



# Play Policy

March 2025

## Play Policy

*'Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child.'*

### Rationale

At Oakwood we believe 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 play provision aligns with our **school values of kindness, curiosity and ambition**. Children demonstrate **kindness** when they play together, share resources and include everyone in their games. We show **curiosity** by finding multiple ways to play with one item over a sustained period of time and by exploring our diverse grounds. We are **ambitious** in our play by taking risks and persevering until we reach success as defined by the child.

Oakwood 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 and therefore we have identified a designated member of staff as the Curricular Lead for Play. Our Curricular Lead for play is: **Miss Bird**

### The 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 well-planned 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 and show **curiosity** towards the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem, their understanding of others and their understanding of **kindness** 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 and be **ambitious** in what they can achieve.

## **Aims**

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Promote the school values of kindness, curiosity and ambition.
- 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**

At Oakwood we recognise 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.

## **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)

Oakwood uses 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 (Appendix A). In doing so, Oakwood has 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.

## **Supervision**

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During lunchtimes, there should be 6 or more adults present outdoors when the whole school is present. The number of adults may be reduced in certain situations, for example when a class is on a visit. 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.

## **The adult's role in play**

We recognise that play in school needs to have leadership, so we have an Oakwood OPAL Working Group. This group holds responsibility for the play strategy, support the development of the play environment and help the play team deliver high quality play opportunities.

At Oakwood, we 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 use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play and all play types (Appendix 3).

The playworker's core function is to create an environment that stimulates 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.

## **Equality and diversity**

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs, we ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

## **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. Our children have access to a variety of environments to play in including fields, brambles, woodlands, tarmac and muddy areas. We also offer multiple fixed and temporary play materials including climbing frames, stage areas, loose parts, gazebos, water apparatus and a mud kitchen.

We strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play.

# Appendices

Appendix A: Health and Safety Executive guidance document  
*Children's play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach*

Appendix B: Playwork Principles

Appendix C: Play Types

## Appendix A:



HSE Children's play and leisure - promoting a balanced approach.pdf

## Appendix B:

### 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.

# Appendix C:

**PLAY TYPES**

Symbolic Play

Locomotor Play

Recapitulative Play

Creative Play

Exploratory Play

Communication Play

Role Play

Fantasy Play

Socio-dramatic Play

Object Play

Mastery Play

Deep Play

Roush and Tumble Play

Dramatic Play

Social Play

Imaginative Play

**PLAY SCOTLAND**  
www.playscotland.org

A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types by Bob Hughes

emeroleary.com