



Gosford Park Primary School

Play Policy

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 within a safe environment. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities. 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. Play is not an add-on to our routine. It is essential and required so that we are able to thrive. Our expansive school grounds provide a crucial opportunity for self-initiated, spontaneous play opportunities.

Children spend 1.4 years of their time at primary school engaging in play times - this is 20% of their school career. Changes in culture and society have led to 'play poverty' in childhood. Play time is therefore valuable and needs coherent planning in order for children to thrive in their outdoor environment mirroring the value of other national curricular areas.

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."*

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. It may be serious or light-hearted. It may produce something, or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows

children an opportunity to be creative, to make decisions and to assess and manage risks.

At Gosford Park Primary school we recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe that the role of the adults is to support the play process.

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.
- Play encourages children to attend school regularly.

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 be themselves and to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- 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.
- Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment.
- Ensure adults respect these rights, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative justice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime.
- Adults support the children to develop new opportunities for play, listening to their ideas about play and supporting all children to access play.
- Allow children to use their curiosity to develop through a range of resources.

5. 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. At Gosford Park Primary School we believe that every child has:
 - **The right to be safe and feel safe.**
 - **The right to learn.**
 - **The right to be treated with respect.**

6. 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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

7. 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 adult's present outdoors.

Gosford Park Primary School has generous ratios of adults to children for playtimes and lunchtimes. We recognise 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 move around the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

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.

R: Risk-benefit assessment- we will consider the risks and the benefits of using equipment, we will think about how we can reduce the risk, if the benefit is worth it.

A: Assemblies focused on playtime- these take place at least fortnightly, celebrating play and also working with the children to agree safe play.

P: Policy for play ratified by your governors and shared with all stakeholders.

I: Inspections carried out regularly and all staff aware how to assess loose parts.

D: Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff.

8. 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.

Playwork Principles:

- 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 and communities.
- Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, 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.
- 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.
- For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
- The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
- The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
- Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and the impact of children and young people.
- Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play.

All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

9. Clothing

We would advise that all children come prepared for outdoor play in all weather conditions. During the colder and wet weather, wellies or walking boots should be worn by staff and children when walking on the school field. Children should wear coats during cold weather, and they may wish to wear waterproof trousers. Children need to be responsible for managing their outdoor clothing. This includes being prepared before they go outside to play. Part of outdoor play means children may get muddy, free play means allowing children to explore the areas they like. In the summer children will need sun cream and hats to protect themselves.

There is a welly box for any children who would like to access the field in wet weather but are unable to provide appropriate footwear of their own. For wellies which have been outgrown there is a welly swap shop where families can swap outgrown wellies for a pair of the correct size.

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.

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. Research shows that pupils at greener schools showed better attention and superior memory (Dadvand, 2015, p.7937). Children using green spaces are also more creative and play imaginatively and collaboratively.

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, children's mental health and well-being, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating their own rights. It increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, in all weathers, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

References

Dadvand. P (2015) Green Spaces and Cognitive Development in Primary School Children. PNAS, [online] 112 (26), P.7937. Available at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/112/26/7937> [Accessed 05.12.23].

UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p.10, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html> [accessed 14 November 2018]