



OPAL Play Policy

Please note that 'Headteacher' may refer to the Executive Headteacher or Head of School. 'Chair of Governing Body' may refer to Co-Chairs of the Governing Body.

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1. 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.

2. 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.

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.*”

Our vision statement says: ***At the Trumpington Federation, we believe that learning should be a lifelong adventure. We aim to inspire and encourage all members of our community to grow and learn together. Through determination, communication and collaboration, we encourage each other to reach for the stars, no matter who we are or where we come from.***

Our schools, governors, children, parents and staff have agreed and share a set of common values and rights for all which underpin our dynamic curriculum, and which encourage creativity, problem solving and a love of learning.

3. Definition and value 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, 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.

The Opal project promotes many of our school values on our value tree including fun, challenge, creativity, adventure, collaboration, communication, respect, adaptability and diversity.

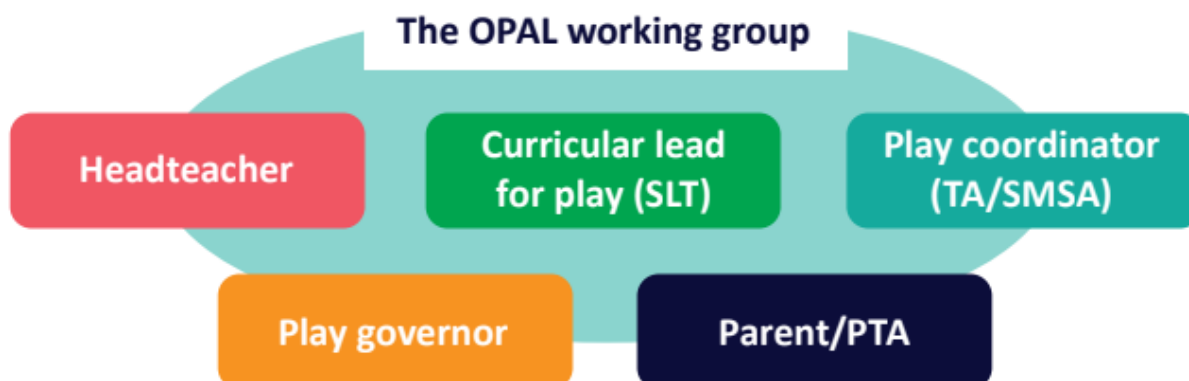


4. Aims

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.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of the OPAL team



The curricular lead for play (OPAL lead)

– leads on strategy, finance and planning.

Minimum hours: One per week plus at least 16 hours set up over the first few weeks.

School position: SLT (deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher or business manager).

Key roles:

- Holds responsibility for play policy, play strategy, budget, action plan and evaluation.
- Manages play coordinator and holds responsibility for the play team.
- Supports play coordinator and play team in delivery of the action plan.
- Reports to headteacher and governors on play development.
- Supports communication on play to the whole school community.
- Supports development of the play environment.
- Supports effective risk management in play (RAPID).
- Supports development of effective playwork practice.

The play coordinator

– leads on operational delivery.

Minimum hours: Eleven per week. One per day in the playground, six in non-contact time.

School position: HLTA, senior supervisor, teaching assistant, SENCO, teacher.

Key roles:

- Reports to curricular lead for play.
- Leads and supports the play team.
- Leads on delivery of the play action plan.
- Leads on provision and maintenance of loose parts and play resources.
- Supports communication on play to the whole school community.
- Supports development of the play environment.
- Supports effective risk management in play.
- Supports development of effective playwork practice within the play team.
- The curricular lead for play can delegate responsibility to the play coordinator, but they retain responsibility to report back to and involve SLT. Exactly what these roles look like will depend on each school's staff structure.

The Play Team:

In OPAL schools, the people in charge of lunchtime play are referred to as 'the play team'. They may have been referred to as lunchtime supervisors or teaching assistants before. In OPAL schools, the focus of these roles changes from one which is mainly about stopping bad things happening, such as accidents and misbehaviour, to one of mainly supporting amazing things to happen, in the form of better play.

The play team does a very important job in schools. They are responsible for 20% of school life. OPAL schools recognise that good quality play is hugely important to the health, happiness, development and well-being of all children and effective running of the school. The play team's job, led by the play coordinator, is to enrich and diversify play without taking the ownership of play away from the children. A good play team will all work together to ensure children have plenty of resources and are supported to be independent and creative. They will also need to regularly discuss;

1. What are we trying to achieve in our work?
2. How well have we done recently?
3. How are we going to do it better in the future

Doing this is called 'reflective practice'. Most of the improvements to play in a school should come from the play team.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

Supervision is regularly reviewed at team meetings, particularly after any incidents have occurred. All supervising staff are highly visible wearing fluorescent jackets and radios at all times. Supervision for children with special educational needs is considered by both the play team and the inclusion team as their needs may need to be considered in greater detail.

9. 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.

See appendices A,D, E.

10. 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.

Our vision statement underpins our values around diversity and equality:

*At the Trumpington Federation, we believe that learning should be a lifelong adventure. We aim to inspire and **encourage all members of our community to grow and learn together**. Through determination, communication and collaboration, we encourage each other to reach for the stars, **no matter who we are or where we come from**.*

*Our schools, governors, children, parents and staff have agreed and share a set of **common values and rights for all** which underpin our dynamic curriculum, and which encourage creativity, problem solving and a love of learning.*

11. 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

A 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.

Appendix

A: The Play Principles:

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.

B: Links to high quality play provision:

- a) 'New Zealand's School Without Rules'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1Y0cuufVGI>



C: HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KgIyL4yic6skX-DiknVC5UGfpD9uR78/view?usp=drive_link

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.

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])

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 providers*² 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

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.'

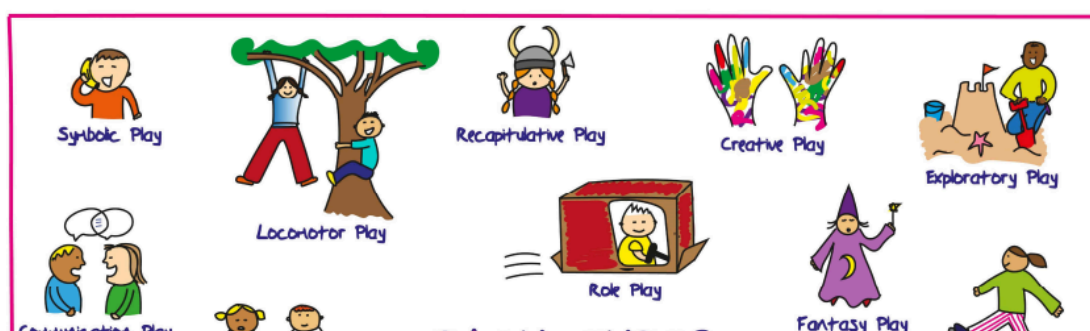
14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent 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

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.

D: Play Types





E: The Language of Play

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 (eg by 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?

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 playing 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 (eg shade, privacy, slopes, mud etc)?"
- ❓ "Do you know why this area is out of bounds?"
- ❓ "Is there anywhere else you could play?"

Other helpful communication prompts¹

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ 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. |

¹Eperjesi, 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/>