



Playable Space Quality Assessment Tool

Developed by INSPIRE Consultancy Ltd.
October 2009

Play England promotes excellent free play opportunities for all children and young people. Play England provides advice and support to promote good practice, and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy makers, planners and the public.

Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive, local play provision and play space. Play England is part of NCB, is supported by the Big Lottery Fund, and is the government's national delivery partner, working to implement the national Play Strategy in England.

NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. As an umbrella body for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, NCB provide essential information on policy, research and best practice for our members and other partners.

NCB aims to:

- challenge disadvantage in childhood
- work with children and young people to ensure they are involved in all matters that affect their lives
- promote multidisciplinary cross-agency partnerships and good practice
- influence government policy through policy development and advocacy
- undertake high quality research and work from an evidence-based perspective
- disseminate information to all those working with children and young people, and to children and young people themselves.

NCB has adopted and works within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Published for Play England by the NCB
NCB, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

Tel: 020 7843 6300

Website: www.ncb.org.uk

Registered charity number: 258825

NCB works in partnership with Children in Scotland (www.childreninScotland.org.uk) and Children in Wales (www.childreninWales.org.uk).

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Introduction

The more children play out freely, the more opportunities they have to build friendships and a network of social contacts. Playing out helps to build their bodies, gets them fit and teaches them vital skills such as: planning, negotiating, being creative, not being afraid to take risks and to experiment, having fun and enjoying themselves. The Quality Assessment Tool aims to help providers create the best possible conditions for that natural and most important activity for children.

The aim of the quality assessment is to assess the quality of children's play spaces. It is designed as a tool to help play providers look at the spaces available for children's play, near where they live and go to school, and assess what sort of improvements could be made to enhance the use and quality of those spaces. As quality assessment using this method is a subjective process it is not intended that the tool should be used to make comparisons between provision offered by different local authorities unless they are assessed by the same people. It does, however, have considerable potential as an internal performance management tool.

Although children play in numerous spaces and places, parks and designated play areas can significantly enhance children's capacity to play outdoors freely and increase the quality of their play experiences. In this assessment we focus on three major aspects to children's outdoor play provision: the location of play areas, the play value and the care and maintenance. The guide offers guidelines for the assessment of the three different types of play space and facility to which all children and young people should have free access in their local neighbourhood.

Type A: Doorstep space and facility

Type B: Local space and facility

Type C: Neighbourhood space and facility

Design for play

Current guidance on designing successful play spaces, published by DCSF, DCMS and Play England¹ highlights 10 key design principles for creating successful play spaces. These principles should be considered alongside this tool, which incorporates the principles within the assessment framework for location, play value and care and maintenance.

Design for Play: The golden rule

A successful play space is a place in its own right, specially designed for its location, in such a way as to provide as much play value as possible.

The 10 principles for designing successful play spaces

Successful play spaces:

- are 'bespoke' – designed to enhance their setting
- are well located – in the best possible place for children
- make use of natural elements – close to nature
- provide a wide range of play experiences – where children can play in different ways
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children – where they can play together
- meet community needs and are loved by the community
- allow children and young people of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge – where children can stretch and challenge themselves in every way
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained – maintained for play value and environmental sustainability
- allow for change and evolution – evolving as the children grow.

All Children's Trusts should be seeking to review local play spaces, as outlined in the statutory guidance to Children's Trusts² and the consultation document *Embedding the Play Strategy*.³

¹ Shackell A, Butler B, Doyle P and Ball D (2008) *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families; Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Play England.

² DCSF (2008) *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

³ Play England (2009) *Embedding the Play Strategy*. London: NCB/Play England.
www.playengland.org.uk/playstrategy

The importance of location

Research shows that location is perhaps the single most important factor in how well children use not only play areas but also open spaces. In general, children like to play locally where they can be seen, see others and meet others. Young people are able to roam further and can therefore use neighbourhood play areas, although they too like to feel safe wherever they are 'hanging out'.

Disabled children and parents or carers with buggies should be able to access the play areas as much as non-disabled children. Often children will play with younger siblings who may need to be taken to the area in a buggy or push chair.

The scoring system is designed to identify the suitability of the location of play areas and spaces where children may play.

The importance of play value

The assessment deliberately focuses on the different, innovative and challenging ways in which children can have a wide variety of play experiences and sensations such as rocking, swinging and sliding – this is particularly important for some disabled children whose impairments mean they cannot for example, sit on traditional swings.

The natural environment offers many opportunities for this and consideration should be given to the varied and interesting ways in which children can play in these environments. Quiet, contemplative play is as important as boisterous and physical play and although children will play in their own way in any given area, their play can be enriched through creating appropriate and stimulating play environments.

Children need to take risks to learn about and understand their own capabilities. Risk does not mean creating hazardous environments, but it does mean ensuring opportunities for challenging play are available through design.

The importance of care and maintenance

All areas will require that children can play free from unexpected hazards. This section aims to assess the quality of care and maintenance of play spaces and areas and should refer to other types of risk-benefit analysis being undertaken.

How to carry out the assessments

How many people should carry out the site assessments?

A minimum of two people should carry out the assessments. Ideally the assessment team consists of three or more. This will help alleviate the inevitable bias in the scoring and provide opportunities for debate and creative discussion.

Each person should assess the sites individually and the scores compared and discussed at the end of each site assessment. Individuals can then adjust scores if they wish to do so. Adjustments in scoring should be done through a cooperative dialogue that enables sharing of different perspectives.

Who should carry out the site assessments?

The most useful results will be achieved if the same people carry out all the site assessments in one area.

The assessments can be carried out by a range of people such as:

- children and young people
- tenants and residents
- playworkers
- parks and open space officers and managers.

Involving a diverse group of people will generate more points of view, perspectives and debates, which can lead to a more critical assessment of the play site. Local residents will probably only score sites in their neighbourhood where their local knowledge will be invaluable.

If the system is to be used across a local authority consistency and comparative data between sites will be important.

Peer assessments carried out in partnership with another local authority can also provide a valuable perspective and is recommended. They can help bring a level of objectivity into the assessment process and provide an opportunity to compare standards.

When to assess?

Whilst this guide does not prescribe a specified time for the assessments, it is recommended that they be carried out when children and young people are most likely to be playing out. If children and young people are present, their views could be sought about the site. And, their use of the site may indicate its

popularity or otherwise. Observations about how children and young people use the site can provide valuable data about the play value and location of the site.

Guidelines and definitions

The guidelines and definitions for assessing the three different types of play space are a guide and are neither fully comprehensive nor definitive. They suggest what children and young people might experience and benefit from in the different types of space. The role of the definitions is to provoke thought and discussion and allow providers to view their provision in a systematic manner, but still taking into account the local surroundings, other spaces available to children and the needs and wishes of local children, young people and other community members. Additional guidance looking specifically at access and inclusion for disabled children, can be found on the KIDS website.⁴

The score sheet

There are two parts to the score sheets. The first part is designed to provide information that may inadvertently affect the scoring such as the weather and the time the assessment took place. If the assessment took place during a bleak, rainy morning during term time there will be no or few children playing. The same site might look more successful during a hot summer holiday when lots of children may be playing there. The assessment sheet provides a record of when the assessment actually took place.

The front page requires the assessors to define the 'site'. In a large Type C park for example, the assessors might restrict the site to a specific radius rather than include the whole park. This information will ensure consistency of scoring between different assessors and different years.

Often the first impressions of a site can be important. First impressions may give a clue as to whether the site looks inviting to children to play. First impressions can be compared to the actual scores and further discussions can take place about any discrepancies.

The scores should provide data for making some planning decisions. The section *Judgements for planning* is to be completed at the end of the assessments once scores have been analysed. This section will provide a record of the rationale for the development decisions for each site.

The scores (from 1 to 5) are to be converted into percentage scores to allow for weighting and comparisons between sites and between the location, play value and care and maintenance sections.

The aim of the scoring system is to identify which play area and which particular aspects of the play area needs improving. Final scores are calculated as a

⁴ KIDS (2009) *Inclusivity Assessment Tool*. www.kids.org.uk

percentage of the possible total score. For each criterion the minimum final score is 20%.

In the fictitious example below, Flip Flop play area scores relatively high on care and maintenance (78%) but lower in location (54%) and play value (48%). Sandcastle play area scores high on location (73%) and low on play value (38%) as does Turn Around play area (69% and 43% respectively).

Type	Play area	Location % score	Play value % score	Care and maintenance % score
A	Flip Flop	54	48	78
A	Sandcastle	73	38	81
B	Turn Around	69	43	56
B	Primal play	55	52	57
C	Treetops	80	54	46
C	Potters Park	65	64	78

The local authority responsible for Sandcastle play area might review the design of the play area, consult with local children and young people, and improve the play value of that particular site. It might decide that given the low scoring in all areas, Primal play area should be removed and the funding invested in the Sandcastle play area.

The scoring sheet also contains targets for improvements. The scores for Treetops play area show that it is in a good location (scoring 80%) but needs to increase the score for play value (54%). The local authority responsible for the site might decide to take steps to increase the play value by looking at the design and layout of the play area.

In some types of play spaces it may not be possible score a full 100% because of the location and size. This should be recorded in the front page of the assessment sheet.

For example it might not be possible for Sandcastle play area to achieve 100% for play value because it is too small for extensive planting or movement. However, there may be other possibilities that allow for the play value to be increased.

Local authorities will need to decide on, and make known, their own benchmark of what constitutes 'good' quality in each aspect of the assessment. One possible approach is to take the range of scores for each aspect for all the local

authority play areas and calculate the median⁵; this can then be used as an initial benchmark with sites above the median scoring 'good'. If a play area with a median score is not felt to be representative of a good site, a site with a higher score can be selected as the 'benchmark' site.

⁵ The median of a population is the point that divides the distribution of scores in half. Numerically, half of the scores in a population will have values that are equal to or larger than the median and half will have values that are equal to or smaller than the median.

To work out the median:

a) Put the numbers in order: 3 6 6 6 7 9 11 11 13

b) The number in the middle of the list is the median 7 is in the middle. So the median value is 7. If there are two middle values, the median is halfway between them. For example, if the set of numbers were: 3 6 6 6 7 8 9 11 11 13 There are two middle values, 7 and 8. The median is halfway between 7 and 8. The median is 7.5.

Example score summaries

Discrepancies between assessors should be discussed and adjusted as appropriate. Where there is continued disagreement a commentary should be added, alternative scores noted and if agreement cannot be reached an average score calculated.

Type A: Doorstep playable spaces

	Current score						Target score to be achieved					
Flip Flop Play area	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=40 Min=8	%	Care and maint Max=25 Min=5	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	23	66	23	58	21	84						
Scorer 2	14	40	17	42	18	72						
Scorer 3	21	60	17	44	19	76						
Scorer 4	19	53	18	46	18	72						
Scorer 5	17	50	20	50	21	84						
Average		54		48		78						

	Current score						Target score to be achieved					
Sandcastle Play area	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=40 Min=8	%	Care and maint Max=25 Min=5	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	25	73	12	30	21	84						
Scorer 2	25	70	15	38	20	80						
Scorer 3	23	66	16	40	19	76						
Average		70		36		80						

Type B: Local playable space or facility

Turn Around Play area	Current score						Target score to be achieved					
	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=50 Min=10	%	Care and maint: Max=35 Min=7	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	23	66	28	56	22	62						
Scorer 2	27	76	22	44	20	57						
Scorer 3	23	66	19	38	21	60						
Scorer 4	22	63	24	48	15	42						
Scorer 5	25	70	21	42	22	62						
Average		68		46		57						

Primal Play area	Current Score						Target score to be achieved					
	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=50 Min=10	%	Care and maint: Max=35 Min=7	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	19	53.	30	60	21	60						
Scorer 2	26	76	29	58	23	65						
Scorer 3	21	60	23	46	22	62						
Scorer 4	9	26	22	44	12	34						
Scorer 5	21	60	25	50	22	62						
Average		55		52		57						

Type C: Neighbourhood playable space or facility

Treetops Play Area	Current Score						Target score to be achieved					
	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=50 Min=10	%	Care & maint Max=35 Min=7	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	26	73	18	36	15	42						
Scorer 2	32	90	41	82	16	45						
Scorer 3	29	83	25	50	18	51						
Scorer 4	29	83	32	64	17	48						
Scorer 5	24	70	19	38	15	42						
Average		80		54		46						

Potters Park Play Area	Current Score						Target score to be achieved					
	Location Max=35 Min=7	%	Play value Max=50 Min=10	%	Care & maint Max=35 Min=7	%	Location	%	Play value	%	C and M	%
Scorer 1	26	73	35	70	30	86						
Scorer 2	19	53	23	46	20	57						
Scorer 3	23	67	36	72	28	80						
Scorer 4	25	70	30	60	29	83						
Scorer 5	22	63	35	70	30	86						
Average		65		64		78						

Classification of spaces for play indicators

Type A: 'Door-step' spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation

A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

For example, this could be a grassed area, open space, residential street in a home zone or small designed play area, which is large enough to enable young children to play within sight of known adults. The space could incorporate some interesting and attractive landscape features and/or a small number of items of play equipment and create an environment which will stimulate young children's play providing opportunities for a variety of play experiences, bearing in mind that older children and young people may also use the space from time to time. A door-step space would be sufficiently close to home for the children who use it to feel safe and be able to interact with individuals and groups of other children. It should also be capable of catering for the needs of children with a range of impairments. Seating may be available for carers, allowing them to sit, watch and meet other people.

Type B: 'Local' spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation

A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

For example, this could be a grassed area, small park, local open space, designed space for play or informal recreation or school playground open out of school hours, which is attractive to children as they begin to move around their neighbourhoods without being accompanied by adults. These spaces and facilities provide a varied and interesting physical environments including, for example, natural features, sand and water, and incorporate some interesting and attractive landscape features with varying levels and contours, which test children's capabilities. There might also be features designed for specific activities such as ball games, wheeled sports or meeting places and/or several of items of play equipment offering a variety of play experiences. Play facilities might also include local staffed play provision such as playcentres, play-schemes, play ranger projects and adventure playgrounds. These spaces and facilities should also be capable of catering for the needs of children with a range of impairments. The children who use these spaces and facilities should feel safe and be able to interact with individuals and groups of other children of different ages.

Type C: 'Neighbourhood' spaces and facilities for play and informal recreation

A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

For example, this might be a park, playing field, recreation ground or natural open space such as woodland, moorland or a beach, accessible and attractive to older children and young people as well as others. The space or facility provides for a variety of age appropriate play and informal recreational experiences. It might provide a varied and interesting physical environment incorporating some interesting and attractive landscape features with varying levels and contours. There are likely to be more challenging items of equipment and features that meet the needs of older children and young people. Larger facilities specifically designed for informal recreation could be present such as a ball court, multi-use games area or skateboard area, which can provide the opportunity for a variety of experiences to young people with differing skills levels. These spaces and facilities should also be capable of catering for the needs of children and young people with a range of impairments. There is likely to be sufficient space to play large group ball games and seating and shelter to enable young people to socialise with their friends.

Guidelines and definitions

Score between 1 and 5 (with 1 as the lowest score, and 5 as the highest score. Score 0 if absent).

TYPE A: Door-step spaces and facilities: A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.					
Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
INVOLVMENT OF CHILDREN					
Were children involved in the development of the site? (This score is for your own use only. It will not be counted in the final score).	Children were not consulted on any aspect of the development of the site.		Children were consulted about the development of the site once.		A representative sample of local children were consulted continuously and participated actively in the design and development process throughout.
LOCATION					
Informal oversight by passers-by or nearby properties such as houses or community centres.	Site has obstructed lines of sight, few passers-by at any time.		Site has some informal oversight by adults but passers-by are few, or only at certain times.		Site has a good level of informal oversight by adults, for example views are unobstructed, site is in an area with people frequently passing by or through it or in full view of local housing.
Well used by children (evidenced by site visits, replacement of worn parts using desk research and local knowledge).	Site is used by few or no children at whom it is aimed. There is no evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass or replacement of worn parts infrequent.		Site has a reasonable level of use by those children at whom it is aimed, moderate replacement of worn parts.		Site is well used by children. There is evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass, local knowledge and observations of children using the space or frequently replaced worn parts on equipment.
Getting there.	Site is on opposite side of a major access barrier for the majority of children who would hope to use it.		Site is close to home but need to take a circuitous route or cross a busy road to get there.		Young children and accompanying adults can get to the site easily, safely and independently from their homes. No significant hazards to accessing the play space safely.

TYPE A: Door-step spaces and facilities: A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
Personal safety, security and lighting.	Site and access routes feel unsafe even in day light or site is located by a busy road.		Site and access routes feel safe in daylight but not after dark. Site is near a busy road.		Site and access routes feel safe at all times and have good exit routes. Both are well lit after dark if open. Site is located away from busy roads.
Getting there for those with impairments or with buggies and pushchairs.	Some children are excluded by poor access; site is not readily accessible to buggies. There are no alternatives to poor pathways and ground is uneven. Sudden changes to surfacing are not easily identified.		Site can be accessed by some e.g. those pushing buggies and children with some mobility, but presents difficulties for others e.g. those with severe impairments, so that they cannot take full advantage of the facility.		Space is accessible to disabled children including those with different sensory capabilities and other specific requirements. Site is accessible to buggies and pushchairs. Good pathways to the site offer an alternative to uneven ground and steps. Entrances and sudden changes in surfaces easily identified.
Meeting other children.	Site located where no other children likely to pass by e.g. away from homes, hidden away.		Site located where there may some opportunity for other children to pass by e.g. a quieter road.		Site located where there is a very high likelihood of other children passing by and joining in play e.g. on the way to and from school or local shops.
Designed for the site.	The play space stands out and does not look attractive. No attempt has been made to design the space to complement the settings.		Some attempt has been made to integrate the play equipment and features.		The play space is an attractive place in its own right, with a distinctive and welcoming character, and located with regard to its setting.
PLAY VALUE					
Enticing to children to play.	Signs or other deterrents including adults prohibit children from playing e.g. no ball games, no children signs; unappealing, tired looking.		Children have restricted access, or are limited in what they can do by regulation, design or attitudes. Site locked when children may wish to play.		Visible signs welcoming children to play using signage and other playful messages, space is child-friendly and appealing. Children and adults feel relaxed (if observed) and at ease. Site open when children may wish to play.

TYPE A: Door-step spaces and facilities: A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
Play opportunities for disabled children.	Site offers little or nothing for children with sensory or physical impairments.		Limited play offer to children with physical or sensory impairments. Disabled children and non-disabled children unlikely to be able to play together.		Play features are designed for a range of abilities and impairments including sensory and physical impairments and behaviours. Disabled and non-disabled children are able to play together.
Movement.	Site offers no or limited opportunity for movement.		Site offers few opportunities for running, tumbling, wheeled activity, rolling, rocking, swinging, balance, climbing or moving around.		Children can run, roll, run, tumble, wheeled activity, rock, swing, balance, climb or moving around freely using their whole bodies or on wheels.
Ball games.	No space for ball games or ball games prohibited.		Small space or too close to equipment allowing only limited space to play with balls.		Ball games area sufficient to kick a ball around, not too close to other play features.
Opportunities to change the environment/space (loose parts).	The site offers no opportunities for children to change their environment (e.g. only limited fixed equipment is available).		The site offers some opportunities to change the environment e.g. through some natural features that might encourage children to change the way they use the space.		The site encourages children to alter the play space in different ways to enhance their play e.g. den building, obstacle courses, bridges over streams and creating shade using the natural environment.
Access to natural environment.	Landscaping and planting either actively discourages play or no opportunities are available to engage with the natural environment.		Landscaping and planting is minimal and offers limited provision for encounters with natural environment.		Site provides some natural features such as trees, bushes, plants, shrubs, wild flowers and long grass, sand, water, rocks, and a variety of levels; and a range of visual and sensory stimuli.
Places for children to sit.	No places for children to sit.		Limited places for children to sit, not suitable for playing or talking together.		Children can sit and play or talk together, places for children to sit are incorporated into the play space, and near to tables or other seated play surfaces.

TYPE A: Door-step spaces and facilities: A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

	1	2	3	4	5
Added play value: the site offers more than just a basic experience of sensation. It offers possibilities for children to take risks without hazards, to intensify the experience or broaden it.	Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are at basic level only and add little to play value.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are more than basic and adds to play value, but does not do so significantly.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are advanced in nature and add significantly to play value: eg, loose parts, places to hide/for reverie, good integration and use of natural environment, a range of textures, planting, use of contours, challenge, opportunities for risk taking, areas where cooperation is needed, and attention paid to all the senses.

CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Well maintained.	Extensive litter or hazardous debris, planting in poor condition, unacceptable graffiti present.		Partly meets criteria for excellence but fails on two or more items.		No evidence of litter or hazardous items, well drained where appropriate, planting is regularly cared for, maintained with play value in mind, no unacceptable graffiti.
Health and safety (May require desk research).	No programme of regular maintenance, safety checks and risk benefit assessment.		Risk assessments take little or no account of potential benefits, appropriate adherence to health and safety standards but maintenance and safety checks on an ad hoc basis.		Regular inspection for unexpected hazards; regular cleaning and general maintenance programmes; dog-free areas; traffic calming; meet agreed safety standards, regular risk /benefit assessment, regular inspection regimes, regular maintenance programmes, as appropriate.
Seating for adults.	No seating for adults.		Limited seating or seating is not well sited for observing play.		Adults can sit and observe children playing.
Litter bins.	No litter bins/ bins in poor condition, or bins are full		One bin, not full and in adequate condition.		One or more bins in good condition and not full.
Dog free zones.	Dogs have unrestricted access to the whole site/ evidence of dog fouling.		Measures taken to exclude dogs but evidence that dogs are entering site.		Management of dog fouling in place through bins, clarification of dog free areas ,signs discouraging owners from bringing dogs to the site, no evidence of fouling.

TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

1

2

3

4

5

INVOLVMENT OF CHILDREN

Were children involved in the development of the site? (This score is for your own use only. It will not be counted in the final score).

Children were not consulted on any aspect of the development of the site.

Children were consulted about the development of the site once.

A representative sample of children were consulted continuously and participated actively in the design and development process throughout.

LOCATION

Informal oversight by passers-by or nearby properties such as houses or community centres.

Site has obstructed lines of sight, few passers-by at any time.

Site has some informal oversight by adults but passers-by are few, or only at certain times.

Site has a good level of informal oversight by adults, for example views are unobstructed, site is in an area with people frequently passing by or through it or in view of local housing or community buildings.

Well used by children (evidenced by site visits, replacement of worn parts using desk search and local knowledge).

Site is used by few or no children at whom it is aimed. There is no evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass or replacement of worn parts infrequent.

Site has a reasonable level of use by those children at whom it is aimed, moderate replacement of worn parts.

Site is well used by children. There is evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass, local knowledge and observations of children using the space or frequently replaced worn parts on equipment.

Getting there.

Site is on opposite side of a major access barrier for the majority of children who would hope to use it.

Children can get to the site independently but need to take a circuitous route or cross a busy road to get there and the site has limited access by footpath or cycle route.

Children can get to the site easily, safely and independently without facing significant hazards. There is safe access to the site using footpaths and cycle routes.

Personal safety, security and lighting.

Site and access routes feel unsafe even in day light or site is located by busy road.

Site and access routes feel safe in daylight but not after dark, Site is near a busy road.

Site and access routes feel safe at all times and have good exit routes. Both are well lit after dark if open. Site is located away from busy roads.

TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
Getting there for those with impairments or with buggies and pushchairs.	Some children are excluded by poor access; site is not readily accessible to buggies or pushchairs. There are no alternatives to poor pathways to the site, uneven ground, steps. Sudden changes to surfacing are not easily identified.		Site can be accessed by some e.g. those pushing buggies and children with some mobility, but presents difficulties for others e.g. those with severe impairments, so that they cannot take full advantage of the facility.		Space is accessible for children including disabled children and those with sensory impairments and other requirements. Site is accessible to buggies and pushchairs. Good pathways to the site offer an alternative to uneven ground and steps. Entrances and sudden changes in surfaces are easily identified. Accessible parking nearby to play space.
Meeting other children.	Site located where no other children likely to pass by e.g. away from homes, hidden away.		Site located where there may be some opportunity for other children to pass by e.g. a quieter road.		Site located where there is a very high likelihood of other children passing by and joining in play e.g. on the way to and from school or local shops.
Designed for the site.	The play space stands out and does not look attractive. No attempt has been made to design the space to complement the settings.		Some attempt has been made to integrate the play equipment and features.		The play space is an attractive place in its own right, with a distinctive and welcoming character, and located with regard to its setting.
PLAY VALUE					
Enticing to children to play.	Signs or other deterrents including adults prohibit children from playing e.g. no ball games, no children; unappealing, tired and unattractive.		Children have restricted access, or are limited in what they can do by regulation design or attitudes. Site locked at times when children may wish to play.		Visible signs welcoming children to play using signage and other playful messages. Space is child-friendly and appealing. Children and adults feel relaxed (if observed) and at ease. Site open at times when children may wish to play.
Play opportunities for disabled children	Site offers little or nothing for children with sensory or physical impairments.		Limited play offer to children with physical or sensory impairments. Disabled children and non-		Play features are designed for a range of abilities and impairments, including sensory and physical impairments and behaviours.

TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
			disabled children are unlikely to be able to play together.		Disabled and non-disabled children are able to play together.
Meets play needs of different ages	Play features meet the play needs of only one age group.		Play features suitable for two different age groups; for example, young children and those of junior school age.		Play features meet the play needs of all age groups up to and including teenagers.
Movement	Site offers a limited opportunity for movement.		Site offers some features that enable running, tumbling, wheeled activity, rolling, rocking, swinging, balance, climbing or moving around.		Children can run, roll, run, tumble, wheeled activity, rock, swing, balance, climb or move around freely using their whole bodies or on wheels.
Imaginative play	The site has no design features to provoke the children's imagination, fantasy or role play.		The site has limited design features to provoke the child's imagination, fantasy or role play.		The site is deliberately designed to provoke and engage children's imagination, encourage fantasy and role play e.g. through changes in level and texture, loose parts, sculptures, natural features and imaginative signage.
Ball games	No space for ball games or ball games prohibited.		Ball games area but no markings, limited equipment, or too small a space for more than one group of children to play ball games.		Sufficient space for team ball games, football etc; ball games area marked out and equipped for a range of ball games, for more than one group of children at one time, not too close to other play equipment or features.
Opportunities to change the environment/space (loose parts)	The site offers no opportunities for children to change their environment (e.g. only limited fixed equipment is available).		The site offers some opportunities to change the environment e.g. through some natural features that might encourage to change the way they use the space.		The site encourages children to alter the play space in different ways to enhance their play e.g. den building, obstacle courses, bridges over streams and creating shade using the natural environment.

TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score					
	1	2	3	4	5
Access to natural environment	Landscaping and planting either actively discourages play or no opportunities are available to engage with the natural environment.		Landscaping and planting is minimal and offers limited provision for encounters with natural environment.		Site provides a range of natural features such as trees, bushes, plants, shrubs, wild flowers and long grass, sand, water, rocks, and a variety of levels; and a range of visual and sensory stimuli. There is opportunity to use the natural environment in play.
Places for children to sit	No places for children to sit.		Limited places for children to sit, not suitable for playing or talking together.		Children can sit and play and talk together, places for children to sit are incorporated into the play space, and near to tables or other seated play surfaces.
Added play value: the site offers more than just a basic experience of sensation. It offers possibilities for children to take risks without hazards, to intensify the experience or broaden it.	Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are at basic level only and add little to play value.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are more than basic and add to play value, but does not do so significantly.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are advanced in nature and add significantly to play value e.g. loose parts, places to hide/for reverie, good integration and use of natural environment, a range of textures, planting, use of contours, challenge, opportunities to take risks, areas where cooperation is needed, and attention paid to all the senses.
CARE AND MAINTENANCE					
Well maintained.	Extensive litter or hazardous debris, planting in poor condition, unacceptable graffiti present.		Partly meets criteria for excellence but fails on two or more items.		No evidence of litter or hazardous items, well drained where appropriate, planting is regularly maintained with play value in mind, no unacceptable graffiti.
Health and safety (May require desk research).	No programme of regular maintenance, safety checks or risk benefit assessment.		Risk assessments take little or no account of potential benefits. Adherence to health and safety		Regular inspection for unexpected hazards; regular cleaning and general maintenance programmes; dog-free areas; traffic calming;

TYPE B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

	Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score				
	1	2	3	4	5
			standards but maintenance and safety checks on an ad hoc basis.		meet agreed safety standards, regular risk/benefit assessment, regular inspection regimes, regular maintenance programmes, as appropriate.
Seating for adults.	No seating for adults.		Limited seating or seating is not well sited for observing play.		Adults can sit and observe children playing.
Litter bins.	No litter bins/ bins in poor condition, or bins are full.		One bin, not full and in adequate condition.		Two or more bins in good condition and not full.
Dog free zones.	Dogs have unrestricted access to the whole site/ evidence of dog fouling.		Measures taken to exclude dogs but evidence that dogs are entering site.		Management of dog fouling in place through bins, clarification of dog free areas, signs discouraging owners from bringing dogs to the site, no evidence of fouling.
Presence of supervisory adults (e.g. park keepers, street wardens, play rangers, community support officers).	No supervisory adults in the vicinity when children likely to be playing.		Supervisory adults in the vicinity at some times children might want to be playing.		Supervisory adults always likely to be in the vicinity at times children might want to be playing.
Toilets/Changing facilities	Restricted use of toilets. Toilet poorly maintained. No accessible toilets.		Toilets available and adequately maintained, but not easily accessible, e.g. too far away or locked when children wish to use them.		Fully accessible, well maintained toilets available for children and adults whilst at the site. Changing facilities for children of different ages including disabled children.

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

1

2

3

4

5

INVOLVMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Were children and young people involved in the development of the site? (This score is for your own use only. It will not be counted in the final score).

Children and young people were not consulted on any aspect of the development of the site.

Children and young people were consulted about the development of the site once.

A representative sample of local children and young people were consulted continuously and participated actively in the design and development process throughout.

LOCATION

Informal oversight by passers-by or nearby properties such as houses or community centres.

Site has obstructed lines of sight, few passers-by at any time.

Site has some informal oversight by adults but passers-by are few, or only at certain times.

Site has a good level of informal oversight by adults, for example views are unobstructed, site is in an area with people frequently passing by or through it or in view of local housing or community buildings.

Well used by children and young people (evidenced by site visits, replacement of worn parts using desk search and local knowledge).

Site is used by few or no children and young people at whom it is aimed. There is no evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass or replacement of worn parts infrequent.

Site has a reasonable level of use by those children and young people at whom it is aimed, moderate replacement of worn parts.

Site is well used by children and young people. There is evidence of wear and tear such as well-worn grass, local knowledge observations of children and young people using the space or frequently replaced worn parts on equipment.

Getting there.

Site is on opposite side of a major access barrier for the majority of children and young people who would hope to use it.

Children and young people can get to the site independently but need to take a circuitous route or cross a busy road to get there and the site has limited access by footpath or cycle route.

Children can get to the site easily, safely and independently without facing significant hazards. There is safe access to the site using footpaths or cycle routes.

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

	1	2	3	4	5
Personal safety, security and lighting.	Site and access routes feel unsafe even in day light or is located by a busy road.		Site and access routes feel safe in daylight but not after dark. Site is near a busy road.		Site and access routes feel safe at all times and have good exit routes. Both are well lit after dark if open. Site is located away from busy roads.
Getting there those with impairments or with buggies and pushchairs.	Some children and young people are excluded by poor access; site is not readily accessible to buggies. There are no alternatives to poor pathways to the site, uneven ground, steps. Sudden changes to surfacing are not easily identified.		Site can be accessed by some e.g. those pushing buggies and children and young people with some mobility, but presents difficulties for others e.g. those with severe impairments, so that they cannot take full advantage of the facility.		Space is accessible for children and young people who are disabled, have sensory impairments or other specific requirements. Site is accessible to buggies and pushchairs. Good pathways to the site offer an alternative to uneven ground and steps. Entrances and sudden changes in surfaces are easily identifiable. Accessible parking nearby to play space.
Meeting other children and young people.	Site located where no other children and young people likely to pass by e.g. away from homes, hidden away.		Site located where there may some opportunity for other children and young people to pass by e.g. a quieter road.		Site located where there is a very high likelihood of other children and young people passing by and joining in play e.g. on the way to and from school or local shops.
Designed for the site.	The play space stands out and does not look attractive. No attempt has been made to design the space to complement the setting.		Some attempt has been made to integrate the play equipment and features.		The play space is an attractive place in its own right, with a distinctive and welcoming character, and located with regard to its setting.
PLAY VALUE					
Enticing to children and young people to play.	Signs or other deterrents including adults prohibit children and young people from playing e.g. no ball games, no children		Children and young people have restricted access, or are limited in what they can do by regulation, design or attitudes. Site locked at		Visible signs welcoming children and young people to use the space, signage and other messages, space is child-friendly and appealing. Children and adults feel relaxed

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

	1	2	3	4	5
	and young people; unappealing, tired, run down.		times when children and young people may wish to use it.		(if observed) and at ease. Site open at times when children and young people may wish to use it.
Opportunities for Disabled children and young people.	Site offers little or nothing for children and young people with sensory or physical impairments.		Limited offer to children and young people with physical or sensory impairments. Disabled children and young people and non-Disabled children and young people are unlikely to use the space together.		Features are designed for a range of abilities and impairments including sensory and physical impairments and behaviours. Disabled and non-disabled children and young people are able to use the space together.
Meets needs of different age groups.	Features meet the play needs of only one age group.		Play features suitable for two different age groups.		Play features meet the play needs of all ages including teenagers.
Movement.	Site offers a limited opportunity for movement.		Site offers some features that enable running, tumbling, wheeled activity, rolling, rocking, swinging, balance, climbing or moving around.		Children and young people can move freely in different ways including, for example, running, tumbling, wheeled activity, rock, swing, balance, climb or moving around freely using their whole bodies or on wheels.
Stretching the imagination.	The site has no design features to provoke the children and young people's imagination, fantasy or role play.		The site has limited design features to provoke the child's imagination, fantasy or role play.		The site is deliberately designed to provoke and engage children and young people's imagination, encourage fantasy and roleplay eg through changes in level and texture, loose parts, sculptures, natural features and imaginative signage.
Ball games.	No space for ball games or ball games prohibited.		Ball games area but no markings, limited equipment, or too small a space for more than one group of children and young people to play ball games.		Sufficient space for team ball games, football etc, Ball games area marked out and equipped for a range of ball games, for more than one group of children and young people at one time, not too close to other play

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

	1	2	3	4	5
			ball games.		equipment or features.
Opportunities to change the environment/space (loose parts).	The site offers no opportunities for children and young people to change their environment (e.g. only limited fixed equipment is available).		The site offers some opportunities to change the environment e.g. through some natural features that might encourage them to change the way they use the space.		The site encourages children and young people to alter the space in different ways to enhance their enjoyment e.g. den building, obstacle courses, bridges over streams and creating shade using the natural environment.
Access to natural environment.	Landscaping and planting either actively discourages play or no opportunities are available to engage with the natural environment.		Landscaping and planting is minimal and offers limited provision for encounters with natural environment.		Site provides a range of natural features such as trees, bushes, plants, shrubs, wild flowers and long grass, sand, water, rocks, and a variety of levels; and a range of visual and sensory stimuli. There is opportunity to use the natural environment in play.
Places for children and young people to sit.	No places for children and young people to sit.		Limited places for children and young people to sit, not suitable for playing or talking together.		Children and young people can sit and play or talk together, places for children and young people to sit are incorporated into the play space, and near to tables or other seated play surfaces.
Added play value: the site offers more than just a basic experience of sensation. It offers possibilities for children and young people to take risks without hazards, to intensify the experience or broaden it.	Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are at basic level only and adds little to play value.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are more than basic and adds to play value, but does not do so significantly.		Features (including equipment, natural features and landscaping) are advanced in nature and add significantly to play value e.g. loose parts, places to hide/for reverie, good integration and use of natural environment, a range of textures, planting, use of contours, challenging, risk, cooperation needed, and attention paid to all the senses.

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score

1

2

3

4

5

CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Well maintained.	Extensive litter or hazardous debris, planting in poor condition, unacceptable graffiti present.		Partly meets criteria for excellence but fails on two or more items.		No evidence of litter or hazardous items, well drained where appropriate, planting is regularly maintained with play value in mind, no unacceptable graffiti.
Health and safety (May require desk research).	No programme of regular maintenance, safety checks or risk benefit assessment.		Risk assessments take little or no account of potential benefits. Adherence to health and safety standards but maintenance and safety checks on an ad hoc basis.		Regular inspection for unexpected hazards; regular cleaning and general maintenance programmes; dog-free areas; traffic calming; meet agreed safety standards, regular risk-benefit assessment, regular inspection regimes, regular maintenance programmes, as appropriate.
Seating for adults.	No seating for adults.		Limited seating or seating is not well sited for observing play.		Adults can sit and observe children and young people if appropriate.
Litter bins.	No litter bins/bins in poor condition, or bins are full.		One bin, not full and in adequate condition.		Two or more bins in good condition and not full.
Dog free zones.	Dogs have unrestricted access to the whole site/ evidence of dog fouling.		Measures taken to exclude dogs but evidence that dogs are entering site.		Management of dog fouling in place through bins, clarification of dog free areas, signs discouraging owners from bringing dogs to the site, no evidence of fouling.
Presence of supervisory adults (e.g. park keepers, street wardens, play rangers, community support officers etc).	No supervisory adults in the vicinity when children and young people likely to be using the space.		Supervisory adults in the vicinity at some times children and young people might want to be using the space.		Supervisory adults always likely to be in the vicinity at times children and young people might want to be using the space.

TYPE C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

	Score: 1 = low score 5 = high score				
	1	2	3	4	5
Toilets/changing facilities.	Restricted use of toilets. Toilet poorly maintained. No accessible toilets.		Toilets available and adequately maintained, but not easily accessible, e.g. too far away or locked when children and young people wish to use them.		Fully accessible, well-maintained toilets available for children and young people and adults whilst at the site. Changing facilities for children and young people of different ages including disabled children and young people.

Assessment sheet

Type of play space or facility

Type A: Doorstep

Type B: Local

Type C: Neighbourhood

Type A: Door-step space or facility: A small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults

Type B: Local spaces and facilities: A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Type C: Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: A larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Name of assessor

Date of assessment

Time

Weather

Description of the site and its surroundings

Which aspects of the site are being assessed?

First impressions of the site

Include first impressions about the site, including location, hazards, overall look and feel, for example: does it look and feel friendly?

Judgements for planning (to be completed after the assessment)

What needs to be considered for this site when making future planning decisions?

5	Excellent	2	Weaknesses, improvements needed
4	Good	1	Serious weaknesses, improvement needed
3	Average, needs some improvement		
Involvement of children		Score	Comments
Involvement of children		NA	
Location (max score A=35, B=35, C=35)		Score	Comments
Informal oversight			
Well used by children			
Getting there			
Personal safety, lighting and security			
Accessibility in getting there			
Meeting other children			
Designed for the site			
TOTAL			
Final score: total as % of max			
Play value (max score A=40, B=50, C=50)		Score	Comments
Enticing to children to play			
Inclusion of disabled children			
Play needs of different ages (Type B and C only)			
Movement			
Imaginative play ages (Type B and C only)			
Ball games			
Loose parts			
Access to the natural environment			
Places for children to sit			
Play opportunities for disabled children			
Added play value			
TOTAL			
Final score: total as % of max			
Care and maintenance (max score A=25, B=35, C=35)		Score	Comments
Well maintained			
Health and safety			
Seating for adults			
Litter bins			
Dog free zones			
Presence of supervisory adults (Type B and C only)			
Toilets/changing facilities (Type B and C only)			
TOTAL			
Final score: total as % of max			

Playable space Quality Assessment Tool

Developed by INSPIRE Consultancy Ltd.

This publication can be downloaded at www.playengland.org.uk

Published for Play England by NCB

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Play England is part of NCB and is supported by the Big Lottery Fund.

NCB
8 Wakley Street
London
EC1V 7QE

Tel 020 7843 6300
Email playengland@ncb.org.uk
www.playengland.org.uk

Registered charity number 258825



Play England is part of NCB and is supported by the Big Lottery Fund. Published for Play England by NCB.



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