

Executive Summary

The intrinsic value of playtimes stems from children's enjoyment of self-organised play.

The review of literature on playtimes in primary schools has highlighted both the value of good playtimes and the concerns that schools and children have. The research shows that opportunities for self-organised play have diminished both at home and in schools.

Instrumental value of interventions to improve playtimes can be found in children's greater engagement in a range of movements and MVPA; in increased prosocial behaviour and reduction in conflicts and the development of social and emotional skills; better problem-solving skills, self-regulation and self-confidence; reduced stress, boredom and injury.

Institutional value: schools that have introduced measures to improve playtimes consistently report happier playtimes with fewer incidents, making them easier to supervise; quicker and better settling into class after playtimes; better attention and on-task behaviour in class; and positive parent reactions.

The literature reviewed here has largely upheld the principle that if children are unable to realise the intrinsic value of playtimes, instrumental and institutional value will be compromised. This suggests that working towards sufficient time, space and permission for children to play will support them to realise the intrinsic value of playtimes, thereby making instrumental and institutional value more likely to follow.

Recommendations

- All schools across the entire primary sector should develop a strategic approach to improvements in the quality and diversity of the play opportunities.
- Schools should focus on using all available space all year and supporting many diverse forms of play.
- Training and mentoring of supervising staff should be embedded in a whole school culture that supports play.
- Schools should be required to demonstrate how they support sufficient self-organised play opportunities for all of their children.