

Inspiring
Scotland



Grounds for Learning

11-18 Secondary School Play

Inspiration and ideas

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The **11-18 Play in Secondary Schools** project is funded by Inspiring Scotland through the Go2Play fund and prepared by Matt Robinson, Outdoor Learning and Development Officer at Grounds for Learning (GfL).

This report comprises of three elements:

- 11-18 Play In Secondary Schools – **The value of play in schools**
- 11-18 Play In Secondary Schools – **Views and voices from Scottish schools**
- 11-18 Play In Secondary Schools – **Inspiration and ideas**

Enquiries, feedback and comments should be made to Grounds for Learning at gfl@ltl.org.uk or www.ltl.org.uk/scotland.

Foreword

It has been enlightening and inspiring to work on this document. There is great variety and creativity in play provision for adolescents. Whilst many examples are schools, and we are pleased to find examples within Scotland and the UK, we have also looked to our play work colleagues around the world.

What we have not done is include all the ideas and opportunities we found – there just would not be enough space for this. We have not had time to examine play for adolescents in the woods of Wisconsin, restorative pop up play in Japan, construction / art play in Lesotho and parkour meets in cities worldwide.

We had to examine our expectations and attitudes towards what play that 11-18 year olds engage with. Relating activities and behaviours to Bob Hughes' taxonomy of play types was very helpful in this.

We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

George Bernard Shaw

What is clear is that teenagers the world over engage with play, when afforded the slightest opportunity and spaces to do so. While play should be driven by freedom of choice and the sheer joy of partaking, we should not underestimate the benefits to our children.

This is 'play' as the great philosophers understood it: the experience of being an active, creative and fully autonomous person.

Pat Kane

These ideas are deserving of further examination, and experimentation, in the Scottish school break context.

Villiers High School in Southall, London

This school had 1300 pupils, and a shortage of outside space. Violence and poor behaviour was a result of the poor outside space. Clara Gaggero a graduate of the Royal College of Art was brought in to work with pupils and staff, instead of the typical playground equipment supply companies that were suggesting costly and traditional equipment.

Clara worked with a small group of pupils, engaging them in consultation, but also in design and ownership. The design is simple breaking up the large open areas, encouraging smaller groups of pupils to have their 'own' discreet area, while not creating hidden spaces. The materials used are robust, with bright colour being introduced in a variety of ways. The 'boxes' offer open ended use - from seating to climbing.

The playground has achieved its main aim of reducing playground violence, but increasing provision for bins and having feelings of 'ownership' of an area or block has also meant that the playground is more looked after. Part of this ownership has been graffiti, which has been recognised as part and parcel of teenage ownership of space. It is also noted that many pupils are more active, clambering up, over, round and through the blocks. Teachers are reporting pupils are more engaged in lessons, after a break time, and many of the pupils engaged with the design process have raised their aspirations.

Another effect of this project was raising aspirations of the core group of pupils involved in consultation and design, who learned many real world skills through the programme.

Images courtesy of Clara Gaggero - www.claragaggero.com



Kyle Academy, Ayr

In 2013, pupils and staff from Kyle Academy proposed a set of cycle trails on the school site. This was hand in hand with a cycle project, supported by local police, in the school as a way of engaging young people in positive behaviour, developing healthy lifestyles and generating environmental benefit. The area around the school and community had a problem with out of school hours anti-social behaviour, and it was also felt that the trails would help with encouraging positive behaviours.

A community and school wide consultation was undertaken, with a number of community concerns being voiced, mainly about loss of dog walking space and use of the trails attracting more youth to the area at night.

The school contracted an external company to design and oversee the build of the trails, with a £45,000 grant from the Carbon Challenge Fund.

The pupils have been surveyed as to their views on the project:

"Being on the trails and cycling downhill makes me feel free!"

"There is choice between the pump track and the trails, it's a huge outdoor gym!"

"Awesome! Makes the community grounds brilliant!"

HMIE recently inspected the school, and positive comment was made on the efforts to engage community and the young people's efforts to make the project a success.

The trails are not currently used at break or lunch, however improvements in pupils pride of the grounds and the use of the trails as motivation has proved successful. The pupils have been excited and engaged with the landscape changes, and teachers are now leading more out of school cycle clubs and activities.

Teachers have used the opportunities presented, to lead tree planting classes, and for some pupils to gain employability awards through joining in with the main contractor on the construction phase.

Outside of school hours, the police report an improvement in disruptive behaviour, and notably the school comment on building better community relationships as part of the work to get the trails built.

Photos: school's own



Quintin Kynaston School, London

Quintin Kynaston is a school where parkour (“freerunning”) has been incorporated into the curriculum, and the play experience of the school.

[take from Learning Through Landscapes ‘Groundnotes’ 2006]

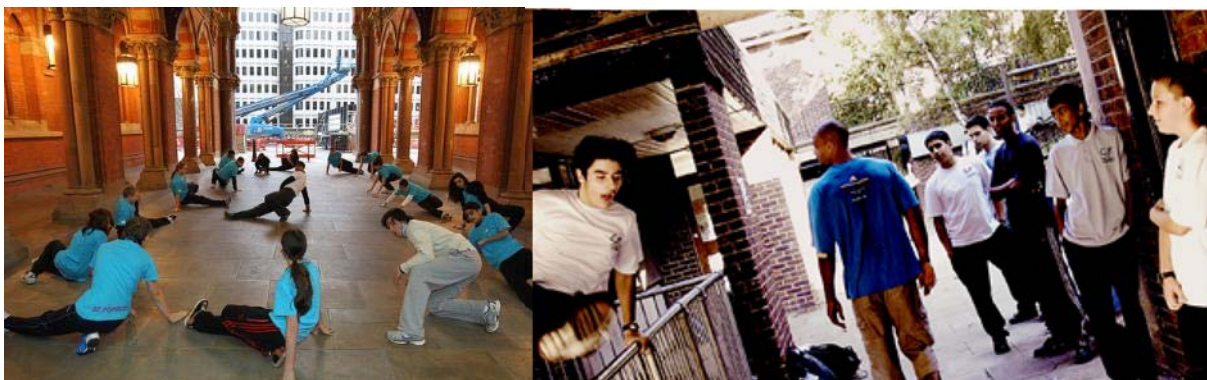
The activity has been introduced as part of the PE curriculum, in a borough wide initiative. Coaches from ‘Parkour Generation’, a local not for profit organisation, worked alongside the PE and school staff. The initial agreement was that the children would not perform the parkour moves outside of coached lessons. However, this has now been rescinded for certain parts of the outdoor space, that are now deemed as suitable.

The head of PE at QK suggests that the activity engages pupils who do not take part in traditional sports. Many of the participants are members of the school community with behavioural problems, or are classified as at risk.

The parkour is proving very successful in getting them interested in school again, and reducing the likelihood of them getting into trouble. This is reflected by the Metropolitan Police, who discovered that sports clubs reduced youth crime by 39% and when parkour was added to the sports on offer, the rate fell by 69%.

The insight from a 13 year old student sums up much of the advantages the school has seen:

Everyone thought I couldn’t do anything. I wasn’t very good...at any of that school stuff, and I didn’t really believe I would be good at anything. But parkour changed that, because it tested my body’s ability to do things. I have much more confidence and have learned a lot about discipline. I can concentrate more in class now, and believe in myself a bit.



McLaren High School, Callander

The grounds at McLaren were included in a major refurbishment and build project. The re-design focussed on improving the quality of the remaining spaces by providing a variety of attractive social spaces, natural areas and a growing area. An important feature is the asphalt and natural surfaces linking together in an attractive matrix.

Another significant feature is the varied topography, incorporating mounds, a natural grass amphitheatre (utilising spare topsoil from the build) and rough meadow ground. The significant amphitheatre provides much social space, and to visit during break is to observe pupils tearing up and rolling, sliding and running down the hill. To date no significant injuries have been reported.

There was significant effort into providing social seating, in a variety of ways from benches and timber tops to retaining walls, to provision of large boulders and the terraces of the amphitheatre. Much of the seating has been placed under trees, entrances and areas of overhang to provide shelter from wind, rain and sun.

Has it been successful?

To visit McLaren at a break time shows how the pupils use the space – there are many varied spaces and locations that can be used. Some pupils can sit in shelter under a tree, or run in between the smaller mounds formed. There have been a few incidents on the larger hill, but some male and female pupils cover significant distances on foot as they traverse the larger hill, a clear example of moderate physical exercise by choice. There is still a shortage of sheltered seating, and ongoing maintenance has to be considered.

There is a more detailed case study available at goo.gl/XYfN6k



Cowley Teenage Space, London

A key part of this project was the way the designers Snug & Outdoor engaged with the teenagers. The designers and local residents supplied moveable, temporary items and structures, allowing the children to engage with the space in a full size, 3 dimensional and interactive way. The space was allowed for experimentation of layout and features.

The materials used are robust, mainly concrete and steel. The space has no primary colours, as these are often associated with younger childrens playgrounds. The space can be used on foot, bike or skate board, does feature some nooks and crannies and has been added to in recent years with the addition of a structure for 'free running'. There are also 'inactivity' zones alongside the pitches and activity areas that are sheltered and offer varied seating.

Very simple in design and construction, the spaces allow young people to use their imagination and find their own way of using the space. The 'inside/outside' space is designed for different use by the age groups, with younger children expected to climb on and jump off whereas older teens could use the same structure as seating for social purposes.

The teenagers who use the space value it highly, and in combination with local community (who overlook the space) and estate management board, there has been a significant reduction in vandalism and graffiti. In being overlooked, young people who use the space report feeling safe, and demonstrate positive behaviours. With a mix of space, that is not all football and wheel park, the space is also popular with girls. This space demonstrates the possibilities of what is a small area, with simple and open ended resources, as a way of engaging a wide variety of ages and both sexes in an outdoor space, at reasonable cost.

There is a further CABI study on the space at goo.gl/DyqFL8

Images courtesy of Tim Gill and Snug & Outdoor



Northfield Academy, Aberdeen

Mandy Tulloch of Mudpies adventures led a pilot project through Grounds for Learning at this Aberdeen school, using 'loose materials' play. This form of play uses simple materials to create an open ended play and learning opportunity. In this scheme the S1 and S3 pupils were invited to be involved as 'play leaders' in the feeder primary schools to Northfield Academy and loose materials were an expected part of this play at the primary schools. A day's training and play was then organised with the Northfield staff and pupils, to ensure their understanding of the methods and opportunities.

Despite misgivings about teenagers not wanting to 'play', the pupils were very keen and engaged in the process. A series of progressive activities had been planned, and getting 'hands on' with Lego and stones proved a great start to the day. By the time the activity moved outside, the pupils were very excited. Dens were built and challenges completed with a lot of co-operation in each team.

The last activity was to get the Academy pupils to plan and risk assess their own activities, suitable for the feeder primary 7's to take part in. This allowed pupils creativity to shine, as well as the responsibility that pupils are capable of.

Although only a short project, it shows the potential for alternative approaches to play in secondary schools, including loose materials play.

A more detailed report can be found in May 2012 'Profiles' from Learning Through Landscapes - goo.gl/7yVzQl

South Camden Community School, London

The 'Quad' was a large underused area at the centre of the South Camden Community School. Students said it 'looked like it had been designed for old people'. Large areas of grass were 'out of bounds'. Access was through a dark narrow corridor that could be intimidating. A week-long 'experimental playground project' transformed the whole space into a social, playful, interactive environment with the use of large-scale platforms, picnic blankets, cafe tables and chairs.

From this everyone (students, staff, designers, landscape architect) were able to experience and imagine how the space could be different. This led to the new and sociable design: the dark corridor was transformed into a bright and playful kaleidoscopic entrance using mirrors; new seating and topography created different levels and areas for students to sit, play and hang out on.

Students shadowed the work of the main contractor, who was primarily responsible for the hard landscaping, and simultaneously ran their own contract to plan and implement the soft landscaping. Students engaged with a range of professions and trades such as surveying, engineering, planning and design, landscape architecture, horticulture and building trades including bricklaying and carpentry.

The planting was carried out by students, following health and safety training to ensure correct use of tools and safe lifting techniques. They also installed an irrigation system. As a finishing touch, they visited a stone merchant to select eight geological specimens to create a learning resource in the quad.

Was it successful?

As well as enhancing the quality of the central quad, a previously uninspiring space, this great project raised pupils' awareness of the construction industry as a potential employer. The Quad is now the social hub of the school, a real transformation.

The school exploited the practical nature of the project to develop and accredit the development of soft skills, such as teamwork and problem solving, as well as IT and numeracy. Throughout the project pupils reflected on their learning using evidence sheets based on the needs of the ASDAN award scheme.

A key outcome has been the pupils' ownership of the space. Having invested time and effort, the pupils are justifiably proud of the space they created. This has translated into lower levels of vandalism, litter and negative behaviour in the space.

The positive benefit of this project for the young people involved was the feeling of ownership, of doing something real, on a large scale and lasting.

Head teacher

The project was led by Snug & Outdoor, who designed the Experimental Play process as well as designers of the space - snugandoutdoor.co.uk



Norsk Oljemuseum, Stavanger

The park was part of the official programme for the celebration of Stavanger as European Capital of Culture in 2008 and designed by Architect Company Helen & Hard AS and Norwegian Petroleum Museum in collaboration with local youth. They created a recreation park for the region's children, with a focus for teen activities. The project is co-funded between local authority and commercial partners, with equipment and manpower also being donated.

This park is a different approach to open ended play provision, incorporating a sense of 'place' through the use of re-purposed oil industry components, and being based on the geography of the Troll oil field. There was a lot of 3D modelling and 1:1 experiments, with young people involved, before the design was finalised.

This public access play area allows for many nooks and crannies. It encourages much physical play, with opportunity for climbing on objects that have not been 'designed' for such access.

The play area had also been designed with a lot of opportunity for judging and choosing risk – some of the potential fall heights are quite large, and it does not feature masses of 'safety' surfaces or standardised, low-risk shapes and structures.

The space is used by a wide variety of children and young people, and is particularly popular with unsupervised teens. The space is open and overlooked, leading to a sense of safety, however, the nooks and crannies are popular within the open nature of the site, to hide away from others eyes, or inclement weather.

The older children use the space as social meeting, as well as physical activities such as skateboarding and parkour. Viewing videos made by the teens shows that the spaces within the park have been creatively used in ways that the designers probably did not foresee or plan for.

The graffiti is noticeable, and yet is seen as 'ownership' and place making by many in the community, and reduces graffiti elsewhere. The significant risks that some of the young people choose to work with has not produced a significant or concerning number of accidents.

There has been some positive engagement of the oil industry with the project, providing civic good and a way of some of the oil industry meeting it's CSR aims.

Images used with permission from Norsk Oljemuseum and Visit Norway. You can find two video's of the designers speaking about the park at goo.gl/48qhx5



The Factoria Joven, Merida

These are a number of 'Factoria Joven' (Teen Factory) projects in Spain. They have a vision to attract "restless youth off the streets, and provide them with a place to skateboard, hip-hop dance, climb rocks, create graffiti — whatever they would otherwise do in much more sinister surroundings". These are places where young people can socialise, engage, play, become active and creative in a safe and positive environment.

Informal learning and free play are seen to be inseparable, and the focus is on outdoor sports facilities and creativity. Central to how the spaces operate is freedom of choice and autonomy. Alongside the free use of the space, is a programme of training courses, competitions, lectures, films and workshops that support this culture.

The Merida Factoria Joven is probably best known (architecturally), and was designed in 2006 by an ex-PE teacher who studied the humanisation of urban spaces, and worked with local young people during the design process. The building took 13 months to complete, and houses internal space including computer lab, performance spaces and graffiti walls. Recycled and cost effective materials abound, with the emphasis on practicality and durability.

The Plasencia Factoria Joven has very similar facilities, however this was constructed in a different manner. Still the emphasis is on multi use spaces, mainly outside, on the opportunity for children to enjoy social activities, creative arts and sports. As an example of the varied activities, the centre hosts a snowboarding competition using the skate park – importing 80 tonnes of snow and ice to facilitate this.

Images from Institute of Youth Extremadura, www.juventudextremadura.gobex.es



Narre Warren Secondary College, Melbourne

Narre Warren is a suburb of Melbourne, Australia. The school caters from 5 to 18 year olds, across 'Prep', Primary and Secondary tiers. The school has 1800+ pupils and 180 staff.

The school approached Richard Bellamo of RB Landscapes to design a 'passive play' area, that encouraged calm and relaxation, and to be used as an outdoor learning area (that many Australian schools have). Richard engaged with school, supplying resources that allowed the classes to think about how they would like their outside space to look and how they would like to use it. This consultation was a two month process.

Richard used the 'colours and textures of Australia' to lend a sense of place, and to create increased opportunity for learning. The community around the school found it interesting that reclaimed tree stumps and corten steel (which weathers to a stable but rusty appearance) were being used.

In between these features, Richard worked with the students to plant many trees and shrubs and maintain them. This has led to increased care and appreciation of the space. Since building, the space has matured, providing interest, shelter and shade. Richard maintains that pupils become engrossed in the nature, offering respite from the business of the day, and of learning about many aspects of sustainability such as recycling, eco-systems and water management.

The only issue in developing the spaces was a lack of budget, however subsequent schools that Richard has worked with have managed to increase their budgets in light of this.



Strathearn Campus, Crieff

The Strathearn Campus is a stunning new PPP building, based within a council owned estate, and is home to Crieff High School. Unlike many schools, pupil access by foot and bus is not through the car park, with two attractive and thought through entrances (one direct to dining hall, one directly past cycle racks). Immediately outside the school fence is a skate / BMX park, which is owned by Perth and Kinross council and maintained as a public facility.

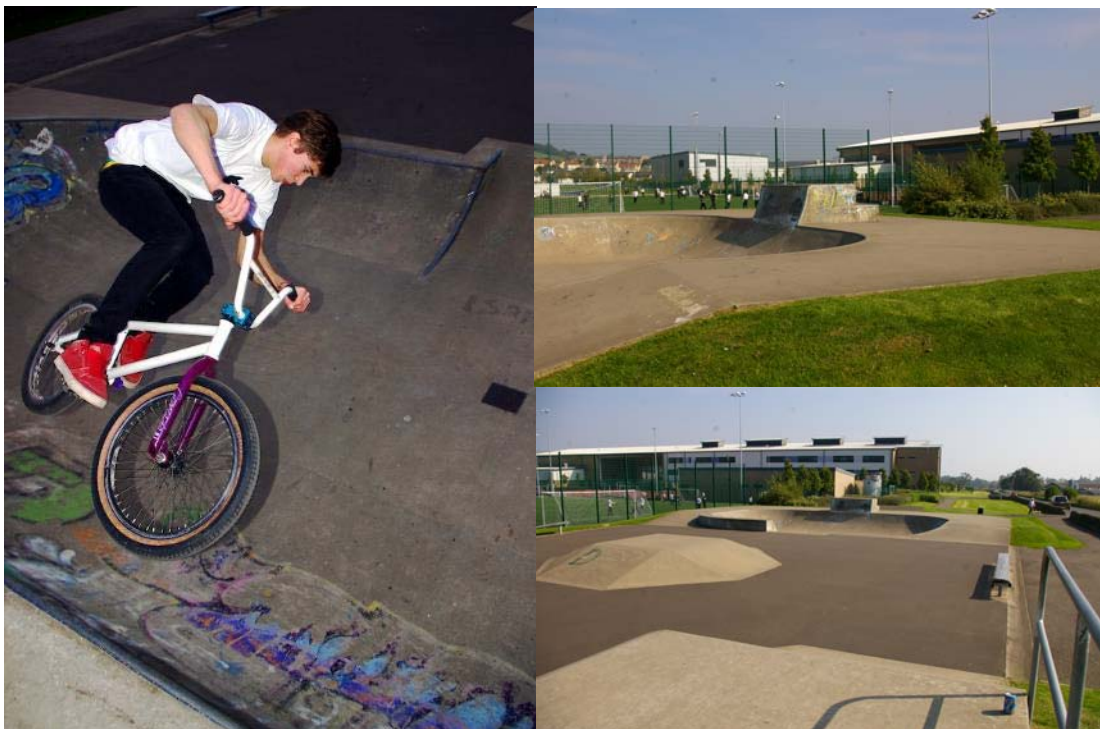
The school has used the skate/BMX facility as part of cycle training days, based within the Health and Wellbeing and PE curriculum. External cycle trainers were brought in, and sessions run with all ages through the school.

Conveniently, the location of the park allows pupils access at lunchtime, as they are allowed 'off site' through parental consent. The site is used almost continually at lunchtime, and the bike sheds show a good number of suitable bikes and scooters waiting for use.

Staff and pupils are incredibly positive of the site that engages a number of pupils in physical activity on a regular basis. The facility is popular with some of the pupils who find engaging with school and a 'regular' playground challenging. This potentially assists with reducing playground incidents, and in motivating many pupils.

Open since 2012, there have not been any significant issues with pupils undertaking an activity of apparent risks in the two years since. First aid and incident records reflect that taking part in football and rugby are more hazardous activities, both at break and supervised. Inappropriate graffiti has been an issue, but the council works hard to remove this when possible.

Images by Matt Robinson (GfL) and Callum Sandilands



Kvernhuset ungdomsskole, Norway

Kvernhuset middle school is in southern Norway, part of the Frederikstadt municipality. It caters for 13-16 year olds, across three year groups. The school building has been somewhat controversial, costing significantly more than the budget and beset with maintenance issues. Externally however, the school playground has proved a real 'hit' with the pupils and local community.

Taking its lead from the schools location in the forest, the playground seems to be part of the natural surroundings, and sports pitches aside, real effort has been made to allow nature to spread back into the school site. The building itself, and many features of the playground, are also intended to support learning and offer opportunity for lessons. These are as simple as compass points painted on the floor or planted areas of roof that are accessible.

The entrance for the school immediately sets an agenda – the car park is situated away from walking and bus access. The main school entrance is on a raised boardwalk between scrubland with seating. The building separates three courtyards, sheltered by trees and planting, and with a mix of terrain from flat tarmac to large boulders and wooden walkways. These cosy yards are added to by a larger playground wrapping the building, with under-building spaces for seating and the ability to get fresh air, even in bad weather. The combination of smaller yards and tree/shrubs growing around creates independent spaces and locations that are still public and allow free flow around the building.

The wider school grounds can only be described as forest, with paths, clearings and some walkways between. The various sports pitches are lined with trees providing more natural shelter. As nature colonises next to the building, grass cutting (there is minimal grass) or similar regular maintenance we would see in the UK, is replaced with trimming back of small trees that encroach the building or yards a couple of times a year.

Feedback from the pupils is of great appreciation of nature, and of it being a restful place to be. The varied textures and natural materials are used as the pupils choose – one day a table, the next a climbing boulder for example. It is clear from the school site that pupils and staff utilise the outdoor space and forest location for much learning, and appreciate the unique nature of the school.

Images courtesy of Ken-Arild Kristiansen.



Rødovre Adventure Playground, Denmark

Rødovre 'Construction Playground' is in Copenhagen, and is one of the better known 'Adventure Playgrounds' in Europe, and has been case studied a number of times. The playground hosts many events including summer concerts put on by the young people, youth training, as well as the play elements. The site also contains many animals, which the children care for as well.

A young person joining the playground today is given a plot of land, and they can choose to help out with caring for an animal such as a rabbit as well. Adults offer the raw materials needed and tools, as well as support if the children require. Nails, wood and paint are valuable materials on this site, tools are loaned in an orderly manner to individual children who are responsible for their return.

Hutches, sheds, houses (on stilts or not) are all built through the course of a year, by the young people, through free choice. Go carts ("soapies" in Scotland) and other items are also emerging from the creativity, skill and work of the young people. These creative projects litter the site. As with many adventure playgrounds, the site can look chaotic and messy in many ways to our adult eye. The children actively engage with hazards, working with each other through learned experience how to manage the risks.

This example is not alone, with 'construction' being a running theme in the adventure playground movement, from Denmark and Germany to Australia, the US and the UK. As an example of what young people will engage with as 'play', it opens the mind to the learning possibilities, as well as free play.

Images courtesy of Daniel Bigler, [flickr.com/thisisdaniel](https://www.flickr.com/photos/thisisdaniel/)

