Harrietsham Church of England Primary School

OPAL Play (Outdoor Play and Learning) Policy

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Harrietsham Church of England Primary School
OPAL Play Policy

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School Context:

Harrietsham CEP Vision Statement

We are a warm, welcoming, and inclusive school rooted in our rural community. Like the mustard seed we grew from tiny beginnings and our branches are now spread wide –providing support and taking our values beyond the school gates. All those in our community feel safe and nurtured - able to flourish and grow academically, spiritually, emotionally and physically to achieve their full God-given potential.

"Nurtured we flourish"

We are a nurturing school. As such we believe in, and follow, **The Six Principles of Nurture** in all of our practice.

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally.
2. The classroom offers a safe base.
3. The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing.
4. Language is a vital means of communication.
5. All behaviour is communication.
6. The importance of transition in children's lives.

Our Values

The roots of our vision are in the parable of the Mustard Seed.

'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches'.
Matthew 13 31-32

In order to grow and reach our potential, everything that we do in school is driven by our vision and underpinned by our core Christian values of:

Love, Fellowship and Forgiveness

Aims of the Policy

At Harrietsham Church of England Primary School we believe that children learn in a caring and fun environment. EVERY child should feel valued, included and secure. Their physical, emotional, social and cultural education is as important as their learning through the National Curriculum.

We recognise that children's self-esteem is paramount to their learning. To ensure that children are motivated and achieve high standards, our entire wider curriculum, both in and outside of the classroom, is exciting, stimulating, broad and balanced, offering children outstanding learning opportunities.

The quality of our teaching is not just confined to the classroom. We recognise the importance of outdoor play and learning. We seek to provide the children of Harrietsham Church of England Primary School with the opportunity to develop key life skills through play, such as: resilience, independence and risk management.

We recognise that children should be the masters of their own learning and OPAL provides staff the opportunity to allow children to be autonomous and share their personal skills and talents inside and outside the classroom.

We believe in the concept of lifelong learning and the idea that both adults and children learn new things every day. We maintain that learning should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience for everyone; it should be fun. With skilled teaching staff who celebrate play, both inside and outside of the classroom, we equip children with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to be able to make informed choices about the important things in their lives. We believe that appropriate teaching and learning experiences help children to lead happy and rewarding lives.

The purpose of this policy

This policy is intended to be a practical working document. Many aspects of this policy have already been discussed and agreed by teachers at staff meetings, with the play team through training sessions and with wider staff groups. Many have been consulted with parents and children.

It outlines a basic level of good practice and provision which is to be matched in all of our play areas.

We deem Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) as an important part of Harrietsham Church of England Primary School and recognise the benefits that championing play can bring to our children. This policy will develop over time.

This policy ensures all staff and parents know what OPAL Play offers and how Harrietsham Church of England Primary School will implement it in their own way.

All staff will be expected to follow the practices within this policy. This policy will ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities when implementing play practices and know that offering these play skills is an integral part of their role in developing children's play skills, independence and resilience. It seeks to inform anyone working with children on practical strategies with regards to risk benefit, supervision and managing play situations.

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.

Rationale

Harrietsham Church of England Primary School believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play.

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 programme rationale is that *"… better, more active and creative play times 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 Harrietsham Church of England Primary School we recognise that play is a large proportion of the children's day and that this time should be fully utilised. We value children's play and look to give children the opportunity to access a range of play types and space on our school grounds.

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. It is any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. 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, different concepts and different 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.

Harrietsham Church of England Primary School values play and believes:

- Play brings uninhibited joy to children.
- Play allows children to explore freely only for intrinsic fascination.
- Play gives children the opportunity to express themselves and lead their own learning.
- Play develops awe and wonder in the natural world around them.
- Play is inclusive to all.

How play supports our school values:

- Love – Play at Harrietsham encourages a love of learning. It allows children to learn through their own interests, real experiences and learn from more knowledgeable others. Play gives children the opportunity to develop their ideas and take their learning in any direction, adapting ideas with peers or alone in the moment.
- Forgiveness - Play at Harrietsham will give children the opportunity to show love through their interactions and the respect they show for each other's wishes with regards to play choices and opinions and also forgiveness through their reconciliation of differing opinions.
- Fellowship – Play at Harrietsham gives children from all backgrounds equal opportunities to a range of experiences. The play space is designed and discussed alongside children who recognise the importance of their ideas. Play at Harrietsham encourages all children to work together in their play, respecting our similarities and differences.

Areas of school life developed through play:

- Becoming Role Models – Children are encouraged to play appropriately – they learn how to agree and disagree calmly and how to resolve any disagreements. Children are enabled to become role models in their play.
- Dynamic Risk Assessment – Children are taught to dynamically risk assess their play – learning their own personal limits and what they are able to achieve safely.
- Mental Wealth and Physical Health - Play at Harrietsham allows children to build their resilience and confidence and it gives them access to as much outdoor space as possible. We can provide all children the opportunity to manage their physical health and mental wealth through a range of outdoor activities.
- Pupil Self-leadership and Management of Risk - Through our playtimes, children are encouraged to risk assess their own play, they are supported to decide upon the 'rules' of play themselves in our play assemblies and they are supported to make their own decisions around their play.
- Pupil Voice - The child's voice is paramount at Harrietsham. We have listened to the children's views to improve play for all. We look to plan opportunities for play based on the children's ideas and interests.
- Quality of Education - We recognise the impact outdoor play has on a child's education. We seek to give every child the opportunity to experience play and the outdoors freely, leading their own learning.

Aims of play in our school

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 which 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

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 to 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)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach' (September 2012) as the principle 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.

Standing Risk Benefit Assessment

The purpose of our Risk Benefit Assessments is to enable us to provide challenge, progression, excitement, creativity and fun in a safe play environment. Risk Assessments cannot and will not provide complete 'safety' and this is not their purpose. They help us to think about, predict, and manage the most serious and most likely potential causes of 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.

Health and Safety is everyone's responsibility. The greater the risk, the more thought and planning is involved. We manage risk and try to avoid 'Benefit –Removal'.

Supervisors are informed by policy, agreed risk-benefit assessments and their own 'dynamic' risk management.

Our Risk Benefit Analysis (Harrietsham RBA - Playground.docx) is stored in the 'General | OPAL Play' team (Microsoft Teams). It is a working document and is updated regularly as new play opportunities are introduced and as areas are safety checked.

Safeguarding in play

All play provision operates within the school's safeguarding framework. Any safeguarding concern arising during playtimes will be managed in accordance with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Staff remain alert to signs of abuse, neglect, peer-on-peer abuse, including bullying, discriminatory behaviour, harmful sexual behaviour, child-on-child abuse and any conduct that may place children at risk. All staff must follow the procedures set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and immediately report concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a Deputy DSL.

Bullying, discriminatory behaviour and intentional exclusion are not forms of acceptable play and will be addressed in line with the school's Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policies.

Where play activities involve technology, photography, recording devices or digital equipment, staff will ensure that the school's Online Safety Policy and safeguarding procedures are followed.

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
- 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 remote and ranging supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult, and adults can supervise large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and of the levels of risk likely to be emerging.

Supervision Guidelines

- **Remote Supervision:**
  This applies when adults are visible and reachable by children within the play environment so that they can quickly respond to an accident or incident. The assumption is that every action by every child will not be seen, but that clear processes are in place to deal with incidents should they happen, and that they can quickly be identified and acted on. It is expected that risk will be controlled by managing the environment and building competence in the children.

- **Ranging Supervision:**
  This applies on large school sites which might have areas away from open view, such as around corners, over mounds, in woodland or long grass. Supervisors would range over the site so they have an idea of the kind of play going on and where children are. This kind of supervision relies on children being supported in identifying and managing risk, and building self-regulation skills and social skills. This kind of play will take place in an environment where risk–benefit assessments have been made.

- **Direct Supervision:**
  This is when adults need to see what every child is doing at every moment and all children are in relatively close sightline of adults. This would be applicable in situations where there is considerable danger of death or serious injury, it is judged that children have very low levels of competence and where they are unlikely to be able to manage risk or self-regulate behaviour.

The adult's role in play

The school will help children to maximise the benefits that they can gain from play by providing trained staff who are informed by and who 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 the 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.

Managing play situations

When managing play situations, we follow the steps below:

1) **Wait** - Do you actually need to intervene at all or can you just stay observant and stand-by?
2) **Observe** - Are the children inviting you to join in their play? Do they clearly need or want your help? If you are unsure, move in a bit closer.
3) **Support** - Support children to experiment and explore different ways of doing things and acting, even if it is not the best way. They need to be able to conduct experiments and make mistakes. This is how they learn.
4) **Act** - Act decisively and swiftly if you think you really need to for safety or protection.
5) **Withdraw** - Remember your goal is to hand back ownership and control of the play to the children. You may be able to sneakily resource their play without them even noticing.

Equality and diversity

The school will make reasonable adjustments to ensure all children, including those with SEND, can access high-quality play opportunities.

Through providing a rich play offer where we aim to meet every child's needs we will ensure that all children, regardless of race, disability, sex, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

How play supports our school values

Equality and diversity in play opportunities has been discussed with all stakeholders ensuring all children's needs are met.

Gross motor structure, communication spaces and areas have been considered in the planning process with the idea that all children can access the whole school site.

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.

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, a key foundation for caring for the environment.

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

Our play space aims to be a varied inspirational and interesting physical environment that maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness and challenge. It aims to be a place where children feel free to play in their own way, on their own terms.

Quality play provision offers all children and young people the opportunity to freely interact with, or experience, the following:

- Other children and young people - with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict.
- The natural world - weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals, mud.
- Loose parts - natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- The natural elements - earth, air, fire and water.
- Challenge and risk taking - both on a physical and emotional level.
- Playing with identity - role play and dressing up.
- Movement - running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling.
- Rough and tumble – safe play fighting.
- The senses - sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.
- Feelings - pain, joy, confidence, fear, anger, contentment, boredom, fascination, happiness, grief, rejection, acceptance, sadness, pride, frustration.

Monitoring and review

This policy is scheduled to be reviewed every year but we are aware of the need to review the school play policy regularly so that we can take account of new initiatives, changes in practice etc.

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for policy implementation.
Day-to-day operational responsibility is delegated to the OPAL Curriculum Lead and OPAL Play Coordinator.

Appendices:

** Copies of all referenced documents are available from the school on request.

Appendix 1: Risk Benefit Management Link

- Risk Benefit Analysis Folder – 'OPAL Play' Team: 'General | OPAL Play'

Appendix 2 – Risk Benefit Log

- Risk Benefit Analysis Folder – 'OPAL Play' Team: 0. RBA
- Play Assembly Log - 'OPAL Play' Team: 0. Harrietsham - Play Assembly Risk-Benefit Log Sheet.docx
- Managing Risks in Play Provision – An Implementation Guide: Managing Risks in Play Provision - An Implementation Guide.pdf

Appendix 3 – Health and Safety Management Statement

- CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH: Microsoft Word - Document2 (hse.gov.uk), Children's Play and Leisure - Promoting a Balanced Approach.pdf

Appendix 4 - Playwork Principles

- Best Play Booklet: OPAL - Best Play Booklet.pdf
- Playwork Essentials: OPAL - Playwork essentials.pdf
- The Playwork Principles: The Playwork Principles.pdf
- Free Range Supervision Guidance: OPAL - Free range supervision.pdf



