**Fixed Play Equipment in Schools - Understanding British/European Standards**

Most permanent fixed play equipment is installed in unsupervised public environments for use by children who are free to come and go as they please. Play equipment is designed to be challenging in various degrees for its specific target age and provide an element of managed risk to the child. There should be no “hidden” risks associated with the equipment itself which are unforeseen to the child. These include areas of entrapment, toggle traps, obstructions to movement, stability of equipment and sturdiness of materials.

All risks associated with playing on fixed equipment should be obvious to the child – things like height off the ground, speed of movement, balance requirements etc. and the British/European Standard designs out unforeseen risks, leaving the child to make judgements of risk based on their own abilities and not on the adequacy of the equipment.

There are currently two British/European Standards applicable to Children’s Fixed Play Equipment:

BS EN1176 - 2020 Playground Equipment and Surfacing

BS EN1177 - 2018 Impact Attenuating Playground Surfacing – Determination of critical fall height.

What about BS EN71? This is the former “British Toy and Hobby Standard” and is only for items to be installed and used wholly within a **DOMESTIC** garden environment. It should **not** be accepted in areas where public liability insurance is required. This standard assumes a high level of parental responsibility, a lower volume of usage and wear - and material requirements which are generally not as robust as under BS EN1176. Unfortunately, some manufacturers try to sell items which only meet BS EN71 direct to schools.

BS EN1176 is not law. However, it is accepted by the Courts as being the model for best practice and failure to follow the standard makes defending litigious claims very difficult.

An item of proprietary fixed play equipment supplied by a reputable manufacturer is required to carry details of its compliance with BS EN1176. This confirms that all aspects of the standard have been complied with and that the item poses no inherent risk to the user, other than those intended as part of the play experience and which the user is able to assess for themselves against their own abilities.

It is important that the equipment should not be altered, modified or interfered with in any way which might result in a “hidden” risk being introduced. It is also important to remember that a piece of equipment is designed for a specific age group and will be of dimensions and construction appropriate to that age group. As a general rule of thumb, if a child cannot use an item unaided, then the child should not be using the piece of equipment (with the obvious exception of a very young child who needs to be lifted into a swing cradle seat and similar instances).

It is vital that all staff supervising or involved in sessions which include items of fixed play equipment, whether on site or in the local park, are aware of and understand why Standards are in place. They are there to protect the child using the equipment and not there to dumb down, or make the equipment unimaginatively “safe”. All play equipment has the appropriate level of managed risk designed into it, in a way which can be determined and assessed by the child using it.

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