

St. Clare's Catholic Primary School



OPAL Play Policy 2024-2025

Commitment and Rationale

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.

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 Aims

Our school aims are:

- To provide children with a play setting which is both stimulating and challenging
- To allow children to take risks
- To provide children with a range of environments which will support their learning across the curriculum and about the world around them

We aim to give the children the opportunity to:

- Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving
- Encouraging resilience and self confidence
- Think creatively
- Develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others
- Develop emotional health, allowing the balance between acting freely and allowing everyone to have their rights
- To develop skills in self-assessing and managing risk

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 St Clare's 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 Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 160) which provide playworkers, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

Symbolic Play – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth eg using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.

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.

Socio-dramatic Play – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.

Social Play – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended eg any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols ie games, conversations, making something together.

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 eg enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self expression through any medium, making things, changing things.

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.

Dramatic Play – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator eg presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.

Locomotor Play – movement in any or every direction for its own sake eg chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.

Deep Play – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear eg 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 eg leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.

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.

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 eg 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.

Imaginative Play – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply eg imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.

Mastery Play – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments eg digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.

Object Play – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements eg examination and novel use of any object eg cloth, paintbrush, cup.

Role Play – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.

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.

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.

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).

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 written risk assessments, the school will use dynamic risk management in order to respond to the fluid nature of risk and challenge in the play environment. The school will also manage risk by building children's skills in identifying and managing appropriate risk themselves. To manage the levels of risk we will follow the guidelines below:

- Recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals
- All staff should self-assess and manage risk, e.g. red tape should be used to section off play areas or equipment which are deemed to be 'high risk'
- Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children.
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed.
- Provide staff with training to supervise play setting
- All staff are assigned a zone on a termly rotation and it is expected that staff will move around throughout the playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing.

Supervision styles

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.

St Clare's Primary school has generous ratios of adults to children for play times 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 awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

The adults' 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 1) . 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 playworkers' 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.

Equality and Diversity

Through provisioning 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.

This policy will be closely monitored by the SLT and the OPAL working party and reviewed based on the needs of the adults and children in the school.

The policy will be reviewed in line with the SEND code of practice to ensure all children are able to access the play provision (this may mean with support for some children).

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' (Appendix 2) to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.

Our caretaker performs regular health and safety checks of the area. The OPAL working party and other staff will check for risks/dangers when they are outside with the children. Children will be made aware of possible risks and help to manage those by alerting staff to them. The playground will be divided into zones to help staff supervise children and to keep a sensible risk-benefit management system in place.

Health and Safety

All lunchtime staff carry a waist bag, which contains basic first aid equipment. There is also additional first aid equipment stored in the medical room. All of the lunchtime staff are first aid trained (October 2023).

Any bumped heads are reported to parents via a bump note; this will be completed by the member of staff dealing with the child.

If an incident involving a child requires a phone call home this must be discussed with the senior leadership team (SLT). All first aid incidents should be recorded in the accident books kept within the first aid waist bags.

Appendix 1

The Playwork Principles

1. Understand need: All children and young people need to play. The impeller to play is innate. Play is a biological process, 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 reason.
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 2

<http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf>