RISK ASSESSMENT

Creative Play Digging Area

School / setting	Whitchurch Combined School	**Assessment date**	1.9.26
Area / location	Creative play digging area	**Assessor**	V. Brown
Activity	Supervised digging, moving soil and imaginative construction	**Review date**	1.9.28
People at risk	Pupils, staff and visitors		

1. Activity and area description

Children use a designated outdoor area to dig, scoop, move and explore soil using age-appropriate tools. They may create holes, channels, mounds and imaginative constructions. The area should have clear boundaries, suitable digging material and a defined place for tools. This assessment should be adapted to the actual site, the age and needs of the children, weather conditions and the equipment provided.

2. Risk rating guide

Likelihood (L) and severity (S) are each scored from 1 (low) to 3 (high). Risk score = L × S: 1–2 Low; 3–4 Medium; 6–9 High. Ratings below are indicative and must be checked on site.

3. Hazards, who may be harmed and control measures

Hazard / possible harm	Who may be harmed	Control measures	Initial risk	Residual risk
Hidden sharp objects, glass, litter or animal waste in soil; cuts, infection or illness.	Pupils and staff	Check the area before use and remove hazards safely. Use known, suitable soil or play-grade material. Do not allow digging in areas used by animals or where contamination is suspected. Stop play and report any unexpected material; staff handle removal using appropriate protection.	6 High	2 Low
Underground services, roots, buried structures or hard objects; damage or injury.	Pupils and staff	Only permit digging in a designated area that has been checked for underground services and site hazards. Set and communicate a maximum digging depth. Do not dig near buildings, fences, trees, drains, utility covers or service routes. Stop if an obstruction is found.	6 High	2 Low
Tools used incorrectly or tools unsuitable for children; impact injuries, punctures or trips.	Pupils and staff	Provide sturdy, age-appropriate, blunt-edged hand tools only. Do not provide pointed, damaged or adult-sized tools. Teach safe carrying and use: walk with tools pointed down, keep space between users and never swing or throw tools. Store tools safely when not in use. Maintain appropriate staff supervision.	6 High	2 Low
Contact between children while digging or moving soil; accidental knocks or tool-related injury.	Pupils	Provide enough space and limit numbers in the area. Establish clear boundaries and rules, including no throwing soil or tools. Encourage children to dig facing away from others and to keep a safe distance. Intervene promptly where play becomes unsafe.	6 Medium	2 Low
Holes, uneven ground and loose soil; trips, falls, trapped feet or ankle injuries.	Pupils and staff	Set limits on hole size and depth. Do not allow tunnels, deep pits or children entering holes. Keep routes and entrances clear.	6 High	2 Low
Soil or sand thrown into eyes or inhaled; irritation or breathing discomfort.	Pupils and staff	Make clear that soil must stay on the ground and must not be thrown. Avoid use in very dry, dusty or windy conditions. Dampen dry material lightly where appropriate, without creating slippery or muddy hazards. Stop play if dust becomes excessive.	4 Medium	2 Low
Hand-to-mouth contact; germs, contamination or illness.	Pupils	Explain that soil and tools must not go in mouths. Supervise closely, particularly younger children. Cover cuts with waterproof dressings. Require handwashing with soap and water after play and before eating. Do not eat or drink in the digging area.	6 High	2 Low
Allergies, skin irritation, bites or stings; discomfort or allergic reaction.	Pupils and staff	Check known individual needs and relevant care plans before participation. Inspect the area for nests, insects, plants that may irritate skin and animal activity. Provide gloves only where suitable and ensure they fit. Follow the school's procedures for bites, stings and allergic reactions.	4 Medium	2 Low
Weather and environmental conditions; heat, sunburn, cold stress, wet/slippery ground.	Pupils and staff	Check weather and ground conditions before and during use. Ensure suitable clothing, sun protection, drinking water and access to shade as appropriate. Close the area during thunderstorms, extreme temperatures, high winds, icy conditions or when the ground is unsafe.	4 Medium	2 Low
Manual handling of heavy loads or awkward lifting; strains and back injuries.	Pupils and staff	Use small buckets and lightweight containers. Do not allow children to lift or carry heavy loads. Adults should use safe handling techniques and seek help with heavy materials. Keep loads low and manageable.	4 Medium	2 Low
Poor supervision, overcrowding or unclear rules; unsafe behaviour may go unnoticed.	Pupils	Agree a suitable adult-to-child supervision arrangement based on age, needs, group size and site layout. Staff must be able to see and hear children and intervene quickly. Set a clear entry/exit point, capacity limit and simple rules. Include the area in staff handover arrangements.	6 High	2 Low
Inaccessible layout or exclusion; children unable	Pupils	Plan access routes and activity options for children with mobility, sensory, communication or other additional needs. Provide varied ways to take part, such as	4 Medium	2 Low

to participate safely or equally.		scooping, sorting, transporting or directing construction. Review reasonable adjustments with relevant staff and individual plans.		
Tools or materials left out; trip hazards, misuse or deterioration.	Pupils and staff	Count tools in and out where appropriate. Store equipment in a secure, designated place. Check tools regularly for cracks, splinters, loose handles or sharp edges and remove damaged items. Keep walkways clear.	4 Medium	2 Low
Poor hygiene or contaminated water used in play; illness or infection.	Pupils	Use clean water from an appropriate source if water is needed. Do not use stagnant water or water from unknown sources. Empty containers after use and prevent standing water. Keep the area free from food waste and animal fouling.	4 Medium	2 Low
Emergency or injury; delayed response.	Pupils and staff	Ensure staff know the location of first-aid supplies and how to summon a first aider. Maintain access for emergency assistance. Follow school procedures for recording and reporting accidents, near misses and concerns. Close the area until any identified hazard has been addressed.	4 Medium	2 Low

4. Safe operating procedures

- Before each session, a member of staff checks the digging area, boundaries, soil condition, weather and equipment.
- Explain and reinforce simple rules: dig only in the designated area; use tools for digging only; keep tools low; do not throw soil; do not dig near others; do not taste soil; tell an adult if anything unusual is found.
- Set a clear maximum number of children and maximum digging depth. Do not permit tunnels, deep pits or children climbing into excavations.
- Staff remain actively engaged and positioned to maintain effective sight and sound supervision. The area is closed whenever adequate supervision is unavailable.
- At the end of play, tools are checked and stored.
- Children wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the area.

5. Inspection and maintenance

Daily / before use: visual check for litter, animal fouling, sharp objects, standing water, unstable edges, holes, trip hazards, damaged tools and changes to the site. After use: restore the area, secure equipment and report defects. Periodically: review soil quality, drainage, boundaries, access, equipment condition and whether the arrangements remain suitable for the children using the area. Record and action defects.

6. Emergency arrangements

Stop the activity and make the area safe. A member of staff should assess the situation, summon the school first aider and follow the school's accident, incident and emergency procedures. For a serious injury or medical emergency, call 999 in line with school procedures. Inform the designated senior member of staff and parents/carers as required. Record accidents, near misses and actions taken.