



Freshwater Creek Steiner School

Play and grounds audit provides strategic direction for future works

- Client:** Freshwater Creek Steiner School
- Location:** Freshwater Creeks, Victoria
- Date:** 2016-2020
- Budget:** \$5k
- Roll:** Design of methodology, skills auditing, recommendations



Our Approach

Although we were originally asked in 2016 to prepare concepts and documentation for construction of a key central play area, a range of uncertainties delayed the project for a number years. To provide the school with a way forward we proposed looking at the bigger picture instead.

We felt what was really required was analysis of the existing conditions to identify shortcomings and opportunities - a playground audit.

We devised a staged methodology that involved a meeting with the stakeholders to go through the process, and an onsite assessment by PM&A of each space/zone/area. We then provided a Play Equipment Assessment Template that was used by school leaders to evaluate each element in the playground.

This data was input into a spreadsheet and presented to the steering committee, as well as posters of relevant inspirational precedent images to inspire the wider school community.

The project was highly successful in identifying priorities for action, and was very well-received by the school community.



Perry Mills & Associates
Landscape Architects
0428 848 646
perry@perrymills.com.au
www.perrymills.com.au

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More Information

Although many schools have limited access to capital funds, and face a range of challenges, their greatest resource is the energy and enthusiasm of the staff, students and families.

We know what great things can be accomplished by enthusiastic volunteers, however this resource can only be unlocked when there is focussed agreement on what's to be done and why.

Understanding the existing conditions of a site is an essential part of problem-solving a creating and sustainable landscape design outcome. This should always include analysis of how the site directs human interaction, and when the site is a playground a more detailed audit is required to consider how children use the space and what the space provides for good play.

A Play Audit considers how the whole school site provides features that encourage:

- Movement – vestibular, proprioceptive, gross and fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination;
- Stimulation of the senses – sound, touch, fragrances;
- Social interaction – cooperation, sharing, decision-making;
- Participation at a level controlled by the child – refuges and retreats for rest and observation, low-stimulation spaces suitable for children on the autism spectrum;
- Creative play - loose materials, contrasting materials, water;
- An appreciation of nature, care for plants / animals;
- Mental stimulation and imagination - sense of place, artwork, imaginative spaces;

The Play Audit considers :

- The range of areas of skills development noted above
- Layout – congestion, conflicting uses, separation of active / passive
- Microclimate – windbreaks, solar access, shade
- Drainage – ability to be used year-round
- Access for children of all abilities
- Age/risk appropriateness
- Safety – ease of supervision, general safety and need for a full Playground Safety Audit by an Accredited Level 3 Playground Inspector to ensure compliance with Australian Standards.

Following the audit we prepare a tabular summary of the audit results, in which recommended works can be prioritised for action.

The benefits of this process are:

- It generates lists of actions that can be prioritised and programmed, helping decision-making and implementation;
- It provides a framework that allows stakeholders (teachers, management, volunteers, parents, and children) to participate in the process. As a result each will 'own' the outcome and be more likely to participate in implementation;
- It provides a list of high-priority actions with clear and accepted reasoning.



Precedent images (detail)



School play zoning plan (detail)



Example of existing equipment



Spensley Street Primary School, Clifton Hill

In 2002 the school volunteers on the Grounds Committee invited a couple of parent Landscape Architects to evaluate the opportunities for landscaping. After doing careful mapping and analysis, the 'Forest Garden' project evolved. This re-imagined a worn-out shady area with mature trees as a space where play is mixed with observation, where outdoor teaching is facilitated and where children can relate to natural phenomena.

Originally poorly drained, careful earthworks were undertaken to create rain gardens and improve drainage. These were edged with straw-bale sitting walls, logs and small decks, were planted with indigenous vegetation and provided with temporary fencing. The area was constructed over a month of weekend working bees where food, learning new skills and fun were key features, and over 100 people were involved. The completed works provided some instant benefits, while other areas were progressively opened up over time.

The legacy of this works remains and has provided inspiration for many future projects by new generations of parents and children since.



Forest Garden, Spensley Street Primary, Clifton Hill

Bellbrae Primary School, Bellbrae

Successful in winning a grant in 2005 to allow sculptor Brad West to work with the school community as an Artist in Residence, the Bellbrae Primary school Principal realised that there was a need to create a suitable space for the large-scale 'sculpture seat' to rest.

I co-ordinated the concept design for an attractive entry area at the front of the school and led the implementation. Articles in the newsletter kept people informed and were key to the donation of many materials and services, leading up to a busy weekend constructing a 28 metre long concrete-rendered haybale sitting wall/fence.



Entry Sculpture space, Bellbrae Primary

Anglesea Primary School

The Parents Club had fund-raised around \$120,000 over a number of years towards creating a nature-play area. Key to the success of this project was the trust given to Peter Shaw, a parent and principal of Ocean Road Landscaping (ORL). I was working with ORL at the time and I designed this project and supervised its early implementation.

The unique opportunity was to divert clean soil/fill from the nearby tip site, to be used to create large mounds, a huge sandpit, decking stage, tree tunnel, Sheoke forest and many other nature play elements

The playspace was conceived as an mini-extension of the Anglesea Heath - a place for nature to cohabit with play.



Natural Playspace, Anglesea Primary

