



# | OPAL -Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

Approved by Governors February 2025

To be reviewed annually  
Review Date February 2026

Governors print \_\_\_\_\_

Governors signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

## 2. Rationale

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

*The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is that "... better, more active and creative playtimes can mean happier and healthier children, and having happier, healthier, more active children usually results in a more positive attitude to learning in school, with more effective classroom lessons, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioural problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life."*

This aligns with our school values to be Eager to learn in all aspects of life and proud to achieve. Opal will further children's opportunities to feel proud about achievements which are not academic and we aim to provide a welcoming, safe environment to encourage confidence at playtime as well as inside school. Our Curriculum has a focus on developing children's vocabulary across all subjects to ensure that whatever path our pupils take they will have the words to express themselves and fulfil their true potential. Opal will give children the opportunity to further develop their vocabulary, problem solve and express themselves with a range of peers.

### 3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, with individuals, and within groups of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures.
- Play requires ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Play enables children to experience a wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness and happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration and achievement, boredom and fascination, fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve. We encourage our children to be 'Proud to Achieve' in all aspects of life and this will now be further developed at school through playtimes.
- Play improves children's wellbeing and is inclusive for all, we endeavour to provide opportunities for all our children at playtime to cater for their interests and needs.
- Play will provide engaging, enriching and varied outdoor learning opportunities.
- Play will enable children to foster a greater connection to the natural world, by encouraging physical and healthy lifestyles.

#### 4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development.
- Improve pupils' overall learning experiences, boost their creativity and imagination and contribute to improved academic outcomes.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence, communication and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.
- Encourage children to be 'Eager to Learn, Proud to Achieve'

#### 5. Rights

Our school recognises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes *the right to play, recreation and leisure* (Article 31) and *the right of children to be listened to on matters important to them* (Article 12). We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

#### 6. Benefit and risk

*'Play is great for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.'*

Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

**The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012)**

(See appendix I) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in the play sector publication 'Best Play', play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm'.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. This is a process that we endeavour to develop with children so that they become life long learners and can apply these life skills at home and later on in life. Encouraging challenge enables children to be the best version of themselves.

## **7. Supervision**

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

Play will be monitored and children further safeguarded as CCTV covers all outside areas, so if there are any incidents these can be seen.

Play workers will have walkie talkies incase they need to radio for support or communicate to others during lunchtime. Playworkers will consist of LSA's and previous

dinner supervisors — staff will be on a rota for canteen staff (supervise lunch) and outside playworkers (supervise play).

## **8. Roles and responsibilities – The adult's role in play**

The school will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

Within the OPAL team there are designated roles:

Opal Curricular lead for play - Lesley-Ann Blackhurst

Opal Play Co-ordinator — Faye Elliott

Opal governor - Christopher Weaver

Opal Parent play Champion — Jade Reece

Playworkers / Play team member (Previously known as lunchtime supervisors)

(See Appendix 2- for documents detailing each role.)

Play Ambassadors — year 5 pupils who will support play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced playworker is capable of enriching the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools and they can act as a stimulus to children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited. Playworkers will support children's learning through adding elements to the play, suggesting ideas if needed and resourcing these, they will facilitate assessing risks too.

### **Playworker's role:**

- To plan, deliver and evaluate, encouraging pupil participation in a varied programme of group play / games / activities.
- Perform a visual risk assessment of the play area to ensure the safety of the children.

- To prepare, utilise and tidy away a range of equipment, materials and resources to provide innovative / creative activities which engage and motivate children.
- To assist pupils as required during the lunch period to ensure their wellbeing.
- To encourage positive interaction and play between pupils to promote inclusion and sharing.
- To encourage good behaviour in accordance with agreed school behaviour policies and playground rules.
- To report any incidents to the class teacher to ensure continuity / communication between the playground and the classroom.
- To work safely and encourage safe behaviour from children, demonstrating an awareness of health and safety regulations.
- To provide first aid treatment, recording any accidents that occur in accordance with school procedure.

Please see appendix 3 for Play work principles document.

## 9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

## 10. **Environment**

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. [www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)

This also will support children in understanding how to safeguard themselves in different situations through risk assessing. Furthermore, it will help them develop

confidence in team building and advocating for their own ideas, beliefs and rights which will increase their social and emotional capabilities. We aim for the environment to provide quality resources so that children develop a love and enjoyment for the outdoors which they can take with them through life, leading to a healthy relationship with exercise and caring for the environment.

### Appendices

Appendix 1 - *HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6)*

Appendix 2 – *Opal roles within school.*

Appendix 3 – *The playwork principles*



## *Appendix I – HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6)*



Health and Safety  
Executive

### CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play

and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to

be done to control significant risks.

2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.

3. HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.

4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.

5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks<sup>1</sup>

and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's

primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration

and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the

realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one

where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.

7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing

them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

1 The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not

contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose

burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance does mean:

- ☐ Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities

- ☐ Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user

- ☐ Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity

- ☐ Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed

- ☐ Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance does not mean:

- ☐ All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced

- ☐ Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket

- ☐ Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities

- ☐ Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment

- ☐ Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers<sup>2</sup>

should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- ☐ The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced

- ☐ Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful

- ☐ Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and

cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have

been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or

that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

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## Appendix 2 – OPAL roles within school.



### **Curricular lead for play**

The curricular lead for play is responsible for driving all play-related initiatives forward within the school. In one form entry schools, they will be in SLT or an experienced teacher. In two form or above, they will be in SLT. This post requires one hour a week during the first year of the OPAL Primary Programme and one hour a fortnight after that.

The curricular lead for play is the person who has responsibility for the school's play action plan and the inclusion of play in the school improvement plan.

The curricular lead for play will report to:

- SLT
- Governors
- PTA

### **What the role entails:**

- Evaluating and monitoring play within the school.
- Being responsible for, supporting and managing the play team and their professional development.
- Managing the play coordinator and their professional development.
- Reviewing and updating the school's play action plan at least three times a year.
- Working closely with the play coordinator to deliver the school's play action plan.
- Carrying out observations of playtimes once every half term.
- Liaising with service support and/or the business manager regarding the maintenance and improvements of the outside area.
- Liaising with the play coordinator and the play team regarding the ordering and replenishing of loose parts and resources for play.
- Work with the play coordinator to ensure regular play team meetings are held to train in playwork practice and improve play at the school.
- Incorporating pupil voice for play into the school's communications plan
- Liaising with the play coordinator to ensure regular play assemblies are conducted using OPAL's CINI format.

## **Play Co-ordinator**

### **Purpose**

The play coordinator will support and facilitate meaningful and productive child-initiated play during the school day **in accordance with the play policy.**

### **Line management:**

The post holder is responsible to the headteacher and P.E. leader for fulfilling duties.

### **Statutory requirements:**

The post holder will have a responsibility to promote and safeguard the safety and welfare of children in accordance with the schools' safeguarding incorporating child protection policy; anti-bullying policy; behaviour policy; and in line with the school's values and mission statement.

### ***Responsibilities***

#### **Ensure wellbeing of pupils**

- Ensure that all play team staff are completing their main duties to a high standard and that all staff are facilitating play development.
- Ensure that you and your play team have read the play policy and are fully supportive of it.
- Ensure the safety, welfare and general conduct through appropriate application of the school's policies and procedures.
- Establish safe and proper behaviour, by appropriate intervention or referral to senior staff, as appropriate.
- Identify and report any unauthorised visitors on school premises.
- Complete any relevant documentation required by the school in relation to incidents occurring during the lunchtime break period.
- Participate in OPAL/team around the child (TAC)/medical meetings, as required.
- Ensure you and your play team are aware of children's special medical conditions and the relevant precautions and treatments necessary.
- Take any immediate action to attend to sickness or accidents by carrying out minor first aid and summoning relevant assistance.
- Report any major accidents or bumped heads to the class teacher, headteacher and pastoral leader and record in the accident book.

**Ensure a diverse range of playable resources are provided for, and are accessible to, all children**

- Ensure there are sufficient resources to promote each of the 'play types' as listed in the play policy.
- Check the quality and condition of resources and repair or remove any resources that are not of a suitable condition.
- Ensure resources are stored appropriately.

**Discuss resources with the children (school council) and use their views to create development plans**

Organise and carry out the replenishment of resources through:

- Securing funding from internal or external sources.
- Purchasing resources as required.
- Coordinating appeals within school and local communities for resources.
- Collecting resources from sources such as the Scrapstore.

**Provide support and training for other school staff or pupils as required**

- Build play team members expertise and practice.
- Organise and support pupil playground leaders with their role.
- Facilitate peer led play opportunities.
- Provide suggestions for playmaker activities and games.

**Ensure enriching play events or opportunities are created**

- Discuss and plan with pupils/staff and school council.
- Implement planned activities which promote play development.
- Review activities to promote self-evaluation and play development.

**Create opportunities for play to support the social and behavioural development of pupils**

- Ensure a rich and varied set of play opportunities is available to all children.
- Provide engaging playwork interventions for pupils who find positive behaviour choices challenging.

### **Governor play champion**

#### **Brief for governor responsible for play**

Governor responsible for play at the school will be required to:

- Observe and assess play within the school.
- Evaluate and monitor play within the school.
- Give feedback and support to the play team.
- Help to make improvements to play in the school.
- Attend play team meetings once a term.
- Gain feedback from the children.
- Report to and share with governors what has been observed and how play has been developed within the school.
- Share contributions and ideas from the wider community.
- Create links in the community that will develop play in the school, eg for sourcing loose parts or encouraging local councillors to see the importance of, and prioritise, play.

### **Parent play champion**

#### **Brief for parent play champion role**

The parent play champions will:

- Observe and assess playtime within the school at least once a year.
- Sit on the OPAL working party and attend development meetings.
- Support other parents to understand the school's approach to play.
- Advocate OPAL's approach and for children's play within the PTA and school community.
- Share contributions and ideas from parents and the wider community.
- Support the ongoing resourcing of loose parts from parents and the wider community.

### **Play Team member (Play worker)**

#### **1. Job purpose/overall description**

Working as a member of the play team, you will ensure that all our children have meaningful lunchtime play every day. You will work as a member of the play team to create a safe and stimulating outdoor environment providing social, active and creative play experiences for all. The play team is also responsible for ensuring that all our children have a pleasant eating experience at lunch time, whilst maximising the time they can spend outside playing. You will support all our children as they visit the dining hall and are responsible for clearing and cleaning the hall to a state ready for use (eg for PE, school assemblies) in the afternoon.

#### **2. Main duties**

- Work as part of the play team to cover all lunchtime tasks daily. This will include sessions outside and also sessions in the dining hall.
- Work with the play coordinator to ensure all children have access to exciting play opportunities every lunch time.
- Facilitate play opportunities and act as an ambassador for play.
- Work with the site manager, play coordinator, and play team members to ensure that all our children have a safe site for play.
- Coordinate and communicate between play zones and dining hall to ensure all children visit the dining hall and eat their lunch.
- Assess play areas for risks daily and communicating/implementing any changes required.
- Assist with putting out and packing away of play equipment/kit.
- Record and report incidents of note that occur during lunchtime – e.g. site issues, behaviour, first aid.
- Assess and deliver first aid to pupils (if trained). Assist with first aid reporting.
- Coordinate and communicate with the play coordinator, play colleagues and the catering team to ensure that all children visit the dining hall in a scheduled manner, to minimise queuing and maximise play time outside.
- Assist children at lunch, eg with queuing, getting seated, opening packets, spillages, disputes, clearing plates / cutlery and encouraging good eating and social skills.
- Clear and clean the hall during service (eg spillages, assisting with waste food, trays and cutlery).
- Clean, pack down and store all dining hall furniture at the end of lunch. Sweep the floor ready for use in the afternoon.
- Offer care, support and advice for children during lunchtime.
- Contribute ideas and suggestions to improve the team practices and performance.



- Promote and safeguard the safety and welfare of children in accordance with school child protection and behaviour management policies.
- Support and uphold the school's values system, our four school rules and reward pupils with verbal praise for positive attitudes and behaviours.
- Attend periodic team meetings and/or training for professional development.
- Assist with training new team members.

### **3. Job context**

The post holder will work under the general direction of the play coordinator. The play coordinator is directed by the headteacher/governing body who will take the lead on the strategic direction of the school, setting its philosophy and its vision. The post holder will have an important role in working directly with our children; working alongside the play coordinator and other play team members to deliver a programme of activities that is appropriate to the age and needs for the children in their care.

### **4. Supervision and work planning**

The play team member will not be required to supervise staff within the setting but will need to work with the play coordinator on planning activities for the children. It will be incumbent on the Play team to supervise children at all times. Please note: this supervision may be at some distance depending on the school's play policy (methods of supervision could include direct, remote and roaming).

### **5. Problems and decisions**

The play team member will be required to resolve day to day issues of a practical or routine nature amongst the children, but issues of an operational or organisational nature should be referred to the play coordinator.

### **6. Working environment**

The working environment will be part, or all of the school premises or accommodation selected by the school. Areas of high use are the outdoor play spaces (playgrounds, field, MUGAs, outdoor seating, wooded / scrub areas, 'The Beach', Mud Kitchen, Forest School area) and the dining hall, but not restricted to these.

## Appendix 3 – The playwork principles

### The playwork principles

*Keep a reflection diary to understand how you do these things*

#### 1. Understand Need

All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals.

#### 2. Understand Process

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

#### 3. Support Process

The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

#### 4. Advocate for Play

For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

#### 5. Create Spaces

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

#### 6. Learn and Reflect

The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, reflective practice.

#### 7. Understand Impact

Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

#### 8. Choose Intervention Styles

Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker interventions must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

