

PLAY. MOVE. LEARN.

RETHINKING SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS



RICHTER SPIELGERÄTE GMBH

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Please note: Not all of the playgrounds shown are located in schoolyards, but all are well suited for this purpose. Some photos were taken in public playgrounds or other educational facilities with similar requirements in terms of space, safety and educational quality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD – SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS IN MOTION	4
FROM DRAB ASPHALT TO A PLAYGROUND OF DELIGHT	5
MOVEMENT & CHALLENGE	6
Balancing	8
Activities at ground level	9
Versatile structures	10
Up & down	11
Swinging into break time	12
Where dizziness is fun	13
Strength meets coordination	14
Teamwork – full speed ahead	15
Adventure at height	16
Rope course	17
PLAYING TOGETHER & SHARING EXPERIENCES	18
Encounters while swinging	20
Moving together	21
Play for many at the same time	22
High up on the net pyramid	23
Venture to the heights	24
Climbing area & meeting point	25
Appealing to the senses	26
Where encounters become visible	27
RETREAT & RECREATION QUIET PLACES IN THE LIVELY SCHOOLYARD	28
Relax	30
Meeting point & recreation	31
Seating options	32
Modular wall – play, protect, design	33
THE BASICS OF SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS	34

FOREWORD – SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS IN MOTION

Today, school is more than just a place for imparting knowledge. Children and young people are increasingly staying at school until late afternoon. This makes school a place where they spend a large part of their lives. And such a place should be enjoyable and lovable, especially for our younger children.

From a physiological development perspective, it is normal for a child to be active. And scientists agree that more exercise at school could increase learning success, improve children's mood, promote their health, and encourage considerate interaction with one another. So why are there still so many school playgrounds that are almost unsurpassed in their dreariness, where children only spend time out of obligation or routine?

More and more teachers are complaining about increasingly aggressive behaviour among pupils. They say that children are fidgety and unable to concentrate. This is hardly surprising, as many of them simply lack exercise. In inner-city areas in particular, there is often a lack of opportunities. A suitably designed school playground could be very helpful in this regard. Allowing public use after school hours would also be a good way of offering children something exciting and challenging, providing equipment that not only gives them a chance to blow off their steam, but also to practise dexterity and balance as well as communicating with each other. They would have a place where they can dare to do things they might not have thought themselves capable of doing, a place where playful competitive situations can be incorporated into lessons. All of the above and much more should be the wishes and goals of a changed and sustainable school playground design. Teachers, parents and the relevant authorities must be taken on board. This requires patience and persuasion – but the effort is worth it.

In an increasingly digital world, it is more important than ever to provide children with spaces for exercise, interaction and independent play. Screen time and digital media have become part of everyday life – which makes it all the more important to have lively places that enable physical activity, social interaction and creative experiences.

Physical activity not only promotes physical health, but also concentration, self-confidence and emotional stability. So why not transform school playgrounds into real learning and living spaces? A place where children can enjoy being active, discover things together and grow through play – that is our vision for contemporary school playground design.

We not only offer a wide range of equipment for different age groups, but also assist with planning aspects such as planting, integrating existing trees, or shaping hills and slopes. Moreover, we can assist you in convincing stakeholders by organising joint visits to reference projects or presentations. Children are our priority – and therefore the school environment, where they spend so much of their time, deserves special attention. Our vision: that children will choose to return to their place of learning in their free time – after school, in the afternoons, and on weekends – because playing here is so enjoyable and a once-dull asphalt square has transformed into a place they long to be.

BREAK TIME IS PERHAPS
THE MOST UNDERRATED
SPACE FOR LEARNING
AND DEVELOPMENT.

Hermann Städtler



FROM DRAB ASPHALT TO A PLAYGROUND OF DELIGHT

For a school playground to truly become a vibrant living space, it needs thoughtful design and playground equipment that meets the needs of children of all ages. From our many years of experience, we know that it's not just about exercise, but also about challenges, social encounters, places to retreat to and sensory experiences.

A well-planned playground creates spaces where children can try things out, play with each other, relax or simply be themselves. A variety of play opportunities promote motor skills, social behaviour and self-efficacy – and they ensure that a grey asphalt square is transformed into a place full of vitality, diversity and possibilities.

In the following overview, we present examples of equipment and design elements that have proven particularly effective from both educational and planning perspectives. They address the needs of children – and create exactly the kind of atmosphere that makes a school playground a place of longing.





MOVEMENT & CHALLENGE

Children want to move. They run, jump, climb, swing, balance, slide, spin, hang upside down – driven by an entirely natural urge to be active. In doing so, they challenge themselves, test their limits and discover what they are capable of.

These physical challenges are more than just play – they promote courage, dexterity, strength and endurance. Those who balance learn body tension and concentration. Those who climb train coordination and overcoming obstacles.

A school playground that encourages a variety of forms of movement not only supports motor development, but also strengthens self-confidence, emotional stability and learning capacity. This is because movement creates balance – and is the basis for healthy development.



BALANCING

Balancing and hopping close to the ground is great fun for young and old alike. Depending on their centre of gravity, the balance blocks are either stable or unstable and wobbly. This creates an exciting balancing course where children can develop their dexterity and body awareness. The balancing beam promotes physical awareness and a sense of equilibrium and it enables children to experience success without significant risk. The rotating beam, on the other hand, is a balancing device with an increased degree of difficulty that requires strong and quick body movements to maintain balance. The wooden beams of the Jackstraws See saw are particularly effective for practising dynamic balance. As in the game of Jackstraws, the other beams move unexpectedly when force and pressure are applied to any part of the system.

Balance Blocks | Balancing Beam | Rotating Beam | Jackstraws See saw

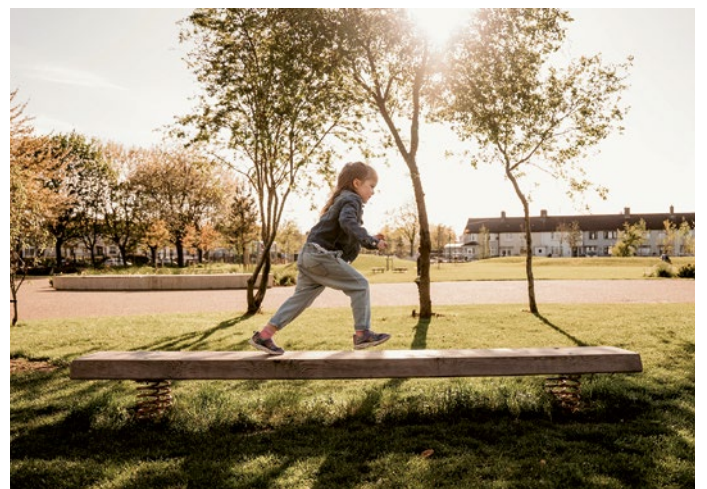


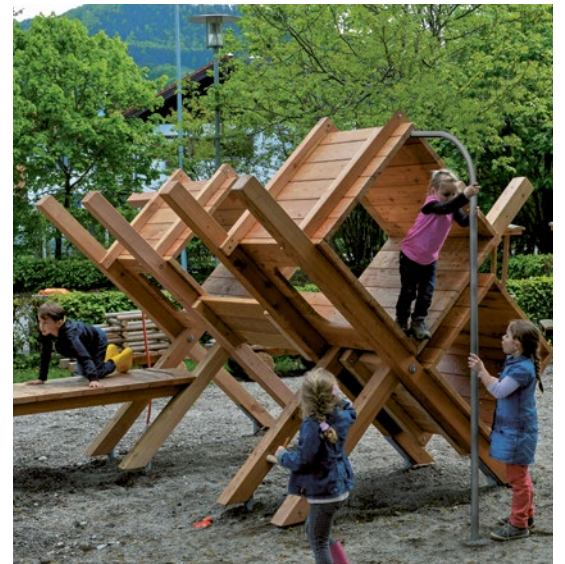


ACTIVITIES AT GROUND LEVEL

The ground-level equipment encourages active group games and promotes balance, coordination and body awareness. The belt path is perfect for wild yet safe rough-and-tumble play. The rubber belt, stretched between the posts, responds to every movement – when one child jumps on it, the others are gently set in motion. The rocking plates made of metal are an unobtrusive yet highly effective play feature that encourages movement games and are also suitable for wheelchair users. The round jumping discs are mounted on strong, low springs. Children can not only enjoy jumping on them but also jump off in all directions, just like from a springboard. The totter beam encourages playful competition. Weight shifts and kinetic energy cause the low-mounted beam to sway, making it challenging for some children to stay on.

Belt Path | Rocking Plate | Jumping Discs | Totter Beam





VERSATILE STRUCTURES

The unusual shape of the triangular platforms invites children to balance, climb and explore, stimulating both their sense of balance and joy of movement. With their small spatial elements, the street acrobats offer a wide range of opportunities for climbing, crawling through and hiding. Sheltered niches create retreats for role-playing games, while the firemen's pole and bridge element provide additional incentives for movement. Both play features combine physical activity and imagination to create a varied play experience.

Triangular Platform | Street Acrobats





UP & DOWN

Our structures invite children to try new things again and again – sometimes going up, sometimes going down, and it is precisely this variety that makes them so appealing. Whether on the firemen's pole, where children play fire brigade, on the inclined wall, which invites them to climb and perform "mountain rescues", or on the swaying chain path: everywhere, the equipment challenges children to be brave, skilful and joyful in their movement. Climbing, scrambling and balancing are just as important as sliding or jumping down safely. Consciously walking across the balancing beam, the rope bridge or the wobbly wooden planks of the chain path trains balance and tactile sensitivity – while at the same time inspiring exciting role-playing games and creating countless moments of shared laughter.

Inclined Wall | Balancing Beam | Rope Bridge | Firemen's Pole | Chain Path





SLIDING INTO BREAK TIME

Slides are among the most popular pieces of equipment in any playground. They get many children moving at the same time – an ideal way to release energy after focused periods of learning. Sliding together creates momentum, lets off steam and generates infectious joy. Slides promote balance, coordination and the ability to assess speed and risk. The sequence of movements – climbing up, waiting, letting go, sliding and arriving – follows a natural rhythm that provides children with a sense of security and orientation.

Various designs allow for seamless integration into the school grounds: slope slides make use of the existing topography and allow children to experience heights, while tunnel slides give them butterflies in their stomachs: dark and light, narrowness and width are experienced intensely – an interplay that promotes self-confidence – and two slides next to each other invite children to engage in friendly sliding competitions. Slides also create attractive incentives for movement when attached to towers and platforms. In short, slides are more than just a single piece of playground equipment – they act as catalysts for movement, social encounters and shared experiences in everyday school life.

Open Slide | Tunnel Slide





WHERE DIZZINESS IS FUN

Spinning, whirling, rotating – what often causes discomfort for adults is a source of great joy for children and an important driving force for their development. Play involving rotation challenges the sense of balance, strengthens body awareness and trains the ability to distinguish between movement and rest. It's not just about fun, but about developing senses that have a profound effect on the body. The dizziness after spinning is not a loss of control, but a natural transition: the body regains its balance, the vestibular system is activated, and children feel intensely alive. Our spinning playground equipment taps into this innate desire to move – whether alone or together, standing, sitting or pushing: it promotes balance, concentration, responsiveness and coordination and transforms spinning into a valuable, joyful play experience.

Standing Carousel | Small Spinner | Whirligig | Carousel
| Roundabout



STRENGTH MEETS COORDINATION

Children and young people enjoy practising certain physical skills, which is why playground equipment with characteristics of gymnastic apparatus also has its place. The degree of success achieved can influence a child's self-perception within a group. On the high bar in particular, movements such as "forward rolls" serve as a means of self-assessment. With the rope bar and the whisk, one can use the posts of the climbing net to create an additional play option. The whisk introduces a new quality to play: it challenges children to perform unfamiliar movements and encourages cooperative activity, especially in pairs – promoting coordination, body awareness and teamwork in equal measure. The double hammock seat is especially fun for two. In a relaxed, hammock-like position, children can swing together while chatting. The natural swinging motion, combined with the unusual lying position, enhances the sense of enjoyment.

Horizontal Bar | Combination of Whisk, Rope Bar and Vertical Climbing Net | Whisk | Double Hammock Seat





TEAMWORK – FULL SPEED AHEAD

Letting off steam together and combining it with a theme is especially appealing for young and old alike. Whether in a large aeroplane just before take-off or landing, on a wobbly raft that requires everyone to maintain balance and coordination, on a catamaran where little explorers happily rock with the waves – especially when someone stands at the mast to create a strong wind – or on the ring scales, which demand speed, skill, communication, and teamwork: our equipment encourages children to work, move, and play together. Even landlubbers can go on a big voyage with our sailing boat: children rock, set sail, and immerse themselves completely in imaginative play.

Big Wooden Plane | Ocean Raft | Catamaran | Ring Scales | Sailing Boat



ADVENTURES AT HEIGHT

The climbing forest adds height, excitement, and adventure to the school playground. Different levels of difficulty challenge children's courage, coordination, and joy of movement. Swaying ropes, narrow logs, and wobbly crossings allow several children to climb simultaneously, meet, help, or avoid each other – fostering cooperation, concentration, and self-confidence along the way. Those who make it to the top have not only overcome an obstacle, but often also pushed themselves a little further. The climbing forest shows how much you are capable of – if you believe in yourself.

Climbing Forest | Climbing Forest Elements



ROPE COURSE

The rope course, with its vertical and horizontal net structures, challenges agility and coordination. Physically active children can balance, climb, and test themselves. Its open design accommodates many children at once, making it ideal for school playgrounds. Horizontal net surfaces allow short breaks before continuing the course.

Rope Course





PLAYING TOGETHER & SHARING EXPERIENCES

The school playground is not just a space for exercise, but also a social environment. Children make friends here, they negotiate, share, and experiment – sometimes wildly, sometimes quietly. Diversity is at the heart of Richter Spielgeräte's approach, forming the foundation of play areas where all children feel at home and enjoy playing together.

Equipment such as climbing structures, net pyramids, and large climbing stacks invite multiple children to play together, showcase their skills, and encourage one another. Those who climb high together learn to trust – in themselves and in others.

Meeting places and play islands also offer space to "hang out" – in the best sense of the word: spending time together, observing, talking, belonging. Sensory-stimulating elements such as the dance chimes, finger labyrinths, or rotating discs promote mindfulness, while the whirlpool column encourages experimentation, and the walk-in kaleidoscope fascinates with surprising perspectives – creating wonder that connects children.

Swinging or balancing together in a group creates experiences that have an impact beyond the playground break, shaping a schoolyard that not only gets children moving but also fosters connection—a place built on respect, cooperation, and participation.



ENCOUNTERS WHILE SWINGING

Swinging is more than just back and forth – it promotes balance, rhythm, and body awareness, while being pure fun. Swinging has a calming effect, relieves tension and is especially fun when several children can swing side by side. The queen swing offers versatile experiences: swinging, rocking, and tumbling in one dynamic moment of play. With its long pendulum, the extra-high swing evokes a feeling of freedom and lightness – almost like flying. The tyre swing combines classic swinging fun with joint coordination and, thanks to its suspension, also allows gentle rotational movements. The hexagonal swing invites playful interaction: children can look at each other, touch feet or swing towards each other. The nest swing rocks gently – the more children sit in it, the greater the fun.

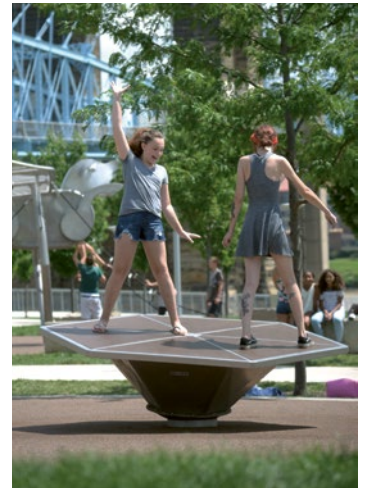
Queen Swing | High Twin Swing | Car Tyre Swing | Hexagonal Swing | Cradle Nest



MOVING TOGETHER

Moving is even more fun in a group. Whether on the rotating disc, which creates exciting moments of rotation through the interplay of force and centrifugal force, the whirlwind, which enables swirling flying sensations by winding up the ropes, the balancing disc, on which everyone finds their balance together and coordinates with each other, or the big see-saw platform, which offers space for many people to seesaw and play together at the same time – the more people participate, the greater the fun.

Rotating Disc | Whirlwind | Large Balancing Disc | Big See-saw Platform





PLAY FOR MANY AT THE SAME TIME

The climbing structures made of handcrafted, irregular round timbers allow many children to play in a small space; even sudden bursts of intense play are absorbed and transformed into a flowing rhythm of play. The area not only offers space for climbing, experiencing heights and developing the senses with hands and feet, but also serves as an attractive place to sit, rest and observe.

Climbing Structures





HIGH UP ON THE NET PYRAMID

The net pyramid is an eye-catching climbing structure that combines natural wood with dynamic rope elements. It can be climbed in many ways and across multiple levels. Its open, flexible net design offers an increasing sense of adventure, adapting to each child's physical abilities. Kids can climb high, balance at lower levels, sway gently, or simply relax—whatever suits their mood. Optional built-in components can further enrich the already high play value.

Net Pyramids





VENTURE TO THE HEIGHTS

Children of all ages have a natural desire to climb. Our climbing equipment helps them reach new heights. Young people in particular enjoy testing their strength and dexterity on the bell-climbing poles as they try to ring the bell at the top. The Maypole is raised by running and pulling the crossbeam together; once released, it swings around the mast like a chain carousel – a dynamic play experience that improves coordination, cooperation, and physical strength. The climbing wall is another popular challenge, offering various levels of difficulty to suit different abilities.

Bell Climbing Poles | Maypole | Climbing Wall



CLIMBING AREA & MEETING POINT

The climbing pyramid and climbing stack, assembled from peeled round timbers, attract attention even from a distance. They impress with their different levels, which encourage a wide variety of movements and role-playing games. Each individual play beam can be climbed, balanced on and explored. Beyond offering height and tactile experiences for hands and feet, the beams also serve as inviting seating areas for resting, observing, and chatting.

Large Climbing Pyramid | Climbing Stack





APPEALING TO THE SENSES

Dance chimes, finger labyrinths, whirlpool columns, and impulse spheres offer children an exciting blend of sensory experience, movement, and discovery. The dance chimes transform hopping and jumping into bright, harmonious sounds. They encourage movement, support children with motor insecurities, and create a sense of lightness – for both players and observers. The finger labyrinth promotes focused hand movements. Tracing its lines sharpens concentration, enhances coordination, and stimulates the connection between the brain's hemispheres – an enriching break from everyday school life. At the whirlpool column, children encounter a fascinating natural phenomenon: turning the crank creates a spiralling vortex that illustrates the principles of movement, counter-movement, and energy – an engaging place for curiosity and exploration. The impulse spheres reveal the laws of physics in a playful way: when one sphere is set in motion, the impulse travels through the entire row until the last sphere swings outward. Children discover rhythms, patterns, and the interplay of cause and effect with delight and curiosity.

Dance Chimes | Finger Labyrinth | Whirlpool Column | Impulse Spheres



WHERE ENCOUNTERS BECOME VISIBLE

Seeing the world through different eyes, perceiving yourself in new ways, and getting physically active – these play elements invite children to enjoy intense sensory experiences. Inside the walk-in kaleidoscope, one's own reflection becomes a captivating panoramic image. Multiple reflections open up fresh perspectives on the body, creating a special place for self-awareness, wonder, and quiet contemplation. The striped mirror makes encounters visible: two people look at each other through the gaps between the mirror strips and suddenly see surprising combinations – one person's eyes paired with the other's nose, or a forehead merging with someone else's smile. This simple interaction creates closeness, sparks laughter, and playfully encourages social connection. The rotating disc brings movement into play. As it spins, it produces optical effects that challenge the senses and promote experimentation. When combined with physical movement, dynamic, ever-changing patterns emerge – a stimulating impulse for play, creativity, and perception.

Walk-in Kaleidoscope | Striped Mirror | Rotating Disc





RETREAT & RECREATION QUIET PLACES IN THE LIVELY SCHOOLYARD

School days are busy, noisy, and full of impressions. Alongside opportunities for active play, it is equally important to provide children with places of retreat – spaces where they can calm down, observe, dream, or simply be themselves.

Not all children seek action and exercise during break time. Some need a safe place to process what they have experienced, to gather strength or to chat in small groups.

With thoughtful design – such as niches, hammocks, rope areas or natural seating islands – zones of tranquillity can be created in the midst of the hustle and bustle. These spaces not only invite relaxation, but also strengthen self-awareness, emotional balance and social consideration.



RELAX

The playground does not always need to be full of action – places for rest, relaxation and gentle swinging are also important. With its roof, the rope nest offers a sheltered place to retreat, relax or lie together in the net. In the hammock, children experience the calming feeling of swinging – alone or in pairs, quietly or in motion. The rope pyramid combines elements of retreat and movement: it invites children to climb, balance or linger in the nets. Such play areas strengthen social interaction and promote a balance between exercise and relaxation in everyday school life.

Rope Nest | Hammock | Net Lounger | Net Pyramid



MEETING POINT & RECREATION

The “Lounging Logs” installation is especially appealing to young people. Those who enjoy showing their skills can balance on the protruding beams. Restlessness and tension can be eased through gentle rocking while sitting, and rocking together encourages communication and connection.

Our “Comes Around” offers both aesthetic appeal and comfortable seating. The two offset, half-shell niches, each equipped with a bench, invite users to retreat, relax, or take a short break before returning to play. The meeting house provides a sheltered space for conversations, short breaks, or spontaneous encounters—suitable for all ages. Its four half-walls create a sense of privacy without blocking the view of the surroundings. The roof offers protection from rain, making the meeting house a popular spot in any weather.

Lounging Logs | Comes Around | Meeting House





SEATING OPTIONS

The soft shapes of the play wave and play barrel naturally invite exploration. These pieces of equipment are also popular as relaxed seating areas for resting and hanging out – as is the island seat, whose two or three backrests can be tilted in two different directions. This allows children to change their perspective during a break and observe the goings-on around them.

Play Wave | Play Barrel | Island Seat





MODULAR WALL – PLAY, PROTECT, DESIGN

The modular play wall is particularly appealing to primary school children and, with its various levels and passageways, offers numerous opportunities for climbing, sliding, hiding and crawling through. The cosy niches create retreats also inspire imaginative role-playing games. The play wall can be designed flexibly – in a straight line or across corners – and can be expanded as children's needs grow. In addition to its play value, it also fulfils a functional role: it serves as a visual, weather and noise barrier, e.g. in areas of the school playgrounds adjacent to roads.

Play Wall



THE BASICS OF SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

As with any public playground, no two school playgrounds are alike. However, school playgrounds offer a significant advantage for planners: the user group and the associated requirements for play equipment are relatively predictable. At the start of the planning process, the following fundamental questions should be addressed:

- Which age group will use the playground?
- How many children will be cared for? Will they use the playground simultaneously?
- Can the school accommodate children with special physical or mental needs?
- Does the school profile provide clues about playground requirements (e.g., sports boarding school, Waldorf school, etc.)?
- Does the school have a concept for integrating physical activity into everyday school life (e.g., “Bewegte Schule” (active school), sports-friendly school)?
- At what times of day and for how long will the playground be used?
- Will the playground be open to the public (e.g., after school)?
- How will pupils, residents, teachers, and educational supervisors be involved?

In addition to understanding the user group, it is essential to record the hard facts about the available space:

- How is the area situated (central residential area, outskirts, near traffic, urban or rural)?
- What is the size and shape of the area?
- Is the terrain flat, sloping, or hilly?
- Are there underground or overhead structures, such as a car park?
- Do access routes for the fire brigade or other services have to be considered?
- Where are the entrances, and from which direction do children arrive?
- How is the site oriented (cardinal direction)?
- Is vegetation present? The presence of shade-providing trees is particularly relevant.”
- Does the soil drain well, and can rainwater be collected or even used for play?
- Are there other previously unused open spaces on the grounds that could be developed for play?

When selecting playground equipment, it is also important to consider the available budget and any requirements regarding fall protection surfacing. Discussions with the facility management and the teachers responsible can provide information about the wishes and concerns of the educational staff. Experience has shown that involving caretakers and cleaning staff in the planning phase, e.g. through a survey, leads to a sense of shared responsibility, resulting in high acceptance and good maintenance of the play area.

Once the basic planning parameters have been established, you will usually have gained a certain understanding of the location and its users, which you can then incorporate into your initial designs. Before you start installing play equip-

ment, it is advisable to take another look at the area itself. Are any measures necessary to create a welcoming and comfortable environment? Perhaps privacy screening or soundproofing measures are needed to shield the area from the nearby road, or a new hill could be added to give the site more liveliness. Areas without equipment should also be deliberately planned – as open spaces for ball games, for playing hide and seek or for flexible use by popular new sports. In countries further north, lighting may be necessary for dark winter days, while in southern countries lighting may also be needed for use after sunset.

When the bell rings for break time, a large number of children rush into the playground in good weather, eager to move and be active. This places high demands on the playground. It is therefore important to select equipment that allows as many children as possible to play on it at the same time. Promoting constructive interaction is just as important as providing opportunities for retreat. To truly recover during the short break, children need play elements that let them release energy, climb with focused concentration, or simply withdraw and rest. In other words, they need opportunities that help them clear their minds from the one-sided cognitive demands of the school day—opportunities that let them break free from constraints, experience self-efficacy, seek challenges, feel their bodies, and engage all their senses. This, in turn, enables them to return to the classroom ready to perform at their full mental capacity.

A well-considered choice of fall protection surfacing ensures safety for children at play. Natural materials should always be the first choice. They impress with their pleasant feel, freedom from unpleasant odours, low heat reflection at high temperatures and – in the case of loose material – the possibility of use in play, e.g. as building material, ingredients in the play kitchen or items for sale in the shop. Natural materials also score points over artificial materials in terms of sustainability and disposal. Topsoil, grass (for low fall heights) or bark mulch that can be rolled over after laying are also suitable for wheelchair-accessible surfaces. Gentle grass embankments or rounded paving at the edges of play areas can integrate with the fall-protection surface, avoiding hard edges and trip hazards.

In light of climate change, and rising rates of skin cancer, it is increasingly important to integrate cooling, shading, and rainwater management into school planning from the outset. Appropriate planting can contribute to these goals, but should be supplemented with additional shading solutions, particularly during the early years when trees are still small. A drinking fountain is a valuable addition to many school playgrounds, promoting hydration and comfort. Using water-permeable surfaces, such as water-bound pavements, across as many areas of the school grounds as possible, along with rainwater retention facilities, ensures that outdoor spaces become usable again quickly even after heavy rainfall.

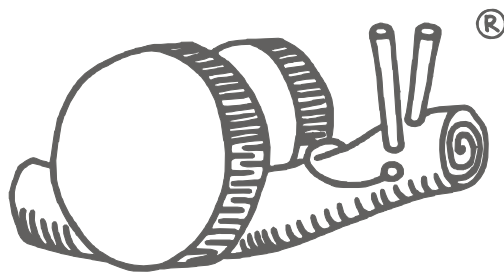
A successful playground in the schoolyard contributes greatly to a relaxed learning environment in the classroom. If you would like individual advice on the playground in your school

project, we look forward to hearing from you and working with you to create a strong place for strong children.

RECOMMENDED READING

"Bewegung bringt's – Erfolgreich lernen in der Ganztagschule" (Exercise pays off – Successful learning in all-day schools), published by Herder, 2025 by Hermann Städtler (Programme Director of "Bewegte, gesunde Schule" (Active, Healthy Schools) at the Lower Saxony Ministry of Education and former headmaster of the Fridtjof Nansen School in Hanover) and Hermann Grams (sports scientist and special needs teacher, former director of the Academy of Sports of the Lower Saxony State Sports Federation).





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