

OPAL Play Policy

Personal Development & Well-being



St Andrew's Benn C of E (VA) Primary School

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Agreed by Governing body

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1. Commitment

St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary School undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary School is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

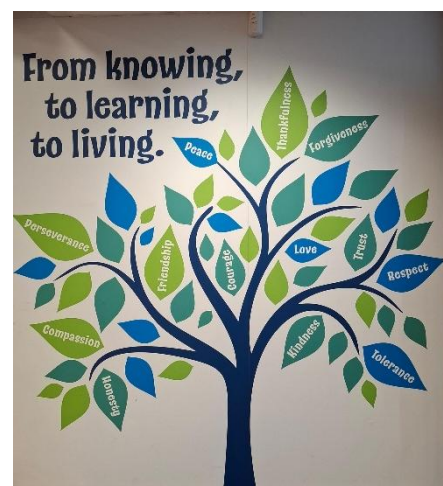
2. Rationale

St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary 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."*

At St Andrew's Benn, the ability to develop play experiences enables our children to live the school values in a number of different ways:

- **Respect:** Children learn to share space, equipment and ideas, valuing others' choices and play.
- **Compassion:** Inclusive play encourages children to notice and support others who may feel left out or need help.
- **Courage:** OPAL invites children to try new activities, take safe risks and challenge themselves.
- **Forgiveness:** Play provides real opportunities to resolve disagreements, repair relationships and move forward.
- **Generosity:** Children naturally share resources, time and attention within open-ended, collaborative play.
- **Thankfulness:** Outdoor play helps children appreciate nature, materials and the opportunities they are given.
- **Perseverance:** Loose-parts play and imaginative challenges encourage children to keep trying, adapt and problem-solve.
- **Honesty:** Play fosters genuine interactions where children learn to be truthful, fair and take responsibility.
- **Friendship:** Mixed-age, inclusive play helps children form meaningful, positive relationships.
- **Kindness:** Children practise caring behaviours—inviting others in, taking turns and supporting peers.
- **Peace:** A rich, purposeful play environment reduces conflict and creates a calmer, more harmonious atmosphere.
- **Love:** Children feel valued, joyful and connected, strengthening their sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing.



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.

OPAL's core belief—that better, more active and creative playtimes lead to happier, healthier children—directly supports our intention to nurture curious, motivated learners who arrive in the classroom ready to engage, think deeply and achieve their best. When children experience joyful, imaginative play, they broaden their thinking, take risks safely, and “imagine the impossible,” developing creativity that enriches their learning.

Improved playtimes also foster the social and emotional foundations that help children make a difference in the lives of others. Through shared play, problem-solving and collaboration, pupils practise and embody our school values: Respect, Compassion, Courage, Forgiveness, Generosity, Thankfulness, Perseverance, Honesty, Friendship, Kindness, Peace and Love. These moments of positive interaction build stronger relationships, reduce unnecessary conflict and create a calmer school community where every child can thrive.

Fewer behavioural issues, reduced playtime accidents and a more positive atmosphere mean staff can focus more on high-quality teaching, modelling our values, and celebrating children's achievements. Ultimately, OPAL helps us create an environment where every child knows that they are loved—valued for who they are, supported in who they are becoming, and encouraged to flourish in mind, body and spirit.

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. Rights

St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary 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.

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

Through teachings of play and OPAL, we will help keep children safe but also to help them manage and experience challenging, risky opportunities through play. Through this type of play children will learn to be emotionally and physically resilient, thus helping them to manage difficult situations, resolve disagreements between each other and keep themselves safe. This type of play raises their resilience, self-esteem, and self-confidence. It also encourages their curiosity, helps them to be more physically active and gives them a sense of independence. The development of these skills in early childhood will help equip children to manage risk safely throughout their lives.

Please find the full HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) as an appendix to this policy.

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 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 and will form part of the school's dynamic risk assessment.

St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary School will use OPAL's R.A.P.I.D. Response to managing risk alongside managing loose parts:

- **Risk-Benefit Assessment:** St. Andrew's Benn will create its own Risk Benefit assessment for activities involving risks presented by environment, materials or practices deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of serious injury or harm.' All risk-benefits will be carried out by the OPAL Curriculum Lead and OPAL Play Coordinator and held on file in the office for inspection. *These will be shared with staff and parents and written records kept.*
- **Assemblies:** OPAL Play Assemblies are held regularly - and when needed - with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play as well as to introduce new equipment or any changes in environment as well as reminding children & staff of the St Andrew's Benn values for play.
- **Policy:** a 'Play Policy' approved by the governing body and leadership is essential and forms the basis for all staff understanding and decision making about managing risk in play. This includes formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance.
- **Inspection:** fixed equipment has annual inspections by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections of equipment and the environment are carried out by the Play Coordinator and Play Team with a record of inspections and damaged/fixed equipment kept by the Play Coordinator. It is the responsibility of the members of the Play Team to

act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Play Coordinator as soon as possible.

- **Dynamic Risk Management:** dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. This means that the quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention. There should be an assumption that most play is not dangerous and that children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time.

However, staff should also be vigilant, they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their patch, who is playing and what the likely risks are. Intervention – if staff think that serious harm (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation), is imminent or probable they should intervene to either stop or manage the risk. If they think that serious harm is possible but not probable, they should remain vigilant. If serious harm is very unlikely then they should probably focus their attention elsewhere or act to further improve the quality of the play offer. Dynamic risk assessment has been introduced the Play Team and regular meetings held around their use of dynamic risk assessments.

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.

At St Andrew's Benn C of E (V.A.) Primary School, the Play Team, guided by the Play Coordinator, will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. They will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

9. 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.

10. 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. Challenging, risky play helps children to learn about themselves and to work out what their own individual limits are. Children learn skills to manage risk through play and these skills can be used in other life-long situations. When we try to limit these experiences we take away valuable learning opportunities from children which may actually result in them being less safe (they will not learn how to do these things for themselves).

Children may occasionally (and will) have minor accidents (cuts, grazes, bruises) when taking part in some of these types of activities. We, as adults, need to recognise their desire to test their boundaries (remember your experiences as a child) and consider the life-long benefits of those experiences.



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

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

Play Principles

Playwork Principle 1

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.

Playwork Principle 2

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.

Playwork Principle 3

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.

Playwork Principle 4

For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

Playwork Principle 5

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

Playwork Principle 6

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.

Playwork Principle 7

Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

Playwork Principle 8

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.

Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide playworkers, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

1. **Symbolic Play** – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth e.g. using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.
2. **Rough and Tumble Play** – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.
3. **Socio-dramatic Play** – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.
4. **Social Play** – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended e.g. any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols i.e. games, conversations, making something together.
5. **Creative Play** – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell e.g. enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self-expression through any medium, making things, changing things.
6. **Communication Play** – play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles / emails/ internet, skipping games, group and ball games.
7. **Dramatic Play** – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator e.g. presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.
8. **Locomotor Play** – movement in any or every direction for its own sake eg chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.
9. **Deep Play** – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear e.g. light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc e.g. leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.
10. **Exploratory Play** – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects eg engaging with

an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.

11. **Fantasy Play** – This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur e.g. playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be where ever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be the list is endless as is a child's imagination.
12. **Imaginative Play** – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply e.g. imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.
13. **Mastery Play** – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments e.g. digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.
14. **Object Play** – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements e.g. examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.
15. **Role Play** – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.
16. **Recapitulative Play** – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

Playwork intervention styles

Wait

to be invited to play – this doesn't have to be verbally, it can be a gesture or other action by the child (play cue)

Enable

play to occur uninterrupted – don't interfere, manipulate or take over

Leave

the content/intent of play to children- let them decide what they want to do and how to do it

Allow

children to decide what is appropriate behaviour – as far as practicable taking into account age, culture and setting

Support

children to explore their own values as far as possible - they learn more about right and wrong from their peers than from playworkers

Only

organise when children want you to - you don't need to organise 'entertainment' for children unless they specifically ask you for ideas

Let

children decide why they play - there's no need for rewards or end products or even to get involved if they don't want you to

Permit

children to improve their own performance- don't constantly offer to help, unless something is detrimental to their well being

Playwork Pointers

Intention When you go into the playground each day, do so with the intention that you will do something to improve the quality of play

Action Do something with loose parts or the environment that makes a change to how it was before. – Draw out the rooms of a house in chalk - Put resources in a place they have not been before – Use loose parts to build a scene, e.g., vets, shop, hospital, hair salon

Observation Watch what children are doing and ask what you can do to help make it better or more fun. Can we make it stronger, safer? Do you need more of certain resources?

Example Do something playful and interesting yourself and watch children join in, then slowly leave and let the children get on with it.

- Make a model stick and leaf house
- Invent and play a new game
- Start building something with loose parts

Invitation When you are observing play, be alert to whether you are being invited to join or leave the play (play cue). If you are invited to join, then try to follow, not lead or take over.

Consistency Talk to your colleagues, so that you are all agreed about how you do things and so that the messages you give to children are consistent.

Respect Children are sensitive, and will copy adult behaviours much more than words. If you need to address an issue, always be respectful, come down to their level, and don't point or raise your voice. Always praise in public and reprimand in private.