



Moorlands Primary School

High Expectations, High Achievements, Challenge and Enjoyment for All

PLAY Policy

Name of Policy Writer/Amendments	Date Written/Amended	Next Review Date	Approved by Governors
Hannah Woodhouse	8 th December 2025		

1. Introduction and Rationale

At Moorlands Primary School, we believe play is a fundamental part of every child's development. Children need opportunities to explore, experiment, imagine, collaborate, take risks, and challenge themselves. Play enables children to connect with their environment and each other in meaningful ways.

Moorlands Primary School has chosen to adopt the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) methodology to transform our playgrounds and playtimes into safe, inclusive, and stimulating environments that support all aspects of children's development. OPAL is a nationally recognised programme that promotes high-quality, child-led outdoor play, encouraging independence, creativity, resilience, and wellbeing.

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."

2. Definition and Value of Play

Play is defined as an intrinsically motivated process that is freely chosen and directed by the child. It holds its own purpose and value, and may occur with or without equipment or other people.

The value of play includes:

- Supporting children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual development.
- Enabling exploration of the environment and different concepts.
- Enhancing self-esteem and understanding of others through diverse social interactions.
- Developing communication, negotiation, and responsibility skills.
- Allowing children to experience and manage a wide range of emotions.
- Encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and independent decision-making.
- Maintaining openness to learning and pushing personal boundaries.

3. Aims

- Provide varied, challenging, and stimulating play environments.
- Enable children to take appropriate risks using a common-sense approach to risk management.
- Support the development of positive relationships among children.
- Foster respect for surroundings and for each other.
- Promote physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual development.
- Offer environments that encourage imaginative and exploratory play.
- Provide opportunities that support learning across the curriculum and understanding of the wider world.
- Encourage independence, teamwork, and collaboration.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

4. Benefit and Risk

Play is essential for children's wellbeing and development. The school recognises that the goal is not to eliminate risk but to balance risks and benefits. Children learn about risk through experience, and overprotection can limit this learning.

Moorlands Primary School follows the Health and Safety Executive guidance (Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach, 2012) (*Appendix B*) and adopts a risk-benefit approach as outlined in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012). Risk-taking is an integral part of play and helps children develop confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills.

The school will:

- Conduct risk-benefit assessments for play activities.
- Practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks with adult support.
- Ensure children's voices are considered, supporting appropriate risk-taking such as tree climbing, hill rolling, and digging.

Specific Risks:

Cycle Helmet Use During OPAL Play

OPAL guidance advises that compulsory helmet use during spontaneous play can create hazards (e.g., head entrapment, vision obstruction). However, Moorlands Primary requires

helmets for cycling activities to align with Bikeability and road safety training. Helmets will be fitted by adults, and cycling zones will be supervised at all times.

Rough and Tumble

Although recognised as a type of play, rough and tumble (e.g., play fighting, wrestling) is not permitted at Moorlands Primary due to risks of injury and distress. All play must follow the Behaviour and Relational Policy, ensuring:

- Respect for personal space and safety.
- Avoidance of harmful physical contact.
- Safe, inclusive, and respectful play.

Symbolic Play and Conflict Play

- Focus on impact rather than content.
- Ensure consent from all participants.
- Prevent involvement of non-participants.
- Intervene if symbolic conflict affects others.

5. Supervision

Children must be supervised during play. Moorlands Primary adopts OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote, and Ranging. Direct supervision is reserved for Reception, children with additional need and children during orientation; for others, remote and ranging supervision is used to encourage independence. Children with additional needs may visit new areas of play with an adult, prior to it being open to all children, in small groups or individually to support with boundaries and understanding.

Daily Supervision Plan:

- Play Team members check their allocated zone each day.
- Zones may change due to staff absence or other factors.
- Staff carry radios for communication and make dynamic risk assessments, moving zones if needed.
- Play Team attend OPAL meetings to share concerns and risks.
- All staff understand the principles of direct, remote, and ranging supervision.

Adult Role in Play:

Adults support children's play by creating environments that stimulate play, acting in accordance with Play work Principles, providing resources, and using 'Language for Play' (*Appendix A*) strategies to resolve conflicts and support positive interactions.

6. Equality and Diversity

Moorlands Primary is committed to providing a rich and inclusive play offer that meets the needs of every child. All children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or special needs, will have equal opportunities to develop, thrive, build relationships, and enjoy school through play.

Appendix A

Language to Support PlayDoc 5.8

SUPPORTING PLAY:

How to supervise challenging play outdoors

We encourage play supervisors to follow these helpful steps before intervening in play they feel is challenging or risky. This approach allows for the adult to fully comprehend the situation so their intervention can be more informed and effective. It also provides some time for children to practice independent risk assessment and conflict management.

- 1. WATCH:** Get a good understanding of what is going on, and determine if children are managing risk independently.
- 2. WAIT:** Check-in with yourself, and weigh your fear against actual risk.
- 3. MOVE CLOSER:** Get another perspective. Does your presence cue the children to manage the situation differently?
- 4. INTERVENE *without* SHUTTING DOWN THE PLAY:** Inform children about the risks and provide guidelines for them to manage those risks. Negotiate some modifications with the children to manage the risks differently (e.g. moving activity from asphalt to grass).

PLAY PROMPTS:

Language to support play

These prompts were developed by an OPAL school in Canada to support children taking responsibility for their play. This same language is used to guide discussions about play inside the school, in the classroom, at assemblies and on school display boards.

- ✓ Are you having fun?
- ✓ Is it safe enough for you?
- ✓ Are you including others?

© OPAL 2020 1

Language to Support PlayDoc 5.8

LANGUAGE TO SUPPORT PLAY:

Instead of saying NO - try these!

Many social conflicts and behavioural issues during play time are motivated by feelings of frustration or anger towards the many restrictions during playtimes. Instead of saying NO, try to support the child's play and help them to work through solutions to continue safely and make better decisions in the future.

When children are play fighting with loose parts:

- ✓ "Are you still having fun? If not, maybe you should play with something/ someone else."
- ✓ "Have you checked in with your partner? Is she/ he still having fun?"
- ✓ "What would happen if you hit each other's face /head/ eyes?"
- ✓ "Are you aiming below the shoulders?"

When children are climbing/ managing heights:

- ✓ "Do you feel safe?", "What would happen if...?", "What's your next step?"
- ✓ "Do you think that's stable? How can we make that work?"
- ✓ "Look around. Have you checked to see if anyone near you could get hurt?"

When children are in an area that is challenging to supervise or off limits:

- ✓ "Why have you chosen this spot to play? Is there any spot in the grounds that has the same features (e.g. shade, privacy, slopes, mud etc.)?"
- ✓ "Do you know why this area is out of bounds?"
- ✓ "Is there anywhere else you could play?"

© OPAL 2020 2



Other Helpful Communication Prompts(1)

- ✓ Stay focused on what you're doing
- ✓ What is your next move?
- ✓ Do you feel safe there?
- ✓ Take your time
- ✓ Does that branch feel strong and stable?

- ✓ I'm here if you need me.
- ✓ Please find a safe spot for your stick while you're running.
- ✓ I've noticed that this is a really busy area. What are some of the things we need to watch out for with so many kids around? (and give some examples). Or,
- ✓ Let's move this to a lower-traffic zone.

- ✓ I've noticed that there are a lot of fallen trees and sticks to trip on here.
- ✓ Should we move this game to a more open area?
- ✓ Sticks need space. Mike, please back up from Sarah. She's holding a big stick!
- ✓ Sticks need space. Look around. Do you have enough space to swing that big stick?
- ✓ What's your plan with that big stick?

- ✓ Rocks need space!
- ✓ Find more space!
- ✓ Before you throw that rock, what do you need to look for?
- ✓ That rock looks really heavy! Can you manage it?
- ✓ Please give each other lots of space so that no one feels like they need to push and no one gets knocked over by accident.

- ✓ Do you feel stable/balanced?
- ✓ Do you need more space?
- ✓ Check in with each other. Make sure everyone is still having a good time.
- ✓ Ask her if she's ok.
- ✓ Ask him if he's still having fun.

- ✓ Did you like that? Make sure you tell her if you didn't like that.
- ✓ If you need to run, meet me at the next trail marker!
- ✓ Let's check this cave/fort to make sure it is safe to hide in.

¹ Eperjesi, P. (2017, June 22). When you want to say be careful! [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://childnature.ca/when-you-want-to-say-be-careful/>

© OPAL 2020

3

Appendix B



Health and Safety
Executive

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

Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday schemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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]).

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