



# School Playground Planning Guide



Our handy  
guide to laying  
the foundations  
for a successful  
playground  
project.

# Without the right support, creating a playground can be anything but fun.

At Playground Centre, we're all about helping you make the right choices for your space, students (and your budget) whether you're creating a whole new play space or upgrading an existing playground at your school.

Use this handy guide to lay the foundations for a successful playground project. All while keeping your eye on the prize: outdoor spaces that use pure fun to support your students to grow, learn and thrive!



## 1 What's your vision?

Having a clear vision of your playground's purpose is the first step to planning, designing and building a brilliant play experience for your students.

- **Who will play there?** Consider the ages, stages and abilities of your students.
- **How many children** will use it at once?
- **What kind of play experience** and opportunities do you want to provide? Active play, fun and fitness? Social interaction? Imaginative play? Safe challenges and adventures? **Or all the above!**
- **What 'look' do you want?** Do you want your playground to complement or blend with your buildings and grounds or stand out and make a statement?



A woman with dark hair, wearing a white lace top, is smiling and pointing at a solar panel. Two children, a girl in a pink shirt and a boy in a blue shirt, are looking at the panel. The scene is outdoors with greenery and a string of white bunting in the background.

## 2 What are your play priorities?

Today's school playgrounds are so much more than just places for children to burn off their youthful energy on their lunch breaks or before the school bell rings.

They play a vital role in helping you achieve your school's student wellbeing and educational goals – supporting 'whole child' development and complementing classroom-based activities.

- Are you creating an **inclusive play experience** that caters to the diverse physical, social and sensory developmental stages and needs of your students?
- Is it just a play space, or is it a **learning space too?** Do you require a layout and other equipment or facilities to create an outdoor classroom?
- Are there specific areas of **your curriculum** you want your playground to support, such as Physical Education or STEM?

### 3 Who needs to be involved?

Collaboration is the key to every successful playground project. Decide who you need to consult up-front and how you'll keep them informed and involved.

Planning a school playground means considering the needs and expectations of:

- **Students**
- **Parents**
- **Teachers**
- The school's **board** and **management**
- Maintenance **staff**.



### SMART MOVE: Call in the experts!

Working with a company that specialises in playgrounds (like Playground Centre) can save time, money and stress.

That's because you not only have access to all the fun stuff like the latest and greatest playground design ideas and equipment, but you also have access to people with the skills and experience to get the serious stuff right like site preparation, installation and safety.



#### Want to get students involved?

Ask us about our 'Create your own Playground' resource which allows students to put forward their ideas.



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## What are the site considerations?

Let's get down to the details!

- What are the **exact dimensions** of the space available?
- **How exposed** is it to the elements (wind, heat, snow)?
- What can you use to your advantage, such as **existing trees for shade**?
- What are the drainage and **soil conditions**?
- Are there any **challenges** or constraints (e.g. slopes).
- For a playground upgrade: is there **existing play equipment** to be incorporated or removed?
- What type of **safety surfacing** is required?
- Are you going to use natural shade or a **commercial shade system**?

Teaching kids about the environment?

Lead by example and select sustainably made play equipment.

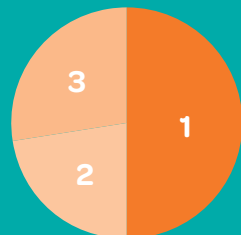




## 5 What is your budget?

The cost to build a playground depends on a whole number of factors ranging from the size of your playground to the play equipment and materials you choose. A playground specialist can help you squeeze more out of your budget by optimising the use of the available space and helping you select equipment which delivers 'maximum play value'.

### Estimated cost breakdown



**1: Playground Design & Equipment** - 50-60%

**2: Site Preparation, & Installation** - 20-30%

**3: Surfacing** - 20-40%\*

\*Based on loose fill surfacing.



## Funding & submission tips

With so many competing budget priorities, new playground equipment doesn't always make it to the top of the list. Download our Funding & Submission Tips for overcoming budget challenges by making the most of grants and community funding opportunities.

## 6 Playground design & equipment

Here's where the fun really begins! Designing a playground that meets your needs based on your space and play priorities.



### Aesthetics

**What look and feel do you want your playground to have?**

There's no one size fits all approach to playgrounds when it comes to aesthetics. Contemporary play equipment offers a wide choice in terms of materials, colours and finishes. You can choose bright, vibrant colours or opt for more natural tones and textures. Your play space can also include colours, elements or themes that reflect your school's ethos or culture or takes its cues from your local culture and environment.



### Equipment & layout

**How will you piece together a fun, development-rich play experience?**

The size of your play space and your play priorities will have the most significant influence on your choice of equipment and the layout of your playground.

Behind the drawcard of irresistible fun, every piece of equipment in your playground should have targeted health and social developmental benefits. The key is selecting a mix of equipment that provides a range of play types and benefits. For example, modular play systems and adventure towers can provide a multitude of play activities in one, compact structure. While individual pieces of equipment laid out like an obstacle course promotes fun and fitness. The addition of seating, tables and shelters can open the door to a multi-purpose play and learning space.

### Budget tight?

You can design a space that allows equipment to be added when funding is available.



### SMART MOVE: Choose quality play equipment

Investing in play equipment that's built to the highest standards of quality, durability and safety extends the life of your playground while minimising the cost of maintenance, repairs and replacement.

## 6 Playground design & equipment (CONTINUED)



### Inclusive and accessible

**Are you passionate about making play more inclusive and accessible for children of different ages and abilities?**

A truly inclusive playground makes interactive, social play more likely by enabling children with and without disabilities, to access and play on equipment together, enriching the play experience and fostering a strong appreciation of diversity. Consider the diverse needs of your students when selecting equipment and surfacing, and explore how the growing range of inclusive equipment, including swings, carousels, climbing structures, and even musical instruments, caters for different physical and sensory needs.



### Safety

**What safety standards and requirements need to be met?**

Your playground should be built in accordance with the safety legislation in your location. Playground safety requirements can typically be found on Education Department websites, and a playground specialist will always be abreast of the relevant safety standards and guidelines.

**Note:** In New Zealand and Australia, appropriate surfacing is mandatory. The options include sand, wood mulch, rubber matting and all have pros and cons relating to maintenance, cost and accessibility.



### Look outside for inspiration!

Check out our case studies on play and fitness spaces Playground Centre has created for schools.

# Playground spaces to consider

## Space-saving bike and scooter parking

- Encourage an environmentally-friendly school commute with bike and scooter storage.
- Compact and secure.

## Spaces to chill and connect

- Provide balance in kids' action-packed days with places to sit, talk and hang out.
- Smart seating solutions in every style, shape and size.
- Configure to invite conversation and interaction.
- Sun savvy shelters.

## Grandstands

- Turn game day atmosphere up a notch with multi-tiered grandstands - portable or fixed.
- Provide practical, convenient amenities like drinking fountains, shelter and extra seating.

## Eating areas

- Build a sense of belonging and connection with spacious, covered areas where students of all ages can share mealtimes and breaks.
- Super-sized shelters for year-round, all-weather protection.

## Outdoor classroom

- Outdoor classrooms offer a fresh approach to teaching.
- Innovative e-classroom technology adapted for outdoor learning.
- Teach environment and sustainability with school gardens.

## Recreation zone

- Table tennis tables and super-sized chess boards are brain and body boosting alternatives to traditional sports.

## Space to play, engage and explore

- Create or upgrade existing play spaces with enticing, exciting and cool school playground equipment for every age, stage and ability.
- Modular play systems that put a premium on play value and development benefits.
- Unique climbing nets and towers – big enough to handle lots of kids at once.
- Make play a full sensory experience with Sand Play and Musical Instruments.

## Fitness zone

- Combine fun and fitness with smart outdoor exercise equipment and circuits.
- Build strength and stamina and get tweens and teens moving.



## 7 Building your playground

Once you have designed your playground and selected your play equipment, decide the best way to prepare your site and install the equipment. It might be an installation team provided by your equipment supplier, or a local contractor. Just ensure you have the right mix of expertise, experience and labour to build your playground to plan, and complete a safety inspection.

Working with a partner like Playground Centre offers you after-sales support, maintenance advice and spare parts (if you need them) – so your students can experience the pure joy and benefits of active play every day, for years to come.



### Your pre-chat checklist

If you're calling in the playground experts, our simple checklist can help focus your first chat. Tick off what applies, talk it over... and watch your playground project take off!



# Discover more, great playground planning & design resources

## Great 8

Your guide to best practice playground design and maintenance.



## All-Inclusive Fun handbook

Your essential guide to inclusive play equipment.



## Outdoor classroom concepts

Clever and affordable outdoor classroom designs.



## Press play on fun

If you're ready to move forward with your playground project, our friendly and experienced team is ready to help.

Our playgrounds and outdoor classrooms support early learning centres and K-12 Schools to brighten children's worlds through play and boost student engagement, development and education outcomes.

