Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy

Summer Term 2026

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.

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 Playmakers 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.

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 (from the Charter for Children's Play), published in 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 types 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.

Aims

In relation to play, our school aims to:

- Ensure we 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.
- 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, Play England 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 essential for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the aim is not to eliminate risk, but to balance risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool."

Health and Safety Executive

The school uses the Health and Safety Executive guidance Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach and adopts a risk-benefit approach in line with the Play Safety Forum.

Risk-taking is a vital part of children's play and development. Through play, children learn to assess challenge, develop resilience, build confidence and manage uncertainty.

Our approach to risk management is based on the principle of creating a "safe enough" environment, rather than eliminating all risks. We recognise that some risk is necessary and beneficial for children's learning and development.

When making decisions about play opportunities, we will consider:

- The developmental benefits of the activity
- The likelihood and severity of harm
- Whether the risk is reasonable and manageable
- The impact of restricting the play opportunity

We distinguish between:

Good hazards – Risks that children can recognise, understand and learn from, which contribute positively to their play.

Bad hazards – Hidden, avoidable or unnecessary dangers that children cannot reasonably foresee and which offer no play value.

The school follows OPAL's **R.A.P.I.D. risk management framework:**

- **Risk-benefit assessments** for planned higher-risk play opportunities
- **Assemblies** to support children's understanding of play and safety
- **Policy** to guide play provision and decision-making
- **Inspections** of spaces, resources and equipment
- **Dynamic risk management** during playtimes

Where higher-risk play opportunities become regular, written risk-benefit assessments will be completed and reviewed. Staff will also use **dynamic risk assessment** during playtimes, responding proportionately to situations as they arise.

Staff intervention will be kept to a minimum where children are successfully assessing and managing risks for themselves. Intervention will only take place where there is a risk of serious or unacceptable harm.

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 necessary or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol their zones 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 our large playground supervisors 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-3:25pm Monday to Friday, at After School Club and our OPAL activity club. We do not allow children use this equipment beyond the school day. Parents/carers have full responsibility for their children before 8.40am and at the end of the school day once they have been dismissed from their classroom.

All staff supervising playtimes are expected to use professional judgement and apply dynamic risk-benefit assessment when supporting children's play.

Playmakers will:

- Observe before intervening.
- Allow children opportunities to assess and manage risks independently.
- Support children to adapt and problem-solve.
- Intervene only where necessary to reduce serious harm.

The role of adults is to facilitate play, not control it. Staff will work in accordance with the Playwork Principles, supporting children's self-directed play while maintaining a safe-enough environment

Inspection and Maintenance

To ensure our play environment remains safe enough for play, the school will carry out:

- Daily visual checks of play areas and equipment
- Routine inspections of loose parts and resources
- Regular maintenance of play spaces
- Annual formal inspections where appropriate

Any hazards identified that present unnecessary risk will be removed, repaired or restricted until safe for use.

Impact on parents

We understand that allowing children access to the field all year round, in addition to resources which could be muddy, can impact on parents wash load. During the winter months and when the field is wet children must wear wellies when on the field and walk and talk path. 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 and a pair of wellies in school. They may also have separate waterproof bottoms and a spare change of clothes especially socks. We have spare coats and clothes to allow children to change if required.

Play Charter

Our school acknowledges the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. We believe all children have the right to play and need to play; free to choose what they do – lively or relaxed, noisy or quiet – with the chance to stretch and challenge themselves, take risks and enjoy freedom.
Our Play Charter (**Appendix 1**) is our promise to you about how we will meet our legal and moral obligations to respect your children's rights. At Elloughton, we have created our OPAL Play Charter with our children, listening to their ideas and taking on board what matters most to them regarding their play.

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.

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 - Play Charter
2 - Playwork Principles
3 - Children's Survey
4 - Parent/carer Survey
5 - Types of Play
6 - Tumble Expectations

Monitoring and Review

The implementation and impact of the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) policy will be regularly monitored to ensure that high-quality play opportunities are available for all pupils and that the school environment remains safe, inclusive and engaging. This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required.

Adoption, Approval, Sign Off

Signed	**Rebecca Brammall**
On behalf of	FGB

Document Control

Title of document	**Outdoor Play and Learning Policy (OPAL)**
Revision number	**2**
Review frequency	Every 2 years
Next review date	Autumn Term 2027
Type or status	Policy
Statutory?	Yes