



Westfield Primary Community School

Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy

Approved By:	Full Governing Body
Date:	July 2024
Review Date:	July 2027

Vision for Westfield

Together we strive to:

Inspire a love for our community through mutual respect, teamwork and the shared belief that anything is possible

Create a learning culture which recognises potential, celebrates achievement and respects individuality

Nurture strong relationships in a safe and secure environment, where opinions are valued and kindness is the core

Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy



Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'



1. OPAL

The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is that "... better, more active and creative play times 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."

2. Our 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.

3. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent 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.

Our school believes that play nurtures relationships with oneself and others. It relieves stress and increases happiness. It builds feelings of empathy, creativity, and collaboration. It supports the growth of sturdiness and grit. When children are deprived of opportunities for play, their development can be significantly impaired.

All children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience, understand and connect with 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.

Through providing a rich play offer that meets 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.

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

At Westfield Primary Community School, the play curriculum has been expertly tailored to enable children to become resilient, co-operative and managed risk-takers. Our committed OPAL team and dedicated Play Makers will ensure that pupils are given opportunities to gain important skills and knowledge to develop their learning journey through the means of play.

Our Westfield Virtues form the foundation of our approach to play through:

- Encouraging kindness through sensitivity to other's feelings; empowering them to continue to develop through encouragement and challenge through passionate teaching.
- Developing the resilience to become creative, active learners who are not afraid to take risks and see mistakes as opportunities for learning.
- Challenging each other's thinking, celebrating successes and working as an effective team.
- Becoming reflective learners who share their opinions with kindness and honesty to shape future learning and opportunities with their peers.
- Promoting a culture of respect by creating positive classroom experiences, where children feel safe to share their opinions, debate sensitive topics and know their voice matters.
- The celebration of all learning to instil confidence in our children and ensuring aspirations are high for everyone so all can succeed.

4. Definition 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.

- 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.

5. Our Vision for Play

At Westfield Primary Community School, we have high expectations for play. We believe that play should be free with calculated risk to develop children as active risk takers, who are aware of their environment, preparing them for later life. We strive for all of the areas of play to be evident in our play areas, to enable children to reap the many benefits this can provide.

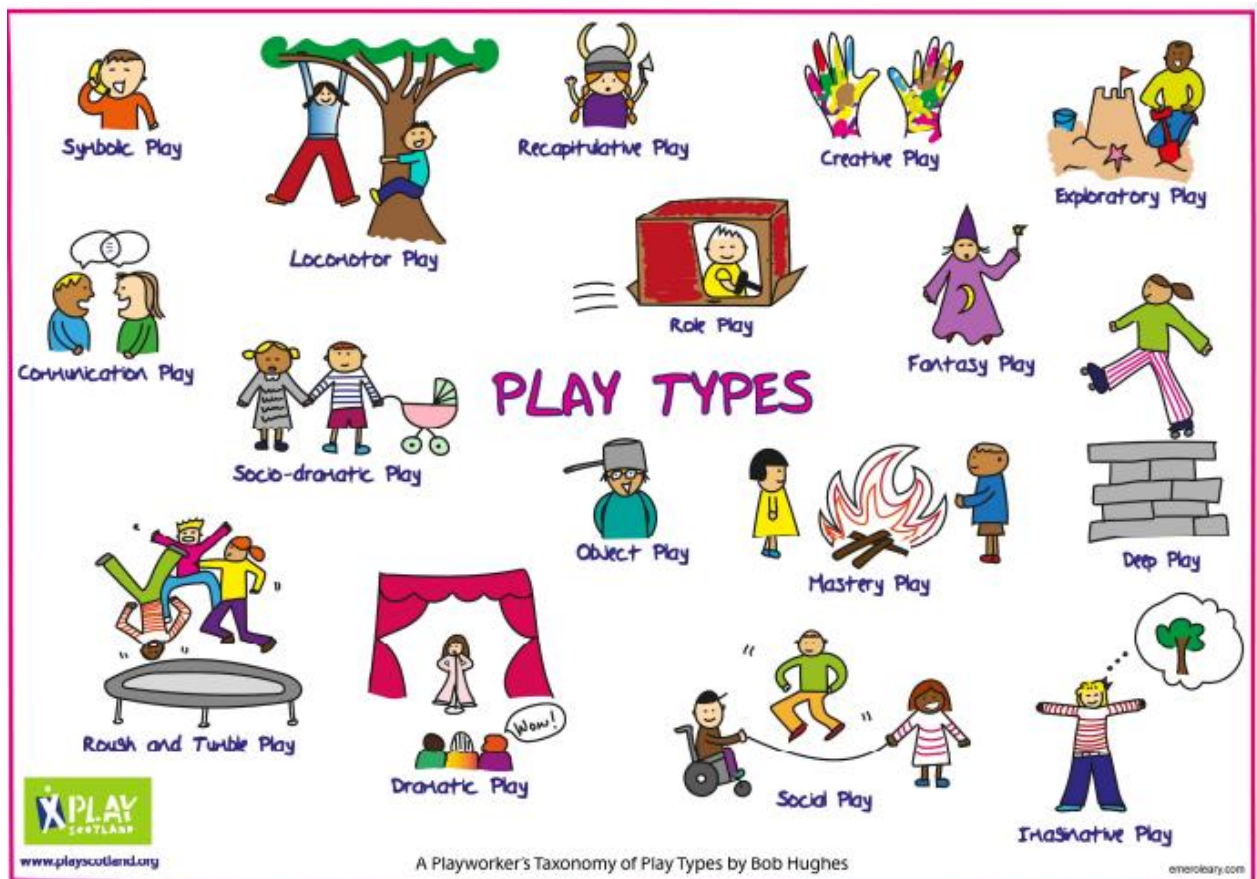
Play is an extremely important element of children's school life and should therefore be carefully planned for.

In our context, play matters because it is a safe space, promotes conversations, inspires creativity and teamwork, respecting individuals, nurtures strong relationships, develops curiosity and self-confidence.

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.

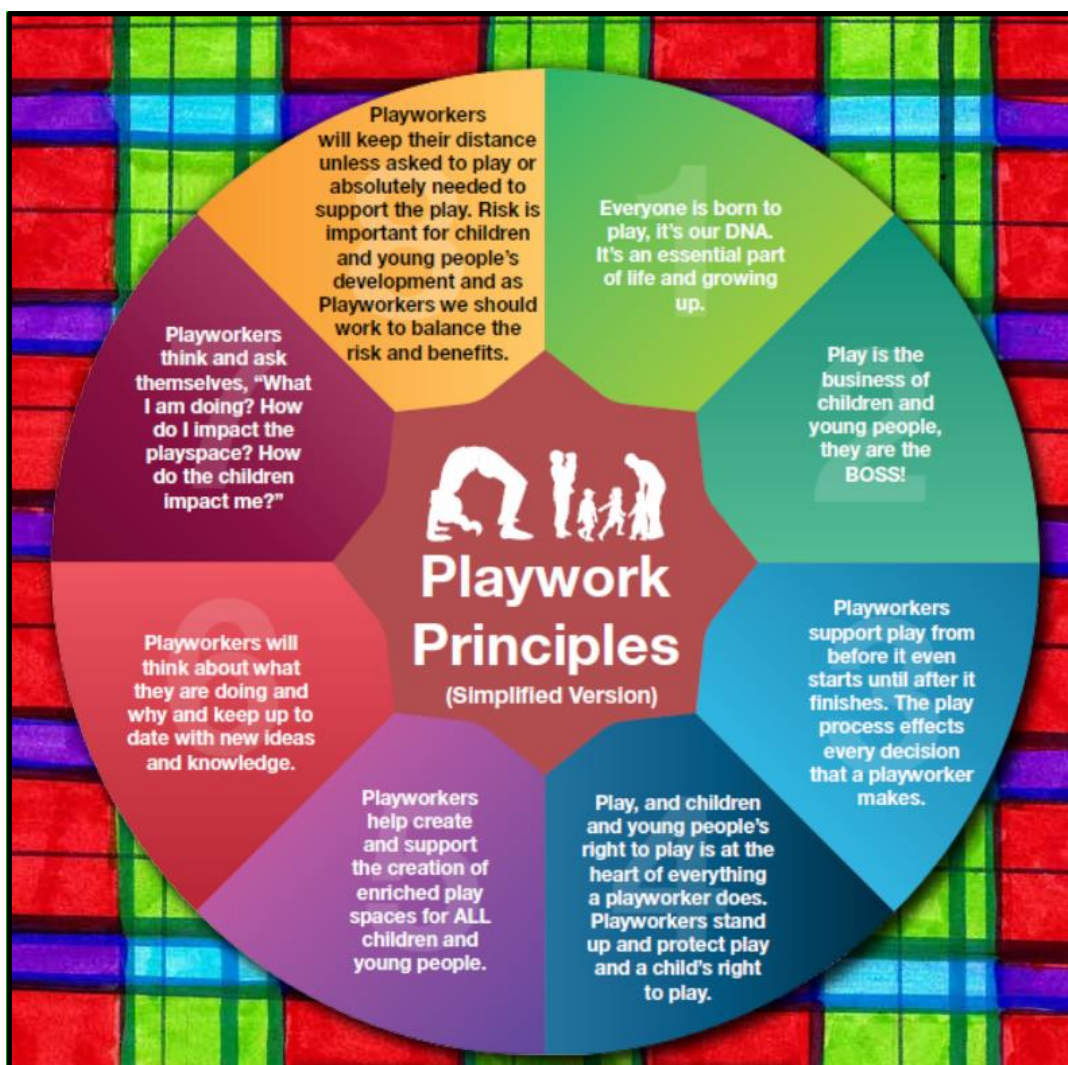
- Let children develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.



6. The Adults' 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 playmaker'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. Adults should participate in play, only if invited or needed; they should know how and when to intervene.



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.

Remote – this is where a supervisor or supervisors are located at a relatively static location some distance from an activity, e.g. supervisor on the playground and activity 20 metres or more away. This style is widely used in other countries and its purpose is for an adult to be present to respond rapidly to an accident or serious behaviour incident.

Ranging – this is where the supervisor moves around the play area, usually on a set course/schedule. The distance from pupils therefore differs but can be 20 metres or more away. On a large site, supervisors should have zones so that they know which parts of the site they are covering and they should modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk.

The school facilitates the use of OPAL equipment during the hours of 9.00am-3:15pm Monday to Friday. We do not recommend children using this equipment outside of school hours and if parents/carers wish to let their children do so, parents/carers will have full responsibility for this.

7. Children's Role in Play

The children will have access to their own version of the play policy (Appendix 2). In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to -

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences

- Respect and look after each other, their environment, equipment and toys
- To take ownerships of their own behaviour
- Ensure that play times are fun for everybody

8. **Risk and Benefit**

'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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. All staff are aware of the HSE Managing Risk Statement (4.6) and have access to this. Please see appendix 1 for further information.

9. **Consulting our Community**

We understand that allowing children access to the fields all year round, in addition to resources which could be muddy, can impact on parents' wash load. We firmly believe the benefits and happiness of the children, along with the other benefits mentioned previously, outweigh the cons. Children should always have a waterproof jacket or coat in school but they may also have separate bottoms and a pair of wellies so they can access the field at all times. If parents do not wish for their child to access the field in wet weather, they should ensure their child is aware and understands the request. All support from parents is sincerely appreciated.

Our baseline children's survey indicated:

- inconsistent messages from staff regarding what the children have permission to do - mainly associated whether the children are allowed to play on the grass related/what equipment the children are allowed to use/certain games children are allowed to play
- 67% of children said they are not allowed on the grass or in bushes every day
- 69% of children said there are places around the playground where they want to play but aren't allowed
- 59% of children said there isn't stuff to build with
- 22% of children said adults stop them playing what they want
- Only 51% of children said they enjoy playtimes

Our baseline parents' survey indicated:

- 47% of parents indicated they thought playtime was too short
- 75% of parents said that playtime helped them develop friendships
- 50% of parents said they didn't think their child had the same opportunities to play outdoors as they did - parents highlighted that the streets aren't safe/there is less freedom/too much technology access that hinders play/more restrictions due to increased perceived risk

- Parents indicated reasons as to why they stopped their children playing outdoors - weather/unkind teens/a child bought out a blade/bullying/videogames/lack of safe space in our community

Appendices

Appendix 1 - HSE Managing Risk Statement

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 benchmarks that can help.

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])

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

Children's Play Policy

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).

- 1** We have the right to have fun at playtimes. It is how we enjoy ourselves.
- 2** We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do.
- 3** We have the right to choose who we play with.
- 4** We have the right to play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment.
- 5** We have the right to explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks.