

What a great start to transition. Not only has the weather been incredibly kind to us with long, dry warm days providing ample opportunity for outdoor learning, but we had an extra –ordinary opportunity on Monday to create a fully inclusive play area in a playground that has until now had very limited appeal.

When I was appointed in post there was a detailed plan of a playground design, drawn up by a professional playground organisation who provide a number of playgrounds across East Lothian, and which promised to fill the very space we successfully filled on Monday. The original playground, on closer inspection was geared more towards the younger age and came with an eye-watering price-tag of £75,000. I can see the benefits to permanent playgrounds and fully agree with the philosophy of robust, colourful and varied play items, but I have to ask how much of the country's playgrounds stimulate real imaginative play and how many more respond to safe and contained play? I have to admit that I am delighted that the project was delayed by a week due to a hitch with the delivery of ten tonnes of specially prepared Play-Chip, which can only be sourced from one company in Scotland. Had it gone ahead as originally planned we would have had a large number of volunteers, which would have been great for collaboration and integration but who, quite possibly and wholly unintentionally, could have over-shadowed and dominated the efforts of Meadowpark pupils.

As it turned out every member of the Meadowpark team pulled together, shifting the 10 tonnes of play chip from one playground to another and helping in the design of what is now known as 'Tyre Island'. One pupil in particular, Max, worked tyre-lessly (☺) throughout the day, beginning with a small shovel and very clear and direct instructions on how to fill a barrow, to using a large orange spade, filling a large bucket and dragging it over to fill in the tyres. In front of my eyes emerged a young person of whom it had been judged 'did not know his numbers' to one who worked out for himself that the greater the effort applied the quicker the outcome.

I do lunch duty most days because I can and because I love being with the team during 'downtime'. On Tuesday I had taken Jilly, my Border Terrier, into school in between dog-walkers, and was sitting with her overseeing lunchtime playtime. There was just us and 6-7 Meadowpark pupils. Not once did I have to remind pupils to cooperate or take turns, or admonish anyone for bad behaviour. Having created Tyre Island, their imagination was fired up, they created their own boundaries and harmonious play ensued.

There is a national groundswell of opinion that we do our young people an injustice as they transition from the primary stages to secondary by stripping them of planned, stimulating, challenging play areas and presenting them with a large playing field and swathes of tarmac, with an expectation that the only way to play is to join a team, a class or a group participating in controlled activity. I hope the tides continue to change and I do know that East Lothian Play Association <http://elpa.org.uk/> and Loose Parts Play <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Loose-Parts-Play-web.pdf> are making positive in-roads to redress the imbalance of play in the early years vs no play in upper years.