



3.1 OPAL play policy

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."

Laurel Avenue Community Primary School – Where Children Shine

Our vision is for the community to see Laurel Avenue as their school, a success in the community; a happy school where everyone is valued and respected. To enable each child to achieve their full potential and make the most of the opportunities and choices offered to them, we aim to provide a secure and stimulating environment that promotes independence, self-esteem, health and well-being.

Our mission statement:

Dream, Believe, Achieve.

This reflects our understanding and beliefs. We aim to ensure that the children at our school are provided with high-quality learning experiences based on a broad and balanced curriculum.

It promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school. This leads to a consistently high level of pupil achievement, preparing pupils for the challenges, opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

At Laurel Avenue Community Primary School we believe that a happy child is a successful one. We are committed to providing a positive, safe and stimulating environment for children to learn, where all are valued. We intend that all children should enjoy their learning, achieve their potential and become life-long learners.

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.*

To value play, it is important to uphold and maintain areas and equipment:

- *Fixed play areas will be inspected annually and results will be recorded.*
- *Monthly ongoing inspection of fixed play equipment will be carried out and recorded.*
- *Daily inspections of equipment will be carried out by the play team to ensure equipment is safe for use.*
- *Intentional inspections such as litter and hazards will be carried out daily by play supervisors daily.*

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.*

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.

You may want to link the idea of rights to your school's values.

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).

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.

At Laurel Avenue Community Primary School, we believe that children are able to learn from all opportunities, and during those opportunities they may come across risks. We believe it is important for children to experience risk and challenge:

- *To help children develop physically and improve physical competence*
- *To improve children's confidence*
- *To increase children's resilience*
- *For children to develop survival skills*
- *For children to develop their ability of dealing with stress*
- *For children to develop their ability to manage and deal with risks*
- *To improve emotional regulation*
- *For fun and enjoyment*
- *To improve self esteem and confidence*
- *To increase and improve body proprioception*

See Appendix 1. – HSE Managing risk statement

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.

Supervisors will use ranging and direct 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. Direct supervision will be used for specific children with high level of needs. As ever, adults will wear yellow jackets, to be clearly visible during play and lunch times.

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. 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. 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.

See Appendix 2. – Playwork principles

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.

A rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children to develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

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

Signed: G Davison

Headteacher

Date: November 2025

Signed: C Linfoot

Chair of Governors

Date: November 2025



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

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])

Appendix 2: Playwork Principles

Playwork Principles



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. That is, 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.

