

Inclusive Playground & Park Development Request



Ensuring Every Child Can Play

Introduction

We are writing to advocate for the inclusion of accessible and inclusive playground design in all current and future park and playground developments.

Every child, regardless of ability, has the right to play, explore, and belong. Yet many public playgrounds unintentionally exclude children with disabilities due to design choices that do not consider accessibility from the outset.

This is not simply a design issue — it is an issue of equity, dignity, and inclusion.

The Problem

Many playgrounds continue to be built with barrier-based design, including:

- Loose-fill surfaces such as bark or mulch
 - Limited or no wheelchair-accessible play equipment
 - Inadequate paths and turning spaces
 - Equipment that requires lifting or assistance to use
- Bark is not an accessible surface.

Children using wheelchairs, walking aids, or with mobility challenges:

- Cannot move independently across bark
- Risk getting stuck or tipping
- Are often forced to remain on the sidelines

This creates unintentional exclusion, where children are present—but unable to participate.

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Why This Matters

Play is essential for:

- Physical development
- Social connection
- Emotional wellbeing
- Confidence and independence

When playgrounds are not accessible:

- Children with disabilities are excluded
- Families feel unwelcome
- Communities miss the opportunity to foster inclusion
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Inclusion is not a special feature — it is a fundamental requirement.

Our Position

We strongly recommend that all playground developments adopt a design-first approach to inclusion, where accessibility is built into the foundation of every project—not added later.

This approach ensures:

- Equal access for all children
- Long-term usability
- Better community outcomes
- Compliance with inclusive design principles

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Key Recommendations

1. Accessible Surfacing (Non-Negotiable)

Replace loose-fill materials such as bark with firm, stable, slip-resistant surfaces, including:

- Wet-pour rubber
- Rubber tiles
- Bonded rubber mulch (accessible grade)
- Concrete or asphalt pathways connecting all features

Accessibility is not just the equipment — it is the surface that makes it usable.

2. Inclusive Play Equipment

Install equipment that can be used independently and safely by children of all abilities:

- Wheelchair-accessible swings
- Inclusive seesaws with back support and grab handles
- Ground-level play elements
- Sensory play panels
- Multi-user equipment encouraging shared play

Avoid equipment that:

- Requires lifting children into position
- Segregates disabled users from others

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3. Accessible Layout & Movement

Design the space to support independent movement:

- Minimum 1500 mm wide accessible paths
 - 1800 mm turning circles for powerchairs
 - Clear, direct routes between features
 - No dead-ends or trapped access points
- ### 4. Whole-of-Space Accessibility

Accessibility must extend beyond the playground equipment:

- Accessible picnic tables and seating
- Shade and rest areas
- Accessible entrances and gates
- Car parking with compliant accessible spaces

If a child can reach the park but not use it, the design has failed.

Design Principle

“Accessibility is not just the equipment — it is the space around it.”

If a child cannot approach, use, and leave independently, the playground is not accessible.

Community Impact

Investing in inclusive playgrounds:

- Supports children with disabilities and their families
- Benefits parents with prams and young children
- Creates spaces usable by older adults
- Strengthens inclusive communities

Inclusive design benefits everyone, not just a few.

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Call to Action

We respectfully ask that Council:

1. Commit to accessible surfacing as standard (no bark in accessible play zones)
2. Include inclusive equipment in all new and upgraded playgrounds
3. Apply universal design principles at the planning stage
4. Engage with lived experience expertise to guide decision-making

About Us

This advocacy is informed by lived experience of disability, practical design knowledge, and ongoing work to promote inclusive environments across New Zealand.

We are committed to ensuring that no child is left watching from the sidelines.

Closing Statement

Every child deserves the joy of play.
Not someday. Not somewhere else.
Right here, in every community.

Inclusive Play Design Here

<https://inclusiveplaygroundequipment.co.nz/inclusive-playground-design-guide/>

Sign Here