

Play Policy



“Play is our brain’s favourite way of learning.”

Diane Ackerman - American author

1. Commitment

At Fulbourn Primary school we recognise that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood and we believe that it is vital in supporting children’s overall wellbeing as well as fundamental in supporting children’s physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. To reflect this commitment we have entered into an agreement with OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision. We will create plans to develop the school grounds over several years and continually develop the range of play experiences available to our children. Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children’s play.

As a school we will strive to provide high quality sustainable play opportunities for all children, regardless of their needs and abilities. Inclusive play is achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces and providing equipment that offer a rich choice of accessible play opportunities.



2. Rationale

During the schools ‘Dreams’ phase in 2023, the school community identified a desire to enhance the quality of children’s play with the intention that it would support positive behaviour, children’s

wellbeing and develop children's creativity and problem solving. There is also a strong desire amongst the school community for children to spend more time outside in nature.

***Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play.
Therefore, this time needs to be valued and planned for.***

Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

As an OPAL Play school, we share their vision: 'that every child in every school has an amazing hour of high-quality play every day – with no exceptions.'



Our 4 Cs

We believe that good quality play provides an opportunity for children to develop in the four key qualities that underpin our school's core values; courage, curiosity, compassion and creativity.

- Courage** Play will promote children's independence and give them courage to engage in new experiences, to develop the skills to risk assess their play and develop both physical and emotional resilience.
- Curiosity** Children will explore a range of environments that will allow them to explore and play imaginatively, to follow their curiosity to test out and problem solve ideas to build on their curriculum learning and to better understand the world around them.
- Compassion** Children will develop respect for their surroundings and each other. Children will develop their social skills, ability to work together and to learn to negotiate with compassion and engage in meaningful peer relationships through play.

Creativity Children will be invited to explore a range of equipment and carefully considered spaces that spark their imagination and stimulate their creativity.

3. Definition and value of play

“Play is the work of the child.”

Maria Montessori

The Government’s Play Strategy defines play as:

‘encompassing children’s behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live’.

This activity meets the four components of a child’s development:

- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).



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.



Loose Parts

Loose parts refer to anything in the play environment that is not fixed and that children can use as part of their play. Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The vital ingredients for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves. These will be stored in allocated areas both outside and in the OPAL storage shed.

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, spiritual and intellectual development.

- 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 and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.
- Develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

5. Rights

Our school is a Bronze Rights Respecting School and 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.

Pupil voice is very important to us and we are committed to working with the children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in our school. Our Environment, Wellbeing and Curriculum Committees all have play as a standing agenda item in the meetings.



“Everything in life has some risk, and what you have to learn to do is navigate it.”

Reid Hoffman

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)* 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)*.

'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 dangers'. (HSE, 2013)

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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.



An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely-chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to independently judge risks, problem solve, learn new skills and develop emotional and physical resilience. Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk children's development is inhibited, which reduces their ability to deal with the wider unsupervised world.

'Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury'

Play Safety Forum.

Children should be encouraged and supported to encounter and manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be rather than completely devoid of risk.

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily basis by the Play Team. The site manager will ensure annual checks are carried out on engineered and fixed equipment. These checks will be kept in the Health and Safety File on Teams.

Risk-benefit assessments will be carried out for activities involving risks presented by environment, materials or practices deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of serious injury or harm. All risk-benefits will be carried out by the OPAL Curriculum Lead and OPAL Play Coordinator. Electronic copies will be kept in the OPAL file on Teams. Paper copies will be kept in the OPAL file in Sherwood.

The Play Team, guided by the Play Coordinator will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led by the Play Team.

It is the responsibility of all staff to work within agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments.

It is the responsibility of the members of the Play Team to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Play Coordinator as soon as possible.

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.



8. 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 (Appendix 2). 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.

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. Play leaders ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. They are also available to participate in the play if invited. Adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

Play Team

At our school the adults that support playtimes are referred to as The Play Team. The Play Team's role, led by the play co-ordinator, is to enrich and diversify play without taking ownership of play away from the children in line with the playwork principles.

The Play team will practice 'dynamic risk management' when on duty. This means they will be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place in their allocated zone and support children to assess and manage their own risk as much as possible for themselves, but will also be vigilant and take immediate action, if ever they think that a risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely.

Play Coordinator

The Play Coordinator has an oversight and leadership role at all lunchtime playtimes and has responsibility to source and maintain plentiful loose parts.

Curriculum Lead for Play

The curricular lead for play is responsible for driving all play-related initiatives forward within the school and will work closely with the play coordinator to deliver the school's play action plan.

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

Children will have opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment and in doing so will learn about their impact of their actions on their environment developing a love for and a desire to look after our environment. This will link to the school's Eco Curriculum where children are taught to be stewards of our school site, thinking about how we impact the school environment now and how we take care of it for the pupils of the future.

Children will be responsible for working together to tidy up equipment, developing a sense of shared responsibility and independence.

Appendix 1 - Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide playworkers with a common language for describing play.

1 Symbolic Play – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth e.g. using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.

2 Rough and Tumble Play – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.

3 Socio-dramatic Play – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.

4 Social Play – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended e.g. any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols i.e. games, conversations, making something together.

5 Creative Play – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell e.g. enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self-expression through any medium, making things, changing things.

6 Communication Play – play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles / emails/ internet, skipping games, group and ball games.

7 Dramatic Play – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator e.g. presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.

8 Locomotor Play – movement in any or every direction for its own sake eg chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.

9 Deep Play – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear e.g. light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc e.g. leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.

10 Exploratory Play – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects eg engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.

11 Fantasy Play – This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child’s imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child’s way, a way that is unlikely to occur e.g. playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be where ever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be the list is endless as is a child’s imagination.

12 Imaginative Play – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply e.g. imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.

13 Mastery Play – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments e.g. digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.

14 Object Play – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements e.g. examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.

15 Role Play – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.

16 Recapitulative Play – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.



Appendix 2 - The Playwork Principles

These principles establish the professional and ethical framework for Playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and Playwork and provide the Playwork perspective for working with children and young people.

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.

Appendix 3 - HSE 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 risks¹ 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 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 providers² 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

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 Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

² 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.