

Fewer accidents when playgrounds challenge kids

Landscape Architect Mary Jeavons, a veteran with close to 30 years of designing outdoor play areas for children of all ages from preschool through primary to secondary, is a firm believer in play based learning in settings that challenge physically and allow free rein to the child's imagination.

"Children are more likely to be injured while playing on conventional public space equipment, because it looks 'safe' they don't take as much care as they do when they are aware that they need to be careful," she says. "We aim to build in graded challenges that children can grow into as they become stronger and their motor skills improve.

"A playground train is always a train but a big rock can be a mountain, or a rocket, or a house depending on what develops as the games evolve."

The recently completed project at Eltham College Junior School in leafy Eltham, Melbourne, bears out her design philosophy and reflects



the school's appreciation of the importance of outdoor play and its contribution to learning, social development and education. Here, a rocky slope leads up to a fort and presents an irresistible challenge for any active child.

As well as quirky custom designed timber play structures designed to capture the essence of the hilly Eltham bushland character, the design includes a degree of 'looseness' – sand, dirt, rocks and pebbles; leaves, twigs and flowers that children appropriate for their play.

The area accommodates groups such as the mining club that enjoys digging and extracting rocks; the ball kickers who need a level grassy space; the monkey bar kids who need skill progression and degrees of challenge; the children playing four square ball games; the chasey games; the rock climbers ...and the performers, dreamers and role players.

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