Borrow Wood Primary School OPAL Play Policy

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1. 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.

2. 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."*

The OPAL approach closely reflects the Borrow Wood Primary School BEST values. By providing a richer, more creative and active playtime, children are encouraged to be brave in trying new challenges, engaged through purposeful and joyful play and supportive through playing collaboratively having to negotiate and include others. These positive play experiences build trust, resilience and improve wellbeing, helping the children return to the classroom ready to learn, with improved behaviour and attitudes. In this way, OPAL supports the development of trustworthy pupils who feel safe, confident and motivated.

3. 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 essential for children's health, wellbeing and holistic development, supporting their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual growth. It promotes physical health through movement and exercise, supports mental wellbeing through enjoyment and immersive experiences, meets sensory needs, and can help reduce screen time.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social world, as well as different concepts, ideas and experiences. Through play, children develop real-world knowledge, discover their strengths and interests, and gain new experiences that broaden their understanding of themselves and others.
- Play fosters imagination, creativity, curiosity and a love of learning, encouraging children to remain open to new ideas, develop their capabilities and extend the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Play builds confidence, independence and self-esteem, giving children the freedom, choice and autonomy to make decisions, take appropriate risks and develop a strong sense of self.
- Play provides enjoyment and positive emotional experiences, helping children experience and manage a wide range of feelings, including happiness, frustration, acceptance, rejection, fear and achievement. Through these experiences, children develop resilience, emotional regulation and self-management skills.
- Play strengthens social relationships and understanding of others, enabling children to build friendships, develop empathy and interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures.

- Play develops communication, language, negotiation and cooperation skills, helping children learn from others, share, take turns, resolve conflicts, balance their rights with their responsibilities, and work effectively as both leaders and team members.
- Play promotes problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making, enabling children to overcome challenges, manage risks, adapt to new situations and develop confidence in their abilities.
- Play provides opportunities for achievement and personal growth, helping children develop self-belief, competence and a sense of accomplishment through meaningful and engaging experiences.

At Borrow Wood, these experiences align closely with our BEST values, encouraging children to be brave in trying new things, engaged in their learning and play, supportive of others through cooperation and friendship and trustworthy as they develop responsibility, respect and positive relationships.

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Provide a varied, stimulating and challenging environment that inspires curiosity, creativity, imaginative play and exploration.
- Foster a lifelong love of learning through engaging, relevant and inspiring experiences that support learning across the curriculum and deepen children's understanding of the world around them.
- Support children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development, helping them build resilience, confidence and wellbeing.
- Enable children to take appropriate risks and develop the confidence, judgement and resilience needed to manage challenges safely and responsibly.
- Promote independence, teamwork and positive learner behaviours, helping children develop self-confidence, self-motivation and the skills needed to achieve personal and academic success.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop positive relationships, cooperate with others and strengthen their sense of belonging within the school community.
- Encourage respect, citizenship and responsibility, helping children value their surroundings and show consideration for others.
- Celebrate equality, diversity, inclusion and individuality, ensuring all children feel valued, respected and able to thrive.

5. 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.

6. 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 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.

See Appendix 1

7. 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.

Borrow Wood Primary school will have a dedicated Play Team supervising children throughout lunchtime. The Play Team will adopt the OPAL approach of direct, remote and ranging supervision, ensuring that children are supported appropriately while maintaining opportunities for independence and self-directed play. A Play Coordinator will oversee the overall lunchtime provision, monitoring the quality and development of play opportunities across the school. The Play Coordinator will also work in close partnership with the Curricular Lead, maintaining regular communication to ensure that the school's play provision aligns with its wider aims for children's learning, development and wellbeing.

8. 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. See Appendix 12

9. Equality and diversity

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.

Borrow Wood's play provision should seek to:

- Ensure all children can access and enjoy play opportunities
- Remove all barriers that may prevent participation in play
- Encourage interaction between children of different ages, abilities and backgrounds
- Make reasonable adaptations to support children with additional needs
- Promote a culture of respect, inclusion and belonging within play settings
- Ensure children feel safe from bullying, harassment and discrimination during play

10. 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' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

11. Appendix A - HSE Managing Risk Statement

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

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.

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.

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.

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.

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[1] 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

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'.

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.

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.

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 Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

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

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'.

Play providers[2] 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.

They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

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

[2] 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.

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.'

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 respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

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.

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12. Appendix B - Playwork Principles

The playwork principles

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. That is, 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 ADULT 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.