



## Opal Play Policy

Document history	
Date approved	
Approved by	Full Governing Board
Review date	April 2025
A copy of this document can be obtained from	The schools' website The schools' network
Related documents	



## 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. Our beautiful site of ten acres provides a crucial environment for self-initiated play. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. The school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play. 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 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."*

Our school vision is all about 'Igniting Passion, Empowering Learner, Transforming the Future' – this is enhanced with our school values of; Courage, Creativity, Curiosity, Compassion and Composure – all things that we hope to foster and develop through play.

## 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 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.
- Play incorporates everything that 'Purple Learning' is about – help develop resilience, bouncebackability, focus, perseverance, collaboration, feedback, reflection, determination, communication, negotiating skills, challenge, courage, problem solving skills, critical thinking, self-efficacy, amongst many other vital learning skills.

#### 4. Aims

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 that 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.

#### 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'*.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments (Appendix 2) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

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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.

Purple Learning underpins all learning at John Rankin Schools – its core philosophy is about understanding the difference between the three zones – comfort, challenge and the danger zone. Therefore, introducing an element of risk to play, seems logical. With play, children are challenged even further to understand what challenge is – and differentiate between activities that pose a certain element of risk, but then understanding what boundaries need to be in place to maintain challenge while not entering the zone where the activity becomes dangerous. In entering into such activities, children will understand how to assess the risks of every challenge and be able to identify what steps they require to keep themselves and others safe.

'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 dangers'. (HSE, 2013) John Rankin will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

## **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 FS2, 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.



This will be part of the school's dynamic risk assessment benefits as part of this we have taken on the use of OPAL's Rapid Response to managing risk. OPAL have developed the five-part R.A.P.I.D. Response to managing risk in your school approach which should be followed alongside the guidance on managing loose parts set out in Doc 3.2 OPAL Loose Part Guidance.

1. Risk-Benefit Assessment - means you should look at your usual environment and practices at least annually, and also when significant changes take place, and keep a written record of the areas in the table below using the risk-benefit template provided. Your assessments should cover hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury. John Rankin Schools has developed its own Risk Benefit assessment and this has been shared with staff and parents, and is available on the school's website.

2. Assemblies - OPAL Play Assemblies as described in guidance Doc 3.10. These should be held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play. A brief written log must be kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed. Regular assemblies will be delivered when new equipment is introduced into the school environment and to remind the children and staff of the John Rankin values which all relate to play.

3. Policy - a play policy approved by the governing body and leadership is essential and should form the basis for all staff understanding and decision making about managing risk in play. This should include formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance. This information is part of the play policy section on supervision.

4. Inspection - technical reports of engineered fixed play equipment. Fixed equipment should have an annual inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections should be carried out by a member of staff and a record kept. A record is kept of any inspections or equipment that is found to be damaged and needs fixing.

5. Dynamic Risk Management - means that staff 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 risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm whilst preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible. Dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. This means that 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, 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. Intervention – if staff think that serious harm (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation), is imminent or probable they should intervene to either stop or manage the risk. If they think that serious harm is possible but not probable, they should remain vigilant. If serious harm is very unlikely then they should probably focus their attention elsewhere or act to further improve the quality of the play offer. Dynamic risk assessment has been introduced to all members of staff as part of a school, Inset Day- regular meetings held with the Play Team around their use of dynamic risk assessments.

At John Rankin, we will divide the play area into zones and have an adult in each zone. Those children who require 1:1s will be allowed to play with all the other children while an additional adult will be ranging but not interfering in play unless any incidents require adult intervention.



## **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.

Playground rules will be kept to the minimum required to maintain safety and all playground rules will be agreed by the Play working party.

## **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.

## **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.

To manage risks :

- Our Site Team performs regular Health & Safety checks of the play areas
- The Opal working party and all playtime supervision staff will check for dangers/ risks when outside with the children
- The children will be made aware of possible risks and helped to manage those via staff alerting them, for example slippery or wet surfaces
- Separate the play area into zones to maintain a risk/benefit management system creating quiet areas as well as areas for physical 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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)