



Too boring and no fun

Play spots are failing our kids

MITCHELL TOY

FINDING a decent playground these school holidays should be a walk in the park, but parents and health experts say the quality of Melbourne play spots for children is on the slide.

New-age playgrounds designed to minimise injury have come under fire for being boring and limiting.

Experts have warned a lack of older-style "adventure" playgrounds could be holding back our children's development.

Child nutritionist Kim Bishop, of Yu Food and Lifestyle, said old-fashioned playgrounds let children exercise more effectively.

"I certainly tend to go for the older playgrounds rather than the more sterile environments," Ms Bishop said.

"At a playground, kids need a space where they are free to move in a variety of different ways.

"There has even been controversy around sandpits as play spaces, but I think it's important to let kids put their hands and feet in dirt and sand."

Researchers at the University of Western Australia have launched a study on the declining quality and number of playgrounds and their

effect on children.

The project's research leader, Lisa Wood, has said councils and schools go overboard in creating safe and sterile environments, and that children should be given greater scope to play.

Docklands mum-of-three Kristy Seymour-Smith agreed, saying playgrounds should be designed for fun.

"I think of the playgrounds that were around when I was a kid — they were quite a bit different," Ms Seymour-Smith said.

"As long as there's supervision, they can be fun and safe at the same time."

Parents were asked to put forward their favourite aspects of a good playground, used by the *Sunday Herald Sun* to find some of the best spots around Melbourne.

Top playgrounds included a castle-style structure at Thomas St Park, Hampton, an adventure playground in Victoria St, Doncaster, and Hays Paddock in Kew.

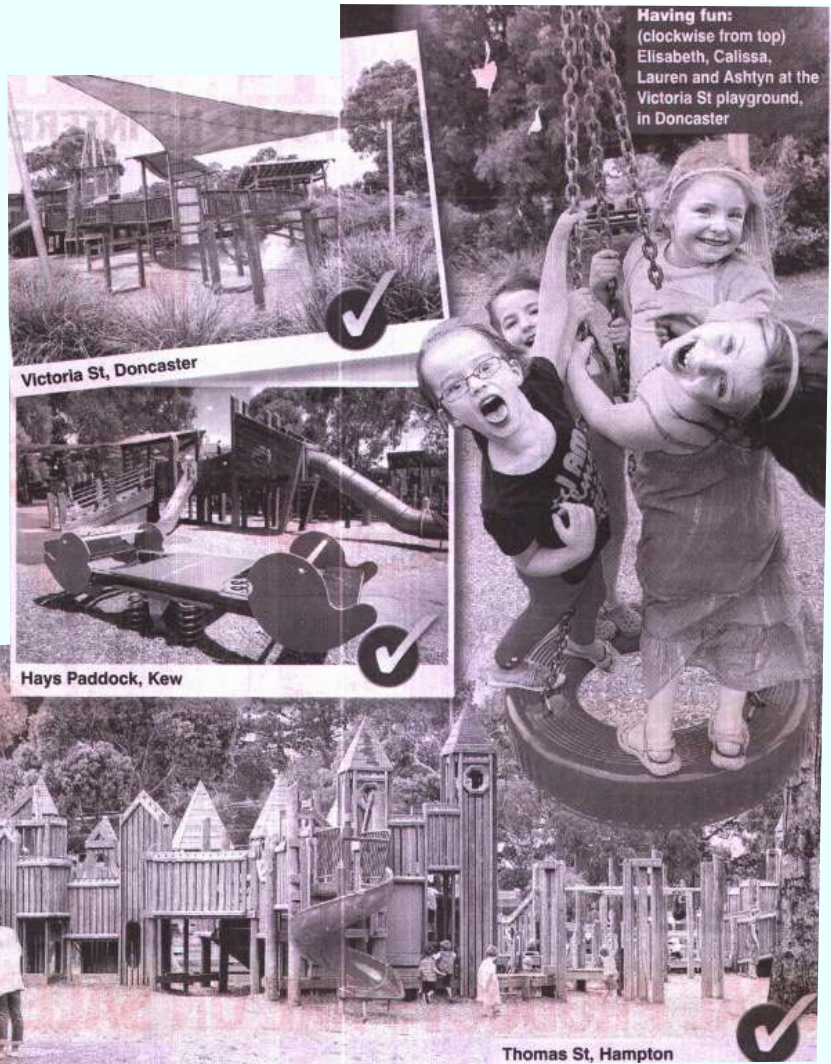
Some of the worst-rated playgrounds included the minimalist Empress Rd Reserve at Surrey Hills and the quirky Maroondah Federation Estate in Ringwood.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD PLAYGROUND

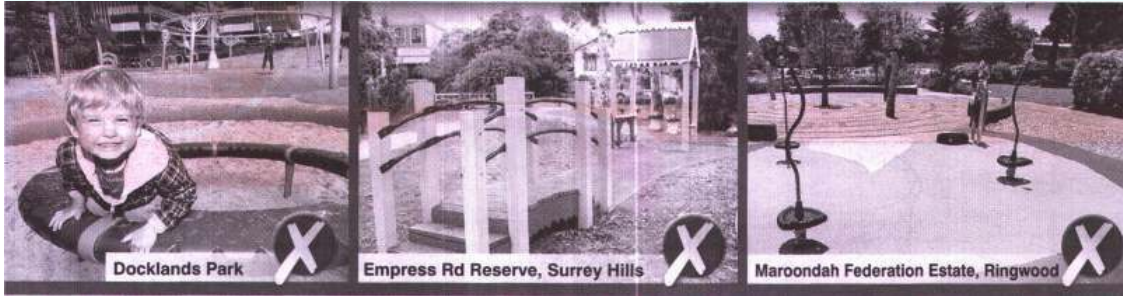
Combining fun and safety is the No.1 priority for parents when it comes to picking playgrounds.

- **Fenced-in environment**
 - Plenty of shade in summer
- **Close to barbecues and toilets**
- Well-maintained and clean
- **Close to natural landmarks, such as trees, streams or ponds**
- Soft ground for safety
- **Not so big that children can be lost or separated**
- Diverse equipment and activities to keep kids entertained and moving





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