

# Welton St. Mary's Church of England Primary Academy



## Our Vision

As an inclusive Christian community we value each person, seeking to release everyone's full potential as promised by Jesus Christ. We seek to provide a safe, inspiring and creative learning environment providing opportunities for all to flourish. Through challenge, support and care, we strive for excellence in all that we do; always building on the foundations of shared values with consistently high expectations rooted in God's love. Together we are encouraged to be agents of positive change in this world.

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'* Romans 15:13

**Wisdom Hope Community Dignity**

## Opal Play Policy

Approved November 2025

# OPAL Play Policy

**Together we care, learn and thrive**

***“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.”***

***Psalms 96:11-1***

## **Our Vision**

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## **Aims**

Our Play Policy aims to ensure that all children at Welton St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy are provided with high-quality play experiences that support their holistic development and well-being. We believe that play enables children to explore, imagine, and interact in ways that foster personal growth and positive relationships, provide opportunities for spiritual growth, contributing to the school's Christian ethos and values of *trust, respect, forgiveness, peace, responsibility and love and friendship*. Playtime is an extension of our commitment to helping every child reach their full potential.

In relation to play our school aims to:

- **Provide a stimulating and secure environment**, supporting the school's goal to help the whole community thrive.
- **Encourage safe risk-taking** to build confidence, aligning with the development of skills and attitudes needed in adult life.
- **Foster positive relationships**, promoting self-esteem, respect, and a caring attitude within the school community.
- **Instil respect for surroundings and others**, reflecting the school's Christian ethos and promoting tolerance and care for all.
- **Support children's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth**, contributing to their development across all areas.
- **Encourage imaginative exploration** to enhance creativity and learning beyond the curriculum.
- **Promote independence and teamwork**, fostering self-reliance and collaboration in line with the school's emphasis on mutual respect.

- **Build emotional and physical resilience**, preparing children to take responsibility and contribute to the wider community.

### **Rationale**

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.*”

### **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.

### **Rights and Responsibilities in Play**

At Welton St Mary’s Church of England Primary Academy, we recognise children’s rights to play, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31). We also emphasise the importance of children’s responsibilities to respect each other’s rights and to play safely. Our commitment to children’s rights is firmly rooted in the values of trust and responsibility.

## **Supervision and Safety**

Our approach to supervision is informed by the need for children to have the freedom to explore while also ensuring their safety. 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 Foundation Stage, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Adaptations will be made for children with additional needs. The play team 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**

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.

## **Equality and Diversity**

We are committed to ensuring that all children, regardless of their background or individual needs, can access and enjoy play at Welton St Mary's. Our play provision reflects our core values of peace and harmony and respect, fostering an inclusive environment where every child is valued and supported.

## **The Learning Environment and Play**

Our school grounds are designed to provide rich, stimulating play environments that encourage exploration and creativity. We believe that a well-designed play environment promotes peace, fosters responsibility for the natural world, and encourages children to take care of their surroundings and each other. We continually strive to enhance our school's outdoor spaces, ensuring that they are welcoming, safe, and engaging for all children and provide a sense of curiosity and 'wows'

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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)

### **Managing Risk in Play**

*'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.

This approach reflects our commitment to responsibility and ensuring that children learn about risk in a safe and supportive setting.

### **Safeguarding Through Play**

A well-designed play environment inherently supports safeguarding by encouraging independence while maintaining oversight. When children engage in a variety of play activities, they are able to explore boundaries within a secure, structured space. Adults in the play environment are present to offer guidance and intervene if necessary, ensuring safety while fostering a sense of trust and responsibility. This approach empowers children to take risks in a controlled way, teaching them about safety, boundaries, and decision-making in a setting that values their well-being.

### **Promoting Positive Relationships Through Play**

Playtime is a key opportunity for building positive relationships within our school community. Children learn to cooperate, share, and support one another, fostering a spirit of friendship and peace. Play is an essential component of our school's approach to nurturing a loving and respectful environment where all children can thrive.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

At Welton St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy, we are committed to regularly reviewing and evaluating our play provision to ensure it meets the needs of all children. We

involve children, staff, and parents in this process, ensuring that our play policy reflects the school's vision and values. Governors play an active role in supporting and monitoring play provision to ensure it aligns with our commitment to providing a safe, enriching, and inclusive play environment.

## Appendix 1

### *HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6)*

# 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 risks<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

*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 providers<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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