Play Policy

(Version 1.0)

Amendment History		
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Signed By: Tricia Brabham
On behalf of school governors

Signed by: JamesOakley
Headteacher

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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."*

We want our school values to be embedded within the children's play. We want them to have courage when playing by trying new things and by taking risks and by making mistakes and learning for the next time. We want them to have curiosity in the world around them by allowing them free and unfettered access to our grounds. Finally, we want them to be a community where children's self-esteem and well-being is promoted through play by all children.

Aims

This policy supports the following school aims:

1) Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
2) Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
3) Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
4) Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
5) Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
6) Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
7) Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
8) Promote independence and teamwork within children.
9) Build emotional and physical resilience.

Purpose

1. To set high expectations of good behaviour during unstructured play, identifying positive role models for the children.
2. To develop positive relationships with mutual respect between staff/pupil and pupil/pupil.
3. To ensure high quality play throughout the school, enabling pupils to better understand how to evaluate risk, be independent and increasingly active in their play.
4. To support pupils' social and emotional growth.

5. To provide a system that promotes the importance of play, improves the quality of play experiences, and ensures adequate supervision.
6. To recognise good behaviour and safe choices, and celebrate peer support to foster increased independence in play.

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.

Definition 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

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)

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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 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 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 role of the supervisor is to make the play environment better. They will follow the three supervision types:

- Direct supervision is for those children who have very low levels of competence and where the children are unlikely to manage risk or self-regulate their behaviour. These adults need to watch what the child is doing at every moment and the child needs to being the close sight line of adults.
- Remote supervision - this type of supervision the adults are reachable by children within the play environment so the adults can quickly respond to any accidents or incidents. 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. Risk is controlled by managing the environment and building competence in the children.
- Ranging - In ranging supervision supervisors' 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.

If an adult is required to intervene in the remote and ranging type of supervision, they will do so in a sensitive way by following the following steps:

1) Wait – do you actually need to intervene or can you 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 unsure move in closer.
3) Support – Support children experiment and explore different ways of doing things and acting even if it not in the best way. They need to be able conduct experiments and make mistakes. This is how they learn.
4) Act – Act decisively or swiftly if you really need to for safety or protection.
5) Withdraw – Remember the goal is to hand ownership and control of play to the children.

The role of adults in play

The school will help children's 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.

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.

Equality and diversity

We are committed to:

- promoting equality of opportunity
- promoting good relations between members of different racial, cultural and religious groups and communities
- eliminating unlawful discrimination

The policy sets out our commitment to tackle discrimination whether direct or indirect, individual or institutional and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations across all areas of school activities, including our dealing with parents and the community.

At Mendip Green Primary we will continuously strive to ensure that everyone in our school is treated with respect and dignity. Through providing 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.

Mendip Green is committed to promoting good relations between persons of different groups and avoiding discrimination, whether direct or indirect. We will actively promote equality, oppose discrimination in all its forms and foster positive attitudes, respect, equality and partnership as we work with child, parents, carers and the wider community.

Roles and Responsibilities

Strategic Lead

The Strategic Lead oversees the OPAL Strategic Team (Curricular Lead, Play Coordinator and Deputy Headteacher). The Strategic Lead is ultimately responsible for Health and Safety.

Curricular Lead

The Curricular Lead leads on strategy and finance. Their key responsibilities are:

1. Holds responsibility for play policy, play strategy, budget, action plan and evaluation
2. Manages play coordinator and holds responsibility for the play team
3. Supports play coordinator and play team in delivery of the action plan
4. Reports to head and governors on play development
5. Supports communication on play to whole school community
6. Supports development of the play environment
7. Supports effective risk management in play (RAPID)
8. Supports development of effective playwork practice.

Play Coordinator

The Play Coordinator leads on operational delivery. Their key responsibilities are:

1. Reports to curriculum lead for play
2. Leads and supports the play team
3. Leads on delivery of the play action plan
4. Leads on provision and maintenance of loose parts and play resources
5. Supports communication on play to whole school community
6. Supports development of the play environment
7. Supports effective risk management in play
8. Supports development of effective playwork practice within the play team

Play Worker

1. **Supervising Play:** Overseeing play activities to ensure they are safe, engaging, and inclusive for all children.
2. **Resource Management:** Sourcing, organizing, and managing a diverse range of play resources, including loose parts, and communicating with children about available resources.
3. **Safety and Risk Management:** Conducting daily risk assessments of play areas, identifying and addressing potential hazards, and ensuring safe play practices.
4. **Child Support:** Fostering children's social and behavioral development, supporting their well-being, and intervening with pupils who find positive behavior choices challenging.
5. **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Working as part of a play team to develop and implement play plans, support staff and pupils with their play leader roles, and participate in team meetings.
6. **Communication:** Discussing play initiatives and plans with pupils and staff, and maintaining effective communication with all stakeholders.

Parents and Governor Champions

1. **Strategic Leadership:** They are the high-level strategic lead for the OPAL program, ensuring it aligns with the school's vision and priorities.
2. **Resource Allocation:** They commit the necessary time, resources, and training to ensure the OPAL program thrives at all school levels.
3. **Championing Play:** They promote the importance of play for children's development, including creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and resilience, as outlined in the OPAL approach.
4. **Policy & Vision:** They work to embed the OPAL philosophy and vision into the school's culture, ensuring play becomes a strategic, not just an optional, part of the school day.
5. **Risk-Benefit Analysis:** They help to ensure staff and the community understand the value of risk-taking in play, moving from an enforcement mindset to a facilitator role.
6. **Overseeing the OPAL Programme:** They provide the high-level direction for the program, ensuring that the day-to-day provision of the OPAL program meets its goals.
7. **Supporting the Play Team:** They indirectly support the play team by ensuring they have the confidence, training, and resources to effectively support play at lunchtimes and beyond.

Monitoring and Review

Progress of the implementation of OPAL play is monitored through designated audits and trackers from OPAL:

- baseline assessment tool
- audit tool
- action plan

The Play Coordinator is responsible for day-to-day monitoring of the implementation of OPAL Play and will feedback to the Curricular Lead, Strategic Lead and wider SLT.
The OPAL Play strategic leadership team meet monthly to update audits and review against the action plan.

This policy is reviewed once a year.