



Meadow Vale Primary

OPAL Play Policy

Status of Policy	Date
DFE/Statutory/Bracknell Forest Model/School	School
Review Cycle	Two years
Date Policy Written	November 2023
Date Policy last reviewed	/
Next review Date	November 2025
Required to be on the school website?	Yes

In partnership with the whole school community and through an engaging curriculum, we aspire to nurture and empower every child to flourish.

We will encourage, inspire, motivate and support them to achieve their potential so they become confident, considerate, resilient and active members of society.

1. Commitment

Following the school's decision to partner with play specialist company – OPAL (Outside Play and Learning) to develop 'Amazing play, every day for every child', this policy outlines our daily commitment to providing the strategic and daily operational leadership needed to provide and maintain, safe, high quality play provision for all our children.

Meadow Vale Primary School believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate and experience 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.

2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, improved technology, 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.

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.*"

3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It should meet the four components of a child's development: physical, intellectual, educational and social. At Meadow Vale Primary School, we believe play has many benefits therefore we aim 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 which 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.
- Enable 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.
- Encourage self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Maintain children’s openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

These align seamlessly with our 3 school rules: ‘Ready, Respectful and Safe’.

Ready	Respectful	Safe
Everyone should be ready for every social and academic learning experience at school and demonstrate this through their attitude and behaviour.	Everyone is expected to be respectful to themselves, each other and our school community and demonstrate this through the language we use and the behaviour we show.	Everyone is expected to behave in a way that is safe in all areas of school life.

4. Rights

Meadow Vale Primary 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.

The OPAL initiative complements our school values of ‘Learning’, encouraging our children to learn through play; ‘Believing’, developing a healthy and curious sense of imaginative play and ‘Achieving’ a successful playtime filled with positive social interactions and creative play.

5. 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)

Meadow Vale Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding document in making decisions relating to risk and play. Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and will practise dynamic risk management (**Appendix 2**) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs. This approach will encourage the children to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support this.

Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. In the words of 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’.

Risk assessments of all play provision within the school should be reviewed on an annual basis or whenever significant change, development in play provision or equipment occurs.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practice ongoing risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

6. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During outdoor play, there should be one or more adult present. Meadow Vale Primary 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.

The structure of the Meadow Vale Play Team is as follows:

Catherine Forrester	-	Headteacher
Ian Freeman	-	Play Curricular Lead
Zoe Galani	-	Play Curricular Lead
Michelle Woodhouse	-	Play Governor
Lenny Brown	-	Play Coordinator
Louise Kadege	-	Play Champion Parent Role

7. 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 3**). 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. School Council meetings will encourage a continued dialogue with children regarding their thoughts about play and will be summarised in the annual pupil survey.

The play team'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 across the 16 play types (**Appendix 4**). A skilled and experienced member of the play team 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. The play team 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 or change the play space if this is required.

8. Children's role in play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (**Appendix 5**). The children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, interactions with the School Council and during discussions and dialogue in class.

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' (**Appendix 6**) to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Appendix 1 – Health and Safety Executive’s Guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure [Microsoft Word - Document2 \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/microsoft-word-document2)

Appendix 2 – Benefit Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Appendix 3 – Playwork Principles

Appendix 4 – 16 different play types

Appendix 5 – Child friendly Play Policy

Appendix 6 – Best Play – What play provision should do for children



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

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.

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.

September 2012

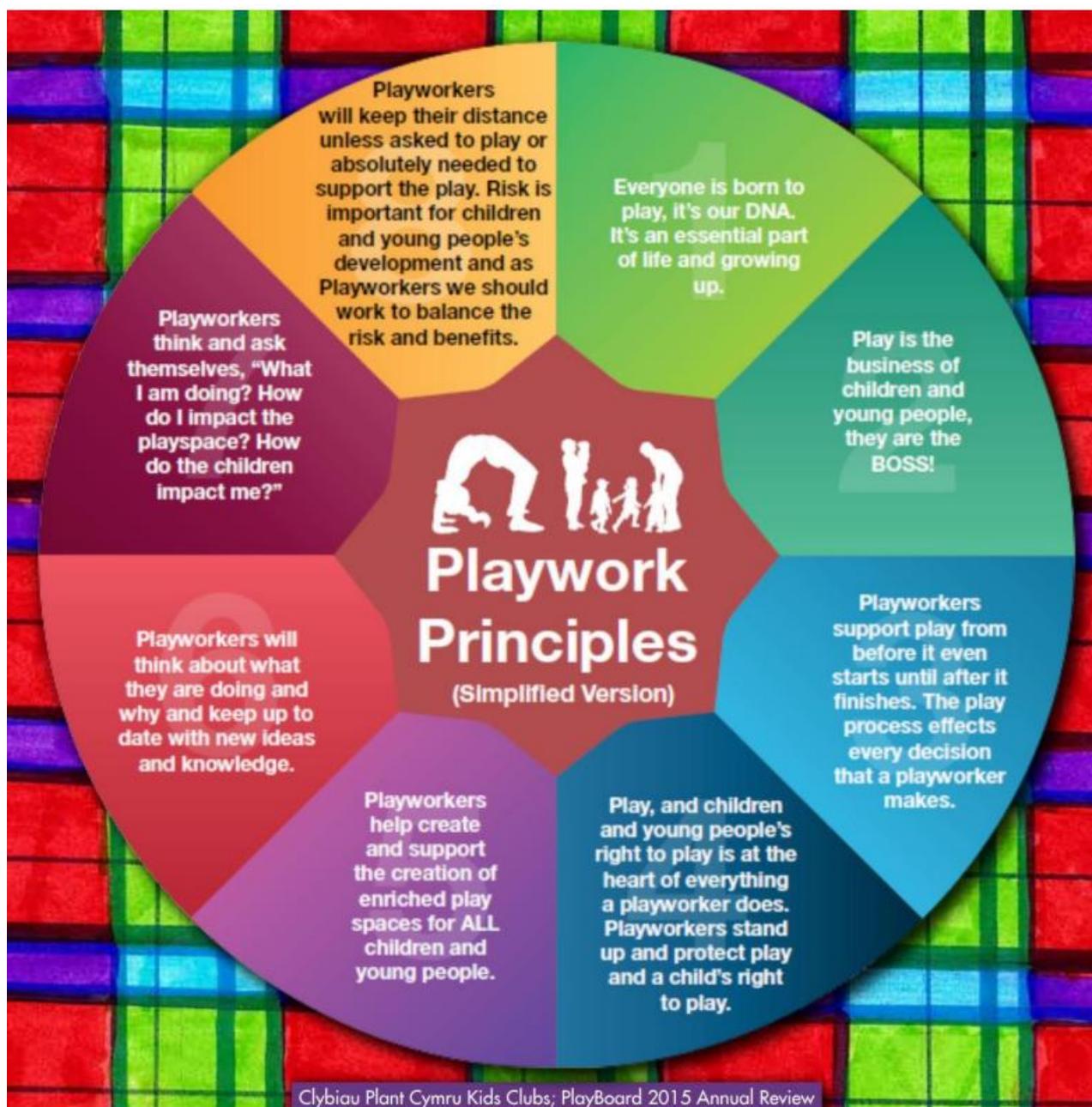
Appendix 2 – Benefit Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Risk-benefit assessment date:

Assessed by:

Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date

Appendix 3 – Playwork Principles



Appendix 4 – 16 different play types

SYMBOLIC PLAY

Using objects, actions or ideas to represent other objects, actions, or ideas, e.g., using a cardboard tube as a telescope.

ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display and it's friendly and positive. This type of play can burn up a lot of energy.

SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY

When children act out experiences, e.g., playing house, going to the shops or going to a restaurant.

SOCIAL PLAY

Any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game or while making something together.

CREATIVE PLAY

Allows children to explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different items, altering something and making something new.

COMMUNICATION PLAY

Play using words, gestures, e.g., charades, telling jokes, play acting, etc.

DRAMATIC PLAY

Play where children figure out roles to play, assign them and then act them out.

LOCOMOTOR PLAY

Movement for movement's sake, just because it's fun. Things like chase, tag, hide and seek and tree climbing fall into this category.

DEEP PLAY

Play which allows the child to encounter risky experiences and conquer fears, like heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects, etc.

EXPLORATORY PLAY

Using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them. An example of this would be a baby mouthing an object.

FANTASY PLAY

This is the make-believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild, and they get to play out things that are that are unlikely to occur, like being a pilot or driving a car.

IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply, like imagining you are a bee or pretending you have wings.

MASTERY PLAY

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments, like digging holes or constructing shelters.

OBJECT PLAY

Play which uses sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements, like using a paintbrush.

ROLE PLAY

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intensely personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example brushing with a broom, dialing with a telephone.

RECAPITULATIVE PLAY

Play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness.



Appendix 5 – Child friendly Play Policy



Children's Play Policy

PLAY SAFE

We have the right to:	We have the responsibility to:
Have fun at playtimes...	Make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.
Make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do...	Make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.
Choose who we play with and include others...	Make sure that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.
Play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment...	Take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.
Explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks...	Think about what we are doing and talk to an adult about the risks we are taking if they ask us to.



Appendix 6 – Best Play – What play provision should do for children

See <https://www.playscotland.org/resources>