



**Western Cape
Government**

Education

Directorate: Policy Co-ordination

Guidelines on Playground Safety at Public Schools

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1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 The purpose of these guidelines is to identify and disseminate best practices in respect of playground safety at schools.
- 1.2 The guidelines are applicable to all public schools in the Western Cape.

2. Legislative framework

- 2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- 2.2 The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996)
- 2.3 The Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act 76 of 1998)
- 2.4 Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools (Government Gazette 22754 of 12 October 2001, as amended in Government Gazette 29376 of 10 November 2006)

3. Introduction

- 3.1 Play forms an important part of the physical, social, intellectual and emotional development of a child. It is, therefore, important for learners to go out into the fresh air, to be physically active, to interact with others and to have an opportunity to release their pent-up energy in a less restrictive environment than the classroom.
- 3.2 These guidelines serve to assist schools in ensuring a safe playground environment for learners at public schools.
- 3.3 In order to ensure safety in the playground, careful planning and deliberate action are needed.

4. Safety of learners in the playground

- 4.1 To ensure the safety of learners in the playground, the following aspects should be carefully considered:
- (a) The number of supervisors for the number of learners;
 - (b) The provision of training for supervisors on safety rules, guidance regarding the use of playground equipment and playground safety;
 - (c) Guidance to learners on how to use playground equipment and facilities safely;
 - (d) The provision of written playground safety rules, which are consistently enforced;
 - (e) A simple and basic environmental survey (repeated quarterly) to ensure that the surface, the perimeter demarcations (if any), the equipment and plants in the area are suitable for a playground, taking cognizance of the age and maturity levels of the learners;
 - (f) Careful selection and placement of playground equipment; and
 - (g) Regular checks, as well as a programme of preventative and reactive maintenance to the equipment and facilities and the surrounding environment, in order to ensure that potential hazards are timeously identified and eliminated.
- 4.2 When in the playground, learners should have access to—

- (a) drinking water; and
- (b) shaded areas.

4.3 Schools should therefore attempt to find a balance between a safe place to play and an environment within which learners can learn to assess possible risks, and to interact with equipment, facilities and the environment in a beneficial manner.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 The principal must:

- (a) In consultation with the governing body
 - (i) develop playground rules for learners,
 - (ii) set the times during which there is playground supervision, including times both before school each morning and after school each afternoon, and
 - (iii) declare a supervised designated waiting area for learners who are waiting for transport after the specified time mentioned in sub-paragraph 5.1 (a) (ii);
- (b) Provide educators with guidance on how to handle incidents on the playground;
- (c) Declare demarcated playground areas and, where necessary, restrict learner access to perimeter fences in particular areas;
- (d) Draw up a duty roster for playground supervision of learners, bearing in mind that—
 - (i) it is acceptable for members of the representative council of learners to share these supervisory duties with educators, and
 - (ii) designated educators should be available, when necessary, to assist these learners with incidents occurring on the playground;
- (e) Ensure that provision is made in the school budget for the purchase and maintenance of age-appropriate playground equipment;

- (f) Ensure that the playground and all equipment on it are regularly checked for potential hazards (see paragraph 10 and **Annexure A** attached hereto); and
- (g) Ensure that precautionary measures are adhered to when purchasing or installing playground equipment as described in paragraph 9.

5.2 The educator on playground duty must:

- (a) Adhere to the playground supervision roster and the times specified therein;
- (b) Engage with learners during playground supervision to ensure that they use playground equipment and facilities appropriately and do not engage in dangerous behaviour while using such equipment and facilities;
- (c) Assist injured learners and arrange for them to receive first aid, if needed; and
- (d) Report broken equipment and other dangerous situations immediately to those responsible for the upkeep of the playground.

6. Playground surface

- 6.1 The playground surface should be free of standing water, water leaks, debris, rocks and excessively intrusive roots of trees that could cause injury to learners.
- 6.2 Refuse, broken glass, twisted and rusted metal, open electrical installations (exposed pipes or electrical conduits), desks and chairs in need of repair should not be on playgrounds.
- 6.3 Schools should plant grass, provide mulch or lay a soft or yielding surface under playground equipment from which learners may fall.
- 6.4 It is recommended that such a surface should extend outwards for approximately two and a half metres around such equipment, depending on the potential risks which may accompany the use of that equipment.

7. Poisonous and otherwise unsuitable plants

- 7.1 With regard to poisonous plants, the following need to be borne in mind:

- (a) The vast majority of plants have a measure of toxicity in order to protect themselves from extinction. It is only when they are ingested in large amounts that there is any danger to learners.
 - (b) Learners are unlikely to eat leaves, flowers, roots or branches; it is therefore most likely to be fruit or berries that attract children.
- 7.2 Botanical experts suggest that the following common South African garden plants be avoided in and around a playground used by younger learners:
- (a) African boxthorn;
 - (b) Camphor tree;
 - (c) Castor oil tree;
 - (d) Cestrum;
 - (e) Frangipani;
 - (f) Oleander;
 - (g) Syringe; and
 - (h) Trees and shrubs which have accessible thorns or which drop thorns.
- 7.3 If schools are uncertain about the safety of plants, particularly those with brightly-coloured berries, it is suggested that the advice of an experienced botanist is sought or contact your local nursery.
- 7.4 When replacing plants or planting new ones, check before purchasing whether the plant is safe and suitable for a playground for learners.
- 7.5 Deciduous trees, which lose their capacity to provide shade for much of the school year, and require additional labour for the raking up of dropped leaves, should be avoided.

8. Selection of playground equipment

- 8.1 Playground equipment should be made of durable material that will not fail during normal usage or deteriorate when exposed to the elements.
- 8.2 Where reasonable and practicable, playground equipment should be age appropriate.
- 8.3 Special care should be taken with equipment made of wood as—
- (a) learners can be hurt by splinters; and
 - (b) wood can become slippery when wet.

9. Precautionary measures

9.1 The following precautionary measures should be taken when purchasing or installing playground equipment:

- (a) Playground equipment should be made of durable material that will not fall apart due to poor manufacturing or deteriorate rapidly as a result of exposure to the weather.
- (b) Guardrails and protective barriers must be placed firmly on the edge of elevated areas, such as terraces, platforms and ramps.
- (c) Play structures which are more than 75 cm high should be placed at least 2.5 metres apart.
- (d) Where reasonably practical, swings, seesaws and other equipment with moving parts should be placed in areas separated from the rest of the playground.
- (e) The equipment referred to in 9.1(d) above should be checked for pinch points.
- (f) No more than two swings should be installed in any one swing bay.
- (g) Non-toxic paint should be used on playground equipment.

10. Inspection and maintenance of equipment

10.1 Regular general checks should ensure that playground equipment and facilities are clean and well maintained.

10.2 Wooden equipment which is cracked or split should be repaired.

10.3 Metal equipment should not be rusted.

10.4 Surface materials in the fall area around equipment should be checked regularly.

10.5 Attention should be paid during checks to hardware, S-shaped hooks, bolts and sharp or unfinished edges that protrude from equipment and which could cut a learner or cause clothing to become entangled.

10.6 Hardware on equipment should be secure, with no loose or broken parts.

- 10.7 Check for signs of disrepair in plastic, wood or other material.
- 10.8 Sandpits should be checked for hazardous debris, such as broken glass or sharp sticks, and they should be free of pests, such as sand fleas.
- 10.9 Sandpits should be covered overnight to prevent contamination by animals.
- 10.10 Equipment which is found to be in need of maintenance should immediately be declared off-limits until it has been repaired.
- 10.11 Ensure that the maintenance of playground equipment and facilities are included in the school maintenance plan.

11. Review

- 11.1 These guidelines must be reviewed when the need arises or in the case of changed circumstances, including changes to legislation and/or regulations and budgetary circumstances.
- 11.2 The governing body of a school may review their Guidelines on Playground Safety when the need arises.

Annexure A**Basic environmental survey for general safety issues**

In line with paragraph 4.1(e) the principal should manage a simple and basic environmental survey (repeated quarterly) to ensure that the surface, the perimeter demarcations (if any), playground equipment and the facilities as well as the plants in the area are suitable for a playground, taking cognizance of the age and maturity levels of the envisaged learners. This will include a more careful examination than the cursory ones undertaken during routine supervision.

It is necessary to identify, and then to evaluate and respond to, the presence of factors such as the following:

1. Trees with intrusive root systems, such that the roots could cause injury to learners.
2. Dangerous levels of toxicity in the plants within the playground area, particularly in their fruit and berries, and sometimes leaves.
3. Obstacles to safe play, such as loose or embedded stones, debris, refuse, rubble, construction material, rusted metal, exposed pipes or electrical conduits, desks, chairs and other equipment in need of repair, standing water and water leaks.
4. Unsuitable or poorly-maintained perimeter fencing.
5. Vegetation which provides a habitat conducive to the presence of rodents or snakes.
6. Trees and plants which need pruning to prevent injury to learners (e.g. branches at eye-level, branches with thorns) or to eliminate dense foliage.