

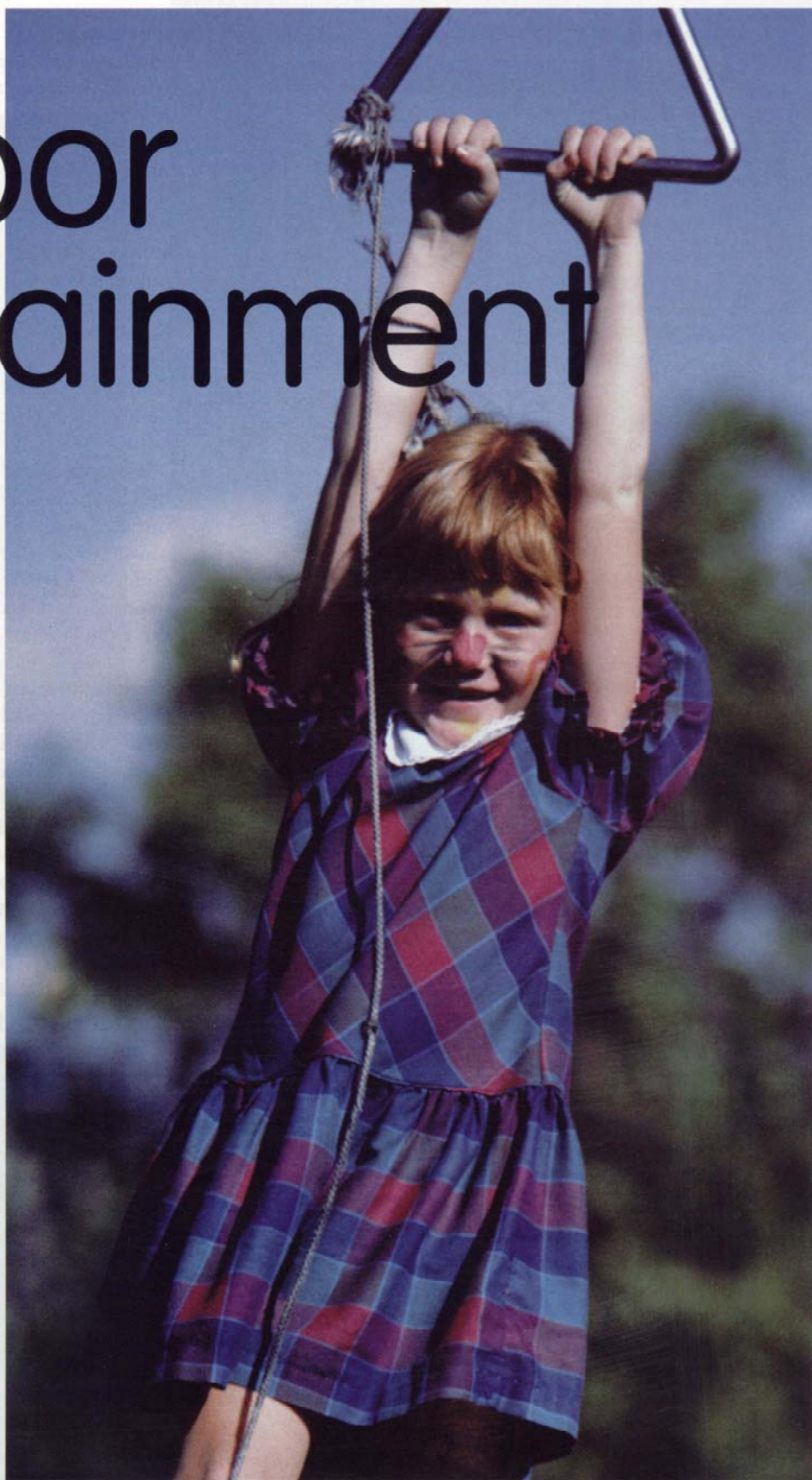
# Outdoor entertainment

If you think it could be time to give your school playground a facelift, Rachel Newcombe provides some inspiration and ideas

Children spend a large amount of their school life in the playground, and the environment they're in can make all the difference. Empty, drab and dreary playgrounds with little to do can create boredom, which in turn can lead to bullying. Yet, with a little imagination playgrounds can be turned into fun, stimulating and enjoyable places – and it's something PTAs can be fully involved with!

'The role of the school playground is an increasingly important one,' explains Anna Boni, Principal Psychologist at Edinburgh's Education Department. 'Gone are the days when it was seen merely as an area of fun and relaxation for our children. Now we recognise it also as a place where pupils develop social skills, make friends, resolve conflicts and improve their co-ordination skills.'

The good news is that there are lots of great products available that help make changes much easier – so it doesn't have to be all hard labour, sweat and toil! Items such as themed seating, climbing frames, giant games, novelty litter bins and canopies can help provide instant changes, and the main area can be >

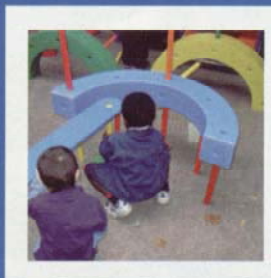


# School playgrounds

## Making a difference

Lisa Johnson, St Mary Redcliffe School PTA, Bristol, shares her experience: 'We transformed our multi-levelled tarmac playground into a stimulating place to play and learn. The children have been involved throughout, which is very important to us. In the course of a year, the grounds were painted, the pond area and garden were refurbished, we've had safety surfacing put down and 12 pieces of play equipment installed.

'Some projects are ongoing – we're still working on a quiet area and we've started developing a magic garden on the big bank behind the school hall, where we're going to have



structures and wind sculptures designed and built by the children. Our top tips for other PTAs would be to:

- make sure equipment complies with the relevant safety legislation
- use whatever skilled people you come across
- investigate local services, such as free labour from people on Community Service.'



**i** > split into activity zones to provide maximum space and cater for all tastes. Benches can be deemed as friendship areas, to help pupils make friends and resolve disputes.

Giant games and tables with boards painted on the surface, such as draughts or chess, provide mental stimulation, and adventure playgrounds can help with the development of co-ordination and physical abilities. Nature areas and sensory gardens are also popular, and according to the organisation Plants for People, may even help to improve a child's behaviour and performance at school. Vegetable gardens can be productive and, as the Tynings School in Bristol says, can even be used to demonstrate composting – it is using children's food leftovers to help with this!

Environmental aspects are also deemed important by Greystone's Primary School in Sheffield. It has installed a swish solar-powered fountain and an unusual wind-powered creature feature made by the children, featuring a spider and ladybird. They're fixed up on the wall and when the wind blows in the right direction seven lights on the ladybird flash.

As well as creating a better outdoor area, the playground itself can be expanded to involve lesson time. For example, simple log seating arranged in a circle can become a story-telling area, and a wildlife garden can aid nature knowledge. It can also be a focal point for school clubs and events.

The idea of making changes may seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be rushed. Before you start, make a time plan and break your ideas into smaller segments, allowing for completion in easy-to-handle stages. 'Children should have a sense of ownership

## Playground ideas

- Novelty bins
- Themed seating
- Gazebos and canopies
- Play equipment
- Giant games
- Story-telling circle
- Painted games
- Wildlife area
- Quiet area
- Sensory garden
- Mazes
- Willow structures
- Decorated banners or murals
- Trees and planters



PlayQuest

# School playgrounds

What to ask

Primary schools

## Useful contacts



- Sovereign Design Systems – trendy canopies for shade or covered play areas. Tel: 01702 291129
- Glasdon Manufacturing Limited – novelty bins, seating, sunshade shelters. Tel: 01253



Lappset

- 891131 [www.glasdon-manufacturing.co.uk](http://www.glasdon-manufacturing.co.uk)
- SMP Playgrounds Limited – arena meeting point seating, stepping stones, furniture. Tel: 01784 489100 [www.smp.co.uk](http://www.smp.co.uk)
- Playforce – timber trails, imaginative play equipment, play towers. Also offers design and installation service. [www.playforce.co.uk](http://www.playforce.co.uk)
- Playquest – fun trails, activity centres, agility equipment. Tel: 01745 561117 [www.playquest.co.uk](http://www.playquest.co.uk)
- Lappset – play equipment, themed play structures (slides, towers, walkways, nets etc), benches. Tel: 01536 412612 [www.lappset.co.uk](http://www.lappset.co.uk)
- Schoolscapes – game-board picnic tables, play vehicles, playground graphics and human sundials, pergolas and gazebos, adventure play trails, swings, sandpits and giant games (eg noughts and crosses). Also offers a design service. Tel: 01208 816620 [www.schoolscapes.co.uk](http://www.schoolscapes.co.uk)

over their playgrounds,' says Anna Boni, so it's important to remember to collect their ideas and get them involved.

As Gary Burn, Head of National Programmes at Learning through Landscapes, says, 'Involving the children, and harnessing their enthusiasm will really drive your project on, and will also help to get more parents on board. As a result the children learn to create and look after something valuable; their self-esteem grows and their behaviour improves, along with their potential to learn and achieve.'

Safety standards are important, too. Equipment manufacturer, Playforces, says, 'The British and European Standard for playground equipment and safer surfacing is BS EN 1176-7,' but if you're in any doubt, contact your local Health and Safety department. Fundraising events can help fund changes, but it's also worth exploring funding options, such as the Learning Together Award Scheme that NCPTA is involved with.

With careful planning and creativity, tired and drab playgrounds can become stimulating environments offering exciting play and educational opportunities. ●



## More information



Thanks to a partnership between NCPTA and the national school grounds charity Learning through Landscapes, help is at hand for PTAs wishing to improve their school grounds. The Learning Together programme provides NCPTA member PTAs with a range of benefits including a comprehensive information pack with ideas on how to get started, access to regional training and the opportunity to enter the termly Learning Together Awards, with a top prize of £1,000. Application forms for the awards are available from the NCPTA office (01732 748850) or [www.ncpta.org.uk](http://www.ncpta.org.uk) More information on the benefits of Learning Together from 01962 846258 or [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)