



West Twyford

Primary School

Play Policy

Last reviewed on:	Autumn 2024
Next review due by:	Autumn 2026
Approved by:	Teaching and Learning

Aims

This policy aims to ensure that all staff and parents know what The OPAL play programme offers and how West Twyford Primary School are implementing this.

This policy will ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities when implementing OPAL in school, including the strategies used to manage risk, supervise and manage OPAL play situations.

Contents

This policy is arranged under the following headings:

- **Commitment, Rationale and Definition of play**

- **West Twyford Vision**

- **Equality and Access and Environment**

- **Benefit and risk and Standing Risk-Benefit Assessments**

- **R.A.P.I.D Approach**

- **Supervision**

- **The staff role in play**

Monitoring and review

This policy is scheduled for review every 2 years, however, we recognize the importance of reviewing the school play policy when required to incorporate new initiatives, evolving practices, and other relevant changes.

Commitment

Our school is dedicated to using this play policy as a reference in all decisions impacting children's play. We are committed to offering the strategic and operational leadership necessary to establish and sustain high-quality play opportunities for all our students.

Rationale

At West Twyford Primary School, we believe that play is an integral part of a child's wellbeing. We recognize the significance of outdoor play and learning for our children (many of whom live in accommodation with little space), and we aim to provide children with a nurturing and enjoyable environment to thrive both in and out of the classroom.

Providing children with the opportunities to explore, manipulate, and engage with their environment helps aid the development of essential life skills through play, such as resilience, independence, and risk management. Presenting opportunities for children to take risks in play increases the self-esteem of children which can extend into the classroom.

This is why West Twyford Primary School have adopted the OPAL programme. It empowers staff as well as children to be autonomous and to share their unique skills and talents with their peers and adults alike in a stimulating environment. With our trained teaching staff who celebrate play, they can support children with the knowledge and understanding they need to make informed choices about their play and managing the risks.

Learning should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience for everyone and most importantly it should be fun! We are convinced that meaningful teaching and learning experiences contribute to children leading happy and fulfilling lives

Definition and value of play

Play is characterized as a process that is intrinsically motivated, child-directed, and freely chosen by the child. It holds inherent value and serves its own purpose, and it may or may not involve equipment or other participants. Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

West Twyford's Vision

At West Twyford Primary School, we believe that children should begin to adopt these key beliefs about play:

- I can **take care** of my **health and wellbeing** through play, which **helps me grow** physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and intellectually.
- I can use **play to explore my surroundings** and **discover new ideas** and **concepts**.
- I can **boost my self-esteem** and learn about others through play with my friends, no matter our differences.
- I can practice **communication and negotiation skills** while playing, helping me balance my freedom to act with my responsibilities to others.
- I can **experience different emotions** during play and learn how to cope with feelings like sadness, happiness, frustration, and confidence.

- I can build my **self-confidence** and make choices while solving problems in my play and learn to be creative.

How does OPAL play support our school rules?

- Ready:

Children are prepared to learn by following their own interests, engaging in real-life experiences, and learning from those with greater knowledge. Play provides them with the chance to explore ideas freely, guiding their learning in any direction they choose, and adapting these ideas either with peers or independently as they go.

- Respectful

Children are given opportunities to respect each other's play choices, value differing opinions, and work through disagreements with guidance from role models during play.

- Safe

Through our weekly inspections and risk assessments, we ensure a safe environment that allows children to take risks and learn to manage them independently.

How does OPAL play support our learning behaviours?

At our school, we embrace lifelong learning skills such as resilience, bravery, cooperation, curiosity, independence, and discipline to help our children build essential abilities for continuous learning. Additionally, our growth mindset approach fosters improved self-esteem and greater enjoyment in school.

Equality and Access

We are committed to providing a diverse and inclusive play environment that meets the needs of every child. By offering a broad range of play opportunities, we ensure that all children—regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or other individual needs—have the chance to grow, build meaningful relationships, and enjoy their school experience.

Our approach to equality and diversity in play has been developed in consultation with SENCO, the OPAL working party and SLT to ensure that the needs of all children are recognized and met. The planning of play areas, including gross motor structures, communication spaces, and accessible areas, has been carefully considered so that every child can fully engage with the entire school environment.

Environment

At West Twyford Primary School, we believe that a vibrant play environment should provide every child with access to engaging, stimulating spaces that are free from unnecessary or unacceptable risks. This enables children to explore freely through self-directed play.

A well-rounded play setting supports safeguarding, nurtures children's confidence in teamwork, and encourages self-advocacy. It also strengthens social and emotional skills and fosters a love for the outdoors—a key foundation for environmental care.

We are committed to continuously enhancing the quality and diversity of our school grounds to enrich play opportunities. Our approach is guided by the **Best Play framework (Appendix 1)** which defines a high-quality play environment as a varied, inspiring, and stimulating space that maximizes opportunities for social interaction, creativity, problem-solving, and challenge. We aim to create an environment where children feel free to play on their own terms.

High-quality play provision offers children a chance to engage with or experience:

- **Social Interaction:** Opportunities to interact with peers, play alone or with others, negotiate, cooperate, and resolve conflicts.
- **The Natural World:** Interaction with weather, seasons, plants, trees, insects, and animals.
- **Loose Parts:** Manipulatable materials, both natural and man-made, for building, adapting, and dismantling.
- **Challenge and Risk:** Opportunities for physical and emotional risk-taking.
- **Identity Exploration:** Role play and dressing up.
- **Movement:** Activities like running, jumping, climbing, balancing, and rolling.
- **Sensory Experiences:** Exposure to sounds, tastes, textures, smells, and sights.
- **Emotional Range:** Experiences of diverse emotions, including joy, confidence, fear, contentment, fascination, sadness, pride, and frustration.

By fostering such an environment, we aim to create a space that allows all children to play, explore, and grow in ways that support their holistic development and enjoyment of school life.

Benefit and risk

"Play is essential for children's well-being and development. In planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to remove all risk but to balance risks and benefits, as no child can learn about risk if shielded from it."

(Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide, 2012)

West Twyford Primary School follows the Health and Safety Executive's guidance in *Children's Play and Leisure (Appendix 2) – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) as its guiding principle in managing risks in play.

Our school adopts a risk-benefit approach, as outlined in '*Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide*' (**Appendix 3**) recognizing that risk-taking is an important aspect of play. Our aim is to provide children with opportunities to encounter acceptable risks within a well-designed and managed environment that is both stimulating and challenging. According to the play sector guidance in *Best Play*, play provision should "balance the need to offer risk with the need to keep children and young people safe from harm."

Standing Risk-Benefit Assessments

The purpose of Risk-Benefit Assessments (an example below) is to facilitate challenge, growth, creativity, excitement, and enjoyment in a play environment. These assessments are not intended to eliminate all risk but to help anticipate and address the most serious and likely potential hazards. In addition to written risk assessments, the school will use dynamic risk management 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. We note the advice from HSE below:

Health and safety law in Great Britain has an enduring principle – that those who create risks are best placed to control them, and that they should do so in a reasonable and sensible way. ***Dame Judith Hackitt HSE Chair 2015***

In school we will follow the R.A.P.I.D approach:

- R:** Risk-benefit assessment
- A:** Assemblies focused on playtime
- P:** Policy for play ratified by your governors or equivalent
- I:** Inspections carried out regularly
- D:** Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

R: Risk-benefit assessment

All services supporting children conduct risk assessments. For play provision, it is essential to highlight the benefits alongside the risks from the outset. This approach has been recommended since 2012.

An RBA is a judgement tool, based on professional knowledge and the potential benefits. These assessments should be active, reviewed regularly, and communicated to all staff and children. Any changes or new play areas should be added to the RBA, with updates shared with everyone involved.

Common areas requiring standing RBAs include boundaries to dangerous areas, tree management and climbing, fixed play equipment, broken or heavy loose parts, rope tying (especially at height), water use and features and sharp or heavy tools.

Written RBAs should be conducted: During an annual site walkabout for significant risks, when changes could cause serious harm, after recurring staff concerns and following near-miss incidents or frequent injuries

A: Assemblies focused on playtime

OPAL play assemblies will be held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play.

Assemblies will aim to:

- Celebrate your school's culture of play and children's creativity.
- Inform children of changes, rights, and agreements.
- Negotiate with children on issues such as risk, tidy-up and expected behaviours.
- Innovate around what children are currently playing to deepen children's engagement

P: Policy for play ratified by your governors or equivalent

This play policy is approved by the governing body and forms the basis for the understanding of all staff and their decision-making about managing risk in play. This includes formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance

I: Inspections carried out regularly

Engineered fixed equipment should have an annual technical inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections are carried out by a member of staff and a record kept.

In addition, all play team members are trained to constantly check for and remove hazards as part of their daily practice, with a clear knowledge of what and when to record, as well as appropriate responses.

D: Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

All staff in the playground and those with responsibility for children at play should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that the risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity of harm while preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

Most of the time they will not need to intervene but should be ready to:

- **stop the activity or manage the risk** if staff think that *serious harm* (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation) is imminent or probable.
- **remain vigilant and consider negotiating how to manage the risk with the children** if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.
- **continue ranging supervision** if serious harm is very unlikely

Dynamic risk management in play work requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. 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, and 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.

All play team staff are trained and reminded that active risk management is an essential part of their job using the OPAL online *Playwork Essentials for Primary Schools* course and training book. They should be observant, mobile and attentive at all times.

Supervision

Schools are legally required to provide supervision for children, though specific adult-to-child ratios are not specified for primary school playtimes. At West Twyford Primary School, adults are assigned to supervise three designated play areas: the Field, KS1 playground, and KS2 playground. These assignments are rotated monthly.

The school aligns with OPAL's supervision models: **Direct, Remote, and Ranging** and the school does not consider direct supervision either feasible or beneficial. Instead, the supervision will primarily follow remote and ranging models, ensuring children can easily locate an adult and allowing supervisors to monitor large areas to stay informed about play activities and any emerging risks.

Supervision Guidelines

Remote Supervision

In remote supervision, adults are visible and accessible within the play environment, allowing them to respond promptly to incidents that range from low or high risk if needed. This model assumes that every child's action will not be directly observed, but effective systems are in place to address any incidents that arise. Risk management in this model is achieved by creating a safe environment and building children's skills and competence.

Ranging Supervision

Ranging supervision is suitable for expansive sites where certain areas may be out of immediate sight, such as spaces around corners, over mounds, or within wooded or grassy areas. Supervisors are made aware of these areas prior to their shift and move throughout the site to remain aware of play activities and children's locations. This model promotes children's ability to recognize and manage risk, enhancing self-regulation and social skills. The environment is assessed for risks and benefits to support this kind of play.

Direct Supervision

Direct supervision, where every child is continuously visible to adults, is reserved for situations involving high risks, where there is a significant threat of serious injury or death, or when children are unable to self-regulate or manage risk due to low competence.

For a visual reference of supervision zones, see the Supervision Site Map in Appendix 4.

The staff role in play

West Twyford Primary School is committed to helping children gain the full benefits of play by training staff who are guided by the **Playwork Principles**. Staff working directly for the school receive training from the school. Where possible we provide training for any externally employed staff.

Staff will reference these principles to determine appropriate interventions, always aiming to create an environment that supports children's self-directed play.

The primary role of a playworker is to establish an environment that encourages diverse play opportunities, stimulating and enriching the child's experience. Skilled playworkers enhance children's play both by designing a thoughtful physical environment and fostering a positive play culture. They provide access to new materials and tools, encouraging exploration and learning, and may join in the play if invited by the children.

Managing Play Situations

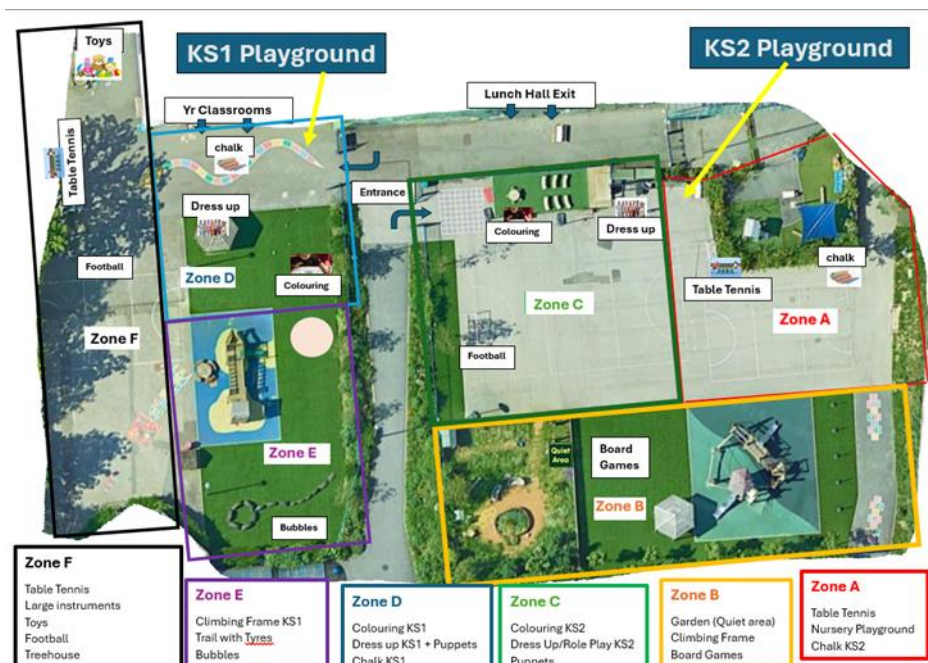
When managing play, we follow these steps:

1. **Wait** – Consider if intervention is necessary or if observing from a distance is more appropriate.
2. **Observe** – Determine if children are inviting your participation or seeking help. If unclear, move closer to assess.
3. **Support** – Encourage children to try different approaches, even if they're imperfect. Experimentation and mistakes are essential for learning.
4. **Act** – Step in decisively if safety or protection is at risk.
5. **Withdraw** – Return control of the play to the children, supporting their independence. You may subtly add resources to their play without direct involvement.

For additional details, refer to the Playwork Principles in Appendix 5.

Appendix

1. **Best Play** framework, <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/best-play/>
2. **Health and Safety Executive's guidance in *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach*** (September 2012)
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>
3. **Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide**
4. **Supervision Site Map *OPAL activity Map .docx***



The playwork principles

Keep a reflection diary to understand how you do these things

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.