerto.
- Ensures unsafe equipment is isolated immediately using non-technical means.
- Must ensure a named competent person is in place to undertake required checks where duties are delegated.

FM/CCFM Staff:

- Undertake weekly visual checks where FM/CCFM staff are available.
- Where no FM/CCFM provision exists, the HT/RPO must formally nominate a named member of staff to undertake weekly checks and maintain a local inspection rota.

Amenities Services:

- Undertake quarterly operational inspections
- Support with consultation and funding
- Maintain the web based Play Inspection App

External Accredited Contractor:

- Undertakes the annual compliance inspection.
- Must be accredited and approved by Estates prior to appointment.

5. Installation and Procurement

All projects must comply with safety, design, and asset-management requirements confirmed by Estates and Amenities. All new equipment must comply with BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177 standards.

No procurement, ordering, or installation may proceed until written approval is provided by Estates and Amenities.

All projects must provide:

- Design specification



- Supplier certification
- Installation method statement (RAMS)
- Evidence of contractor competence and insurance

External organisations (e.g., Parent Councils):

- Are not bound by Council procurement rules when acting as employer.
- Must obtain approval from Estates and Amenities before contractor appointment.
- Equipment, installation methods, and suppliers must meet all required standards.
- Inclusive design must be incorporated where reasonably practicable, aiming for a balanced range of accessible play opportunities.
- Contractors may only be used where Estates and Amenities confirm they are qualified.
- All fixed playground equipment, once installed on school sites, becomes the property of The Highland Council.

6. Inspection Regime

Weekly Routine Visual Checks:

- Responsibility of HT/RPO.
- May be delegated to FM/CCFM where available.
- Must be completed weekly.

Quarterly Operational Inspections:

- Completed by Amenities Services.

Annual Compliance Inspections:

- Undertaken exclusively by an independent accredited contractor.
- Ensures consistent estate-wide compliance.
- Annual inspections must be undertaken by an RPII accredited inspector. Routine and operational checks may be undertaken by trained staff.

7. Maintenance and Reporting

Defects must be logged on Concerto by delegated staff, but responsibility rests with HT/RPO.

Property Maintenance Officers liaise with Amenities Services and the HT/RPO to agree appropriate steps with approved contractors.

Unsafe equipment:



- Must be isolated immediately using non-technical means such as tape.
- Only Estates or RPII approved contractors may carry out technical isolation or repairs.

Vandalism:

- Must be isolated immediately.
- Logged on Concerto and reported to Property & FM.
- Police Scotland informed where criminal damage is suspected.

Urgent Issues:

- Must be logged through Concerto to the maintenance team.
-
- Amenities is not a route for urgent response.

Repairs must be carried out by a suitably qualified person and to BS EN 1176 standards as relevant.

8. Risk Management and Safety

Risk assessments:

- Completed by HT with support from the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team- considering suitability, age and ability.
- Should be updated following incidents and reviewed annually.
- All accidents and near misses involving playground equipment must be recorded and reviewed.

Signage:

- Limited to essential safety messages (e.g., “Do not use if damaged”).

9. Council Funded Projects

- Where projects are funded internally, Head Teachers must ensure all works are delivered through the Council’s standard compliance, procurement and Estates and Amenities approval routes.
- Use the standard Project Notice Form (PNF) and “Your Checklist”.

10. Externally Funded Projects

Externally funded projects must:

- Follow the Council’s Externally Funded Projects Procedure.



- Use the standard Project Notice Form (PNF) and “Your Checklist”.
- Receive formal approval from the relevant Estates Officer and Amenities Services.
- Projects will not be considered without confirmed full funding, including ongoing maintenance costs.
- Unauthorised installations will be subject to removal or closure.

The Estates Team is the formal approving body for all playground works.

Highland Council may levy fees for review and approval where officer time is required.

The accompanying “Your Checklist” should be used to guide the funders through the process. A project shall not commence until Council review and approval is completed. The school’s Headteacher and Estates Officer is available to provide guidance on how to complete the PNF.

11. Project Support- Amenities Services

Early engagement with the Highland Play Strategy Coordinator is advised. This can help schools ensure that the appropriate equipment choices, suppliers and engagement processes lead to a successful project.

12. Community Engagement and Feedback

Schools should engage with pupils, parents, carers and staff, where appropriate, in the design and use of playground equipment.

Engagement should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the project.

Feedback may be gathered through:

- Pupil groups
- Parent or carer surveys
- Staff input
- Wider community engagement where relevant

This information may inform:

- Play Sufficiency Assessment duties
- School Improvement Planning
- Evaluation of outdoor play provision



13. Review and Monitoring

This policy will be formally reviewed every two years by Education Services in consultation with Estates, Facilities Management, Health and Safety, and Amenities Services.

Ongoing compliance will be monitored through:

- Completion rates of required inspections
- Timeliness of defect reporting and repair
- Annual inspection compliance
- Number and type of equipment closures

Estates and/or Health and Safety Services may undertake periodic audits of inspection records and compliance.

Schools must provide inspection and maintenance records on request.



Appendix A: How to Propose, Develop and Implement a Successful Project– Your Checklist

This checklist gives a recommended approach for non-Highland Council, externally funded initiatives that a school, parent council, or community group wishes to be considered for the benefit of the specific school. Use it to help guide you through the procedures, reviews and approvals that may be required. Use this in conjunction with the Project Notice Form (PNF v1.5 H&P School Estates). Submit the completed PNF and supporting documentation to your Estates Officer. The Estates Team will review the PNF and will provide the approval decision and all associated restrictions and requirements.		
Action and Coordination Checklist for: [ENTER YOUR PROJECT NAME AND 2-3 SENTENCE DESCRIPTION HERE]		COMPLETED Y/N (add date, as appropriate)
Project Category: DECIDE WHICH CATEGORY BELOW BEST FITS YOUR PROJECT NOTE: THE TERM “INTENDED STRUCTURE” OR “STRUCTURE” REFERS NOT ONLY TO A BUILDING STRUCTURE BUT ALSO DRAINAGE WORKS, EARTHWORKS, OR STRUCTURE DESIGNED TO PRESERVE OR ALTER ANY NATURAL FEATURE, AS WELL AS MANY OTHER PROJECT TYPES. (See, <i>The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015</i>)		WHICH CATEGORY? (A, B or C)
Contact your area Estates Officer if you are unclear which category applies to your proposed project. Project Category A In most cases you will need external Construction Design Management (CDM) support for a Category A project, unless the project is taken on by the Highland Council as employer (See items #6 and #9)	Your project is Category A if it involves one or more of the following: - Construction, alteration, renovation, removal, repair, redecoration or other maintenance (including cleaning using high pressure water and/or abrasives or corrosives or toxic substances) of a structure. - Preparation for an intended structure including clearance, excavation, or site preparation for a structure for use or for occupation. - Assembly of prefabricated elements to form a structure or disassembly of,	

below.) All Category A projects: - Require completed Project Notice Form (PNF) - Require CDM oversight.	including prefabricated elements of, a structure, or removal of any product or waste from demolition or disassembly. • Installation, maintenance, repair or removal of mechanical, electrical, gas, telecommunications, computer or similar services which are normally within or fixed to a structure.	
Project Category B In general, Category B and C projects (non-construction) will be coordinated by the school Estates Team (or other relevant team if not school site). All Category B projects: - Require completed Project Notice Form (PNF) - May require CDM oversight.	Your project is Category B if it involves one or more of the following (and does not overlap with any item of Category A above): • Acquiring (through project fundraising, grants, donations or similar) equipment that may be subject to regulatory standards (e.g., some domestic grade equipment may not be permitted for school/public use); • Introduction of outdoor play equipment and/or gym equipment; • Introduction of and locations of indoor and outdoor storage boxes/cupboards units including garden tool storage.	
Project Category C In general, category C projects (non-construction) will be coordinated by the school Estates Team (or other relevant team if not school site). All Category C projects: - Require completed Project Notice Form (PNF)	Your project is Category C if it involves one or more of the following: • Landscaping/gardening using no power tools or machinery, or powered earth moving equipment, or loading/unloading vehicle/machinery; • Tree planting and general horticultural work with no introduction of or spreading of invasive species or nuisance species; • Planting of wildflower meadows/gardens with no introduction of invasive or spread of invasive species.	

ITEM/ACTION		DATE (if appropriate)	NOTES (Add your own notes below for the initiative/project)	
1.	PROJECT DESCRIPTION [Include here the detailed description to include Project Category, project proposer (group/individual), the “Employer” (who will be contracting for any works). Also include brief goals and objectives; start and end dates; age classes of pupils targeted; benefits to school curriculum; funding sources; reference relevant examples from elsewhere, if available.]	[Start and completion dates.]	Your own notes here may include funding sources; how maintenance requirements will be met and funded; identify any post completion inspection requirements, and funding source for inspections and any subsequent remedial repairs. ¹	
2.	POINTS OF CONTACT /NOTIFICATION (a) [Name/s, title/s, and contact details for the school’s lead persons for the project/initiative]		You must notify the relevant Highland Council staff well in advance of a proposed project for an initial overview of your proposal and to elicit initial response (positive or negative) ² . In the first instance this will be the school Estates Officer (Place Service Cluster). Must notify (b) and (c) of any change to project lead name or contact details.	
	(b) [Name and contact details of your Area Quality Improvement Manager (AQIM) – ask your head teacher for the school’s AQIM.]	[Date when notified]		
	(c) [Name and contact details of your area Estates Officer. Email CLEstates@highland.gov.uk if you	[Date when notified]		

¹ Through discussion and prior agreement with School Estates (Place Service Cluster), The Highland Council may take on subsequent maintenance, inspection and repair, in full, or on a cost-sharing basis, however, this cannot be assumed and should be discussed at project inception.

² Initial positive response is not “green light” but indicates support pending subsequent completion and approvals by all parties as appropriate. This may include Education, Property & Facilities Management, and Legal, as well as regulatory bodies (Planning, Building Control), or external inspection bodies such as Care Inspectorate, Fire Service.

	or your head teacher do not have an Estates Officer contact.			
3.	DESIGN PLAN: Produce a design plan and drawings agreed by the head teacher, parent council, and others as appropriate, and submit to area Estates Officer for initial review.		Your initial design drawings should include location and layout information and be accompanied by a brief project description suitable for review and discussion (include utility requirements, accessibility, and expected maintenance requirements, as appropriate).	
4.	PROCUREMENT: Primarily relevant to Category A projects. See also item 7 below. (a) Produce cost estimate for the project – include all labour and materials, connection charges, consultant fees (CDM), etc. (b) If appropriate, identify where you have written agreements with a business or other group that has committed to providing labour and/or materials at reduced rates, and produce the comparative cost estimate. (c) If a local or other business has offered to undertake the work, ask them if they are on the current Highland Council Construction Framework Agreement. If not on the current Framework, then ask if they hold Construction Health and Safety (CHAS) Certification. (d) If your local parent/business is not listed under the Framework and they are in a relevant business, they may be added as a “New Supplier” for this one project to allow them to submit a		[This section is mainly relevant to Category A projects and where The Highland Council’s Procurement rules may apply. The Highland Council’s Property and Facilities Management team have responsibility for Construction Design Management (CDM) compliance and for the associated procurement of construction services. See Notes section under Item 6.] [The project approval process will involve detailed review of construction work Risk Assessments Method Statements (RAMS) forming Construction Phase Plans. The Highland Council operates a “Plan-in-Place” procedure so that no works commence without examining the contractor’s plan for works to ensure the safety of premises occupants and the public who may be affected by the proposed work. The area Maintenance Officer will require to be informed of the proposal and to be aware of the works taken place and this will be coordinated through the CDM team.	

	tender/quote for the work. The business owner should contact the Estates (school projects) Team to action this if appropriate.			
5.	PLANNING AND BUILDING WARRANT: Meet with Planning department to determine Planning requirements, if any, and with Building Control for Building Warrant requirements.		Planning Department and Building Control are the ultimate groups to determine construction development and building related requirements. Depending on the project, Education, and Property and Facilities Management may have additional requirements related to Curriculum, Health and Safety, and Accessibility.	
6.	COORDINATION: Coordinate with area Estates Officer and provide updated design and any responses from Planning/Building Control.		Regardless of level of effort, cost, extent/absence of land disturbance, or degree of volunteer labour or donation of materials, “projects” must be conducted according to UK standard Construction Design Management (CDM). Highland Council’s CDM Team will determine the appropriate level of compliance (See item 9) for a qualifying project. [List here all relevant Points of Contact for the project as well as their role and responsibilities.]	
7.	PROJECT FUNDING: Depending on the project category and project specifics, the full cost of a project may include labour costs, professional fees, materials, equipment hire and rental, planning or similar application fees, and VAT. Typically, a project will not be permitted to commence until 100% of funding is secured.		Project funding from external supporters/donators should be deposited to the individual school’s School Fund. School funds: • Are held separately from the Highland Council • Do not form part of the Council’s ledger • Are under management responsibility of the head teacher • And the administration and governance must comply with Highland Council’s financial regulations.	

8.	IMPLEMENTATION: In some but not all cases, it may be possible for the Council to recover VAT on goods and services bought using donated school funds. The Council would then implement the project on behalf of the school, parent council or community group. For a project to be implemented by The Highland Council, school funds must be forwarded/donated to The Highland Council to cover full project costs for all category A projects, and potentially for some category B and C projects. To fund a project, the school fund would forward a cheque to the Council's income section along with the relevant documentation (analysis slip) and ledger code. (Council policy does not accept cheques but this is an exception to that rule.) The Estates Officer can assist the school/head teacher with this procedure.		A school fund can forward/donate funds to the Highland Council to cover the cost of the ex-VAT goods and services, and the Highland Council would then implement the project and pay the invoice including VAT, and then proceed to recover the VAT. If this is applicable to a particular project, it would then be subject to the following conditions. • The supply of goods or services must not benefit the donor. This should not be an issue where the goods or services are provided to or used by the school for purposes "...closely related to the provision of education." • The Highland Council makes the purchase itself – i.e., places the order, receives the supply, receives the VAT invoice addressed to it, and makes the payment. • The Highland Council retains ownership of the purchase and uses it or makes it available for its own non-business purposes (i.e., non- business = educational). • The Highland Council keeps sufficient records for the purchase and the purpose for which it was made.	
9.	FOR CATEGORY A PROJECTS THERE ARE THREE OPTIONS FOR COST QUOTATIONS AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: (a) Highland Council proposed as Employer but no existing quotes or no preferred company identified - Where funding has been approved by a third party for equipment or a structure that		Best practice indicates that a minimum of three requests for quotation is sought for a project – note, it is not required that three quotes are received but that it is documented that best effort has been made to secure best option by requesting at least three firms provide a quote. The entity receiving a	

	requires construction works, and using your completed Project Notice form, a Concerto request ("Raise Job") is raised by either the head teacher/school, or the Estates Officer for either taking delivery of said equipment and/or arranging quotes for equipment installation or for construction work. Contract administration will be led by the area Maintenance Officer. (b) Highland Council as Employer with quotes obtained from a preferred company – As above but where the Parent Council/ group/community will install said equipment or structure that requires construction works, and using your completed Project Notice Form, a Concerto request ("Raise Job") is raised by either the head teacher/school, or the Estates Officer and the area Maintenance Officer will liaise with Property and Facilities Management for review of the project. This will include, for example, CDM Officer review of the skills, knowledge and experience of the proposed company, and Design Team review where Building warrant and / or Planning permissions are required. Depending on the nature of the work, the Maintenance Officer may oversee the project as Clerk of Works.		requested quote should immediately confirm receipt of the quote. A formal quote acceptance/contract award notice should be issued to the successful bidder. Unsuccessful bidders should be notified and thanked for their offers. Under certain threshold amounts, it may be feasible to request a single quotation from your identified firm, however, this can leave you/your group and The Highland Council open to challenge for unfair practices and can create liability to you and/or your group. Having worked with your local parent/firm, you will hope that they would be the successful tenderer. If your firm has committed to provide certain elements <i>gratis</i>, at cost, or other reductions, then they need to show this clearly in their quote when compared to other quotes. This best outcome is achievable and does not violate any procurement or CDM rules and regulations. If a preferred firm/contractor is not on the Highland Council's Framework Agreement, then in some circumstances a preferred firm/contractor may be added as a new one-time supplier.	
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	(c) Parent Council/Group/Community as Employer - Where the Parent Council or local group or community has engaged a third party to install equipment or carry out construction works then using your completed Project Notice form, a Concerto request is raised for Property and Facilities Management to review the works for CDM, safety, etc., and to coordinate the activity on site through a Clerk of Works role. The local Maintenance Officer may be designated as Clerk of Works to oversee the delivery and installation of the project.			
10.	CHANGE REQUESTS: After project initiation, no change requests to the project scope are authorised without the explicit agreement of THC Maintenance Officer (or Clerk of Works) and the Estates Officer.		The head teacher, teaching staff, Parent Council members, parents or other school groups are not permitted to request the contractor to modify the project or its scope without prior approval by the area Maintenance Officer (or Clerk of Works) or Estates Officer.	
11.	PROJECT COMPLETION (a) Request a final inspection by the local Maintenance Officer to make sure the work complies with the specification and that the quality of workmanship is acceptable. (b) No payment of final invoices shall occur until the work is inspected and determined that it meets the scope and is of appropriate quality. (c) The holder of the project funds should retain a proportion until the project is agreed to be complete and to the		Any structures or modification to THC lands/property as a result of the project shall be noted on THC property management data bases. The school project/initiative group shall provide copies of all drawings, manuals, guidance, maintenance schedules, manufacturer's information and similar, to the school head teacher and the local Maintenance Officer to incorporate into property management.	

	satisfaction of the area Maintenance Officer and the school's head teacher. (d) Get completion certificates (Building Standards) and acknowledgement all Planning conditions are discharged. (e) Close out the project/initiative by notifying area Maintenance Officer and Estates Officer, and provide relevant documentation to the Highland Council – see note opposite.		For those projects that involved Planning and Building Standards, make sure all appropriate completion certificates have been received and Planning has acknowledged all conditions have been cleared.	
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Appendix B: Project Notice Form

SCHOOL (OR OTHER HIGHLAND COUNCIL SITE)

SCHOOL NAME: Click here to enter text.	
FULL ADDRESS: Click here to enter text.	
HEAD TEACHER (or Council Site RPO): Click here to enter text.	TELEPHONE NO: Click here to enter text.
ASSOCIATED SECONDARY SCHOOL (or N/A if not school site): Click here to enter text.	
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Click here to enter text.	
PROJECT CATEGORY Choose an item. (REFER TO YOUR CHECKLIST)	
PROJECT COST: £Click here to enter text.	VAT INC. Choose an item.
PERCENT FUNDING SECURED: Click here to enter text.	FEES INCL Choose an item. (TYPICALLY 17%)
PROPOSED START DATE FOR WORKS: Click here to enter text.	
DURATION OF WORKS: Click here to enter text.	
PROPOSED END DATE: Click here to enter text.	
CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING BASED ON THE RESPONSE TO ITEM 9 ON YOUR COMPLETED CHECKLIST	
A. HIGHLAND COUNCIL AS EMPLOYER BUT NO QUOTES OR CONTRACTOR IDENTIFIED ☐ B. HIGHLAND COUNCIL AS EMPLOYER BUT WITH QUOTES AND PREFERRED CONTRACTOR IDENTIFIED ☐ C. PARENT COUNCIL/GROUP/LOCAL COMMUNITY AS EMPLOYER ☐	
MAINTENANCE & REPAIR; INSPECTIONS; SUSTAINABILITY & LIFECYCLING	
A. INDIVIDUAL, GROUP OR ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTENANCE & REPAIR: Click here to enter text.	
B. ARE MAINTENANCE AND/OR INSPECTIONS REQUIRED FOR REGULATORY or SAFETY COMPLIANCE: Choose an item. IF YES, LIST REQUIREMENTS AND RELEVANT REGULATIONS: Click here to enter text.	
C. WHAT PERCENT OF MAINTENANCE & REPAIR, AND INSPECTIONS IS FUNDED: Click here to enter text. IF LESS THAN 100%, EXPLAIN HOW REQUIREMENTS WILL BE ACHIEVED Click here to enter text.	
D. WHAT IS ESTIMATED LIFESPAN OF EQUIPMENT, STRUCTURE OR WORKS: Click here to enter	

text.

IF LESS THAN 10 YEARS, HOW WILL ITEMS BE REMOVED AND SITE RESTORED/MADE SAFE: [Click here to enter text.](#)

YOUR SCHOOL ESTATES OFFICER (PLACE SERVICE CLUSTER), OR OTHER SERVICE OFFICER FOR NON-SCHOOL SITES, MUST REVIEW THIS FORM **BEFORE FORMAL SUBMISSION.**

**SCHOOL ESTATES (OR OTHER) OFFICER NAME:
REVIEW DATE:
SUBMITTAL DATE:**

THIS COMPLETED FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED WITH SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS TO THE ABOVE-NAMED ESTATES OR OTHER OFFICER, WHO WILL COORDINATE REVIEW AND APPROVAL.



Appendix C: School Step by Step Guide for Upgrading School Playgrounds

Definition of Fixed Play – Equipment which is purchased from an Equipment Supplier which will be fixed into the ground and meets BSEN 1176 - Swings, slides, trim trails, gym equipment, goal posts, climbing frames etc.

Definition of Non-Fixed Play – Equipment which does not meet BSEN 1176 and is not from an Equipment Supplier – upcycled equipment, nature play, planting etc

Examples of Non-Acceptable Play Materials

The following are examples of materials and equipment that may present a foreseeable risk of serious injury, contain hazardous substances, cannot be adequately inspected and maintained, or function as playground equipment without complying with relevant standards:

- Industrial transport pallets (wooden or plastic).
- Scrap metal and metal offcuts.
- Glass items and broken glass.
- Demolition materials, rubble and broken concrete.
- Industrial drums, tanks and containers of unknown origin.
- Electrical appliances and electrical components.
- Vehicle parts not specifically designed for play use.
- Damaged tyres with exposed steel reinforcement.
- Timber containing protruding fixings, excessive splintering, rot or contamination.

- Materials that create foreseeable entrapment hazards.
- Homemade swings, climbing frames, monkey bars, zip wires or similar play structures.

School playgrounds should involve many different types of play including fixed and non-fixed equipment. Meeting BSEN1176 can be challenging but we are here to help you to create an inclusive playground where there is a choice of play for all students. The following guide has been created to support you in

