

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Background

Children's Play Advisory Service (CPAS) is committed to providing inspections of a consistently high quality and therefore offers quality assurance based on quality control measures.

A quality inspection should be a tool for you to use which enables you to manage your playgrounds efficiently and effectively. In this way though a quality inspection may cost more it can give you considerable savings overall.

Quality Control Measures

1. Task Specification

Different inspectors will carry out inspections of playgrounds in slightly different ways and their reports will differ in appearance. This is a result of a competitive market in which inspectors all try to do what they feel will meet the client's needs. The following gives a broad indication of what a client should expect from an annual inspection. It is a minimum and inspectors may well exceed this.

- a) The inspector will access all reasonably accessible parts of each item of playground equipment and test for wear, corrosion, missing parts and other deterioration. The inspector will do this by applying force and weight and/or probing as appropriate. Some parts may not be accessible because it would risk the inspector's own safety. In these circumstances, and if the inspector believes there is a significant potential hazard, (s)he will advise the client on what action should be taken.
- b) The inspector will assess each item against relevant standards and guidance and identify any failures which are associated with any significant risk of accidents.
- c) The inspector will assess the condition of ancillary items. Other obvious hazards which are associated with the playground (these may be outside of the playground) will also be considered.
- d) The inspector's report will identify the above and give an indication of level of risk and/or priority of action required to the above so that the client is enabled to direct their resources to the areas of greatest risk.

- e) This “task specification” will appear on the CPAS website and inspectors will bring it to the attention of any client for whom they are carrying out or tendering to carry out annual inspections.
- f) Failure to comply with the above will be a disciplinary matter to be addressed by the CPAS.

2. Complaints Procedure

Should a client have a complaint about a particular inspector they should raise it with that inspector in the first instance.

Should the inspector not be able to resolve the client’s concerns, then the matter should be referred to the Director of CPAS.

If it cannot be resolved at this stage, then Clients are offered a “second opinion” as a quality control measure.

The CPAS will contract an experienced inspector (“reviewing inspector”) to visit the client for a day during which they will discuss any statements which the client would have previously prepared such as witness statements, photographic evidence, etc. They would usually also inspect a selection of sites either randomly or ones where the client had identified what they believe to be serious failings.

The reviewing inspector will be looking for evidence of failures to identify significant hazards or deterioration. This inspector will NOT be looking for failures to identify minor matters of standard compliance or interpretation or minor matters of deterioration.

The client would be clearly informed that minor matters such as this would not be regarded as negligence.

The reviewing inspector’s report will be sent to CPAS and to the client. If the original inspector’s inspection and/or report is deemed to have been unsatisfactory then they will be given the option of not being paid or having to return and re-inspect the playgrounds. In extreme circumstances where the failures prove reckless or repeatedly unsatisfactory, the option will be taken of removing the inspector from the CPAS.

Should the reviewing inspector find the client’s complaints to be frivolous or mendacious the client would then pay a fee to the CPAS of £500 plus expenses which would be sufficient to pay the independent inspector plus a minor administrative cost to the CPAS. This is a condition of undertaking an independent review of an inspection.

3. Peer Review

CPAS has a commitment to Continuing Professional Development which will be carried out through training and peer review.

4. Quality Assurance by non-CPAS Inspectors

Where Local Authorities or others have had annual inspections carried out but believe them to be unsatisfactory, then CPAS can offer a quality assurance check.

This would be carried out by an inspector of at least 10 years experience. S/he would normally visit the client for a day during which they will discuss any statements which the client would have previously prepared such as witness statements, photographic evidence, etc. They would usually also inspect a selection of sites either randomly or ones where the client had identified what they believe to be serious failings.

The inspector will be looking for evidence of failures to identify significant hazards or deterioration. The inspector will NOT be looking for failures to identify minor matters of standard compliance or interpretation or minor matters of deterioration.

The client would be clearly informed that minor matter such as this would not be regarded as negligence.

The inspector's report will be sent to the client who can then use it to assist in the resolution of their complaint to the original inspector.

For further information and costs please contact:

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5. Freedom of Information

All inspectors are made aware that under the Freedom of Information Act a member of the public can obtain a copy of their annual inspection reports and associated communications. This might include a competitor inspector, a solicitor, or a member of the public whose child has had an accident.

With that information it may well be possible for poor quality inspections to be identified and actions taken. Should an inspector have had the inspections fraudulently carried out by an unqualified or lesser qualified substitute and the inspector could be proved to be somewhere else on that day then this would clearly be a serious matter.

Should an inspector be claiming a higher qualification or level of competence than they have, then this would be identifiable and action taken.

Rob Wheway MSc, MEd, MCIMSPA, MCMI, FRSA
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Children's Play Advisory Service
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