



Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy

Autumn Term 2023

Commitment

Our school refers 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.

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.

Recent feedback from staff, governors and parents highlights that children have much less access to free play opportunities than they used to in previous generations. This kind of outdoor play was described as the best days of their childhood and provided many opportunities to develop skills which cannot be replicated in other environments. With this in mind, along with the increase in childhood obesity, childhood stress and anxiety, we prioritise outdoor play provision as an important part of the school day. It accounts for 20% of the time that children are in school so deserves attention and resources to make it effective, enjoyable and beneficial.

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."*

At Elloughton Primary School, the play curriculum has been expertly tailored to enable pupils 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 Moral Compass is at the forefront of our approach to play, giving children the opportunity to develop our key values through play.





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Definition and value of play

Play is the fundamental way that children enjoy their childhood. It is essential to their quality of life as children. It is a freely-chosen activity which a child finds satisfying. This may or may not involve other children or staff. Benefits of play (Play Charter, November 2009) are:

- Playing is fun: it is how children enjoy themselves.
- Play promotes children's development, learning, imagination, creativity and independence.
 - Play can help to keep children healthy and active.
 - Play allows children to experience and encounter boundaries, learning to assess and manage risk in their lives; both physical and social.
 - Play helps children to understand the people and places in their lives, learn about their environment and develop their sense of community.
 - Play allows children to find out about themselves, their abilities, their interests and the contribution they can make.
 - Play can be therapeutic. It helps children to deal with difficult or painful circumstances such as emotional stress or medical treatment.
 - Play can be a way of building and maintaining important relationships with friends, carers and family members.

Definitions of play

The following definitions give an insight into the importance of play, and why it is needed to develop children holistically.

“Play is a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious,’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.” - Johan Huizinga (Homo Ludens, 1955).

“Children’s play is characterised as an activity that is (a) “desired” by the child whom is playing, (b) “always involves an imaginary situation,” and (c) “always involves rules” (which are decided upon by the players)”. (Lev Vygotsky, 1978).

“The right to play is a child’s first claim on the community. Play is nature’s training for life. No community can infringe that right without enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.” (David Lloyd George, 1926).

Our vision for play

Here at Elloughton Primary, 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.



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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.

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.

Article 31 of the Unicef Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. From this, PlayEngland created The Charter for Children's Play which clearly states that:

- Children should have spaces to spend adequate time playing at school.
- Adults should always let children play; this is non-negotiable.
- Children greatly value and benefit from staffed play provision.
- Children's play is augmented by expert play workers.
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play, this should always be provided when needed.

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 a vital feature of play provision and of all environments in which children spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter calculated risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment.



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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 risk-benefit assessment and have access to this. Please see **appendix 1** for further information.

Supervision

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 8.55am-3:20pm 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.

Impact on parents

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. We will be more relaxed on clothing and footwear in school in order to support parents. 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. Your support is sincerely appreciated.

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 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.



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Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offering 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.

Appendices

- 1 – HSE Managing Risk Statement
- 2 – Playwork Principles
- 3 – Children's Survey
- 4 – Parent/carer Survey
- 5 – Types of Play

Adoption, Approval, Sign Off

Signed	Rebecca Brammall
On behalf of	FGB
Date	Autumn Term 2023

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