

Playground Risk Assessments & Inspections: Clear Guidance for Schools

★ PLAYGROUND IMAGINEERING

Managing playground safety in schools does not need to be complicated or time-consuming. Good practice focuses on regular visual checks, periodic recorded reviews, and formal inspections at appropriate intervals. This guidance explains what is expected at each stage and provides simple frameworks schools can adopt with confidence.

1. Daily Playground Safety Checks (Visual Checks)

What Are Daily Checks?

Daily playground checks are informal visual inspections carried out before pupils use the play area. They are designed to identify immediate hazards that could cause harm if left unaddressed.

These checks are not full risk assessments and do not require lengthy paperwork.

Who Carries it Out?

- Teachers / Teacher Assistants
- Site Managers / Care Takers

What Should Be Checked Daily?

- Obvious damage to equipment
- Loose or missing fixings
- Sharp edges or splintering timber
- Trip hazards
- Debris, litter or vandalism
- Wet, icy or slippery surfaces
- Any changes since the previous day

Recording Daily Checks – Many schools choose to:

- Carry out checks informally, or
- Use a simple tick-sheet to confirm the area is safe

The key focus is action, not paperwork. Any concerns should be reported immediately and, if necessary, the affected area temporarily restricted.

2. Termly Playground Risk Assessment (Recorded Review)

What Is a Termly Risk Assessment?

A termly playground risk assessment is a more structured review of the playground environment. It looks beyond immediate hazards and considers wear and tear, developing risks, and whether existing control measures remain effective.

Who Carries it Out?

- Site Manager
- School Business Manager
- Designated health & safety lead
- Senior leadership team member

What Should Be Reviewed Termly?

- Condition of play equipment
- Surfacing wear and fall zones
- Stability of structures
- Signs of rot, corrosion or movement
- Accessibility and inclusion considerations
- Supervision arrangements
- Review of any incidents or near misses

Recording Termly Assessments

Termly assessments should be documented and linked to the school's main playground risk assessment. Actions should be noted, prioritised and reviewed.

This review helps schools plan maintenance, budget effectively and demonstrate proactive safety management.

3. Annual Playground Risk Assessment (Formal Review)

What Is an Annual Risk Assessment?

The annual playground risk assessment is a formal, documented review of risks and benefits associated with playground use. It considers how children use the space and how risk can be managed without removing valuable play opportunities.

When Should It Be Reviewed?

- Annually
- After installing new equipment
- Following significant repairs or alterations
- After an accident or near miss
- If pupil needs or usage patterns change

What Does It Include?

- Identification of hazards
- Assessment of risk vs benefit
- Existing control measures
- Additional actions if required
- Review date and responsible person

This assessment supports positive risk-taking and recognises that challenge is an essential part of play.

4. Annual Professional Playground Inspection

What Is a Professional Inspection?

A professional playground inspection is carried out by a qualified playground inspector with specialist knowledge of standards, materials and installation requirements.

Why Is It Important?

Professional inspections:

- Identify technical or structural issues
- Assess compliance with relevant standards
- Support insurance and liability requirements
- Provide independent reassurance for schools

How Often Is It Needed?

- Annually, as best practice

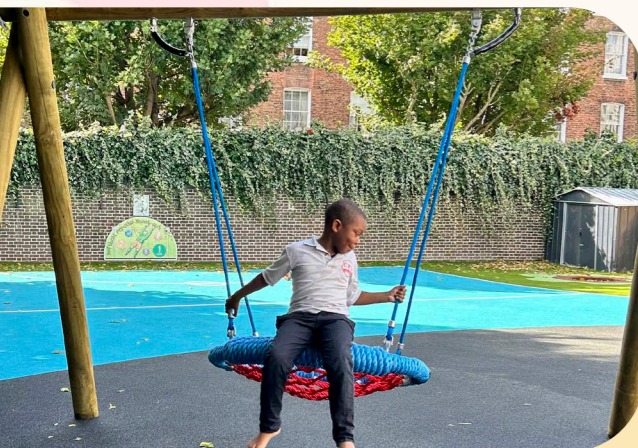
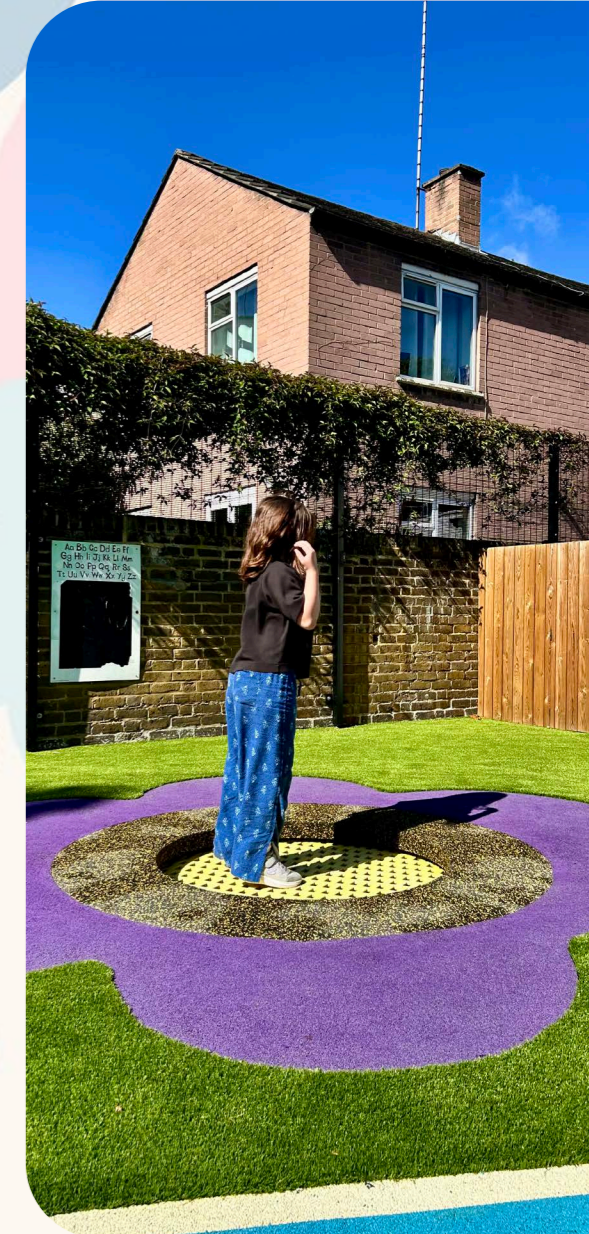
The inspector will provide a written report highlighting:

- Any urgent issues
- Medium- and long-term maintenance needs
- Recommendations for repair or replacement

After a Professional Playground Inspection: What Schools Are Expected to Do

Following a professional playground inspection, schools should review the inspection report and consider the actions recommended.

While schools are not legally required to complete every recommendation immediately, they are expected to demonstrate that they have taken the findings seriously and are managing risk appropriately.



Key Reassurance for Schools:

Schools are not expected to complete daily written risk assessments for playgrounds. A sensible approach combining daily visual checks, termly recorded reviews, annual risk assessment updates and professional inspections is widely recognised as good practice. This layered approach supports safety while allowing children to enjoy challenging, engaging and meaningful play.

Summary at a Glance:

- **Daily:** Visual safety checks (informal)
- **Termly:** Recorded playground condition review
- **Annually:** Formal risk assessment review
- **Annually:** Professional playground inspection

This guidance can be used alongside your school's existing health and safety procedures and adapted to suit your setting.