



Play Policy

Commitment

Perryfields Primary will refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play, including the role of supervising adults. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all our children.

Rationale

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to discover, explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, physical needs, disabilities, 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."*

Definition and Value of Play

At Perryfields Primary, 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.

Play directly supports the school's commitment to holistic development and the creation of a safe, inclusive, and aspirational learning community. The values of respect, kindness, honesty and tolerance embedded in the school's vision are naturally cultivated through high-quality play.

Alignment with the School's Values and high standards

Respect

- Children learn to respect each other's ideas, personal space, and individuality through collaborative and imaginative play.
- Respect for equipment and the environment is expected and reinforced as pupils take responsibility for resources and tidy-up routines.
- Inclusive play spaces promote respect for diverse needs, abilities, and preferences.

Kindness

- Children learn to offer help, share equipment, and include others in games, building a culture of care.
- Play encourages empathy as children notice when others are upset, need support, or want someone to play with.
- Older or more confident pupils naturally take on nurturing roles, modelling kind behaviour for younger peers.

Honesty

- Through games and shared activities, children practise being truthful about rules, mistakes, or accidents.
- Play provides safe opportunities to admit errors, negotiate solutions, and restore trust.
- When conflicts occur, children learn to express feelings honestly and resolve disagreements through open communication.

Tolerance

- Varied and inclusive play experiences teach children to accept and value differences in how others choose to play.
- Mixed-age and mixed-ability play builds understanding of different perspectives and ways of interacting.
- When children encounter disagreements or unfamiliar behaviours, they develop patience and the ability to compromise.

Links to Other School Policies

The OPAL approach supports and enhances:

- **Behaviour Policy:** By promoting cooperation, self-regulation, positive relationships, and reduced conflict.
- **Safeguarding Policy:** By ensuring safe, supervised, and well-designed outdoor environments.
- **Teaching & Learning Policy:** By strengthening skills that underpin academic progress, such as resilience, communication, and problem-solving.
- **SEND/Inclusion Policy:** By providing accessible, equitable play opportunities tailored to diverse needs.
- **Wellbeing & Mental Health Policy:** Through active, creative, and restorative play that improves emotional health.

OPAL also aligns with:

- **DfE: Childhood and Play Guidance** – emphasises the importance of active, inclusive play in improving health and wellbeing.
- **PE and School Sport Premium Expectations** – encourages physically active play and daily movement opportunities.
- **Statutory EYFS Framework** – highlights play as the central mode of learning for young children.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** – acknowledges play as protective and supportive of emotional development.
- **SEND Code of Practice** – requires equitable access to activities, which OPAL supports through inclusive design.
- **Equality and Diversity policy.**
- **Childhood Obesity Plan** – increases daily physical activity through natural, playful movement.

Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure all play settings and opportunities 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.

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.

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.

The full HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) is included in this policy (Appendix 1).

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.

The school has identified play zones (**see Site Map in Appendix 2**) which are each supervised by a member of the play team through a ranging approach. Where the school has identified play which poses additional risk, a Risk Assessment will need to be completed and a member of staff we have allocated in the Zone to give direct supervision.

Our extensive grounds and diverse range of equipment provide all children with opportunities to find their preferred play style. This rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children 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.

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.

A copy of the Playworks Principles can be found in Appendix 3 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.

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 We also have access to the OPAL college resource to share examples of good practice.

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
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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
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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:

The aerial map of Perryfields Primary School playground is divided into several zones, each with specific play equipment and activities:

- Re-wilding:** Located at the top left, featuring a circular pattern of concentric lines.
- Art-Making:** A yellow circle at the top.
- Small World:** Two yellow circles below Art-Making.
- Lego:** A blue circle below the first Small World.
- LLP Depot:** A blue circle below Lego.
- Sports:** A large orange rectangle on the left side.
- Cardboard + Scrap play:** A large blue rectangle in the center.
- Shed:** A small blue circle below Cardboard + Scrap play.
- Social Spaces:** A blue circle below the shed.
- Hammock:** A yellow circle below Social Spaces.
- Wheels Storage:** A blue circle to the right of Cardboard + Scrap play.
- Wheel Play:** A blue circle to the right of Wheels Storage.
- Music wall:** A blue circle below Wheel Play.
- Forest Play:** A light blue rectangle on the right side.
- Garden Games:** A blue rectangle below Cardboard + Scrap play.
- Social Spaces:** A blue circle below Garden Games.
- Messy Cafe:** A blue circle below Social Spaces.
- Digging:** A blue circle to the right of Messy Cafe.
- Sandpit:** A light blue rectangle at the bottom left.
- Large Loose Parts:** A large red rectangle on the left side.
- Shed:** A yellow rectangle to the right of the school building.
- Wheels Storage:** A blue circle to the right of the shed.
- Wheel Play:** A blue circle to the right of the wheels storage.
- Music wall:** A blue circle below the wheel play.
- Forest Play:** A light blue rectangle on the right side.
- Garden Games:** A blue rectangle below the school building.
- Social Spaces:** A blue circle below Garden Games.
- Messy Cafe:** A blue circle below Social Spaces.
- Digging:** A blue circle to the right of Messy Cafe.
- Sandpit:** A light blue rectangle at the bottom left.

Four inset photos on the left side show children engaged in different play activities:

- Children playing in a sandpit.
- Children playing with large loose parts.
- Children playing in a social space.
- Children playing in a garden area.



Perryfields Primary

2025-2026

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.