



Westlands Primary School

OPAL play policy

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."*

Our school values state that we want our pupils to be a STAR. Safe, trustworthy, aspirational and respectful. We feel that through the benefit risk child-guided play provided by the Opal Program, our pupils will be able to realise all of the school values.

Safe: The "child-guided" aspect of Opal considers the child's capabilities and comfort level, potentially reducing unnecessary risks. Children will be supervised and their play will be benefit risk assessed.

Trustworthy: By allowing children to take calculated risks and make decisions within the play, the program can foster trust in their judgement and ability to learn from experiences.

Aspirational: The Opal Program involves challenges and exploration, it can encourage children to push their boundaries and strive for mastery. This can translate into an aspirational attitude in other areas.

Respectful: Child-guided play often involves collaboration and negotiation. The program can provide opportunities for children to learn to respect each other's ideas and play styles.



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.

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.



At Westlands Primary School, we can foster a love of play which empowers every child to reach their full potential.

- **Importance of Play:** We acknowledge the crucial role of play in child development.
- **Student-Centred:** We understand the importance of incorporating student voices for maximum enjoyment.
- **Holistic Development:** We focus on both personal growth and skill development through play.

We strive to foster a love of play that empowers every child to reach their full potential, nurturing our school's STAR values of safety, trustworthiness, aspiration, and respect.

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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

At Westlands Primary School, we believe that child-centred play should incorporate opportunities for calculated risks and age-appropriate challenges. This allows children to:

- **Develop resilience:** By facing and overcoming challenges in a safe, supervised environment, children build confidence in their ability to handle difficult situations.
- **Learn from mistakes:** Risky play provides a natural setting for trial and error, allowing children to learn valuable lessons from both successes and setbacks.



- Push their boundaries: When presented with safe challenges, children are encouraged to explore their limits, develop new skills, and gain a sense of accomplishment.
- Become problem solvers: Risky play often requires creative thinking and problem-solving skills to navigate obstacles and overcome challenges.
- Develop self-awareness: By experiencing calculated risks, children gain a better understanding of their own capabilities and limitations.

We ensure safety remains a priority by providing clear supervision, age-appropriate challenges, and a supportive environment that allows children to take calculated risks and learn from their experiences.

See appendix 1 - Children's Play and Leisure promoting a balanced approach.

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.

See Appendix 2

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 3 - Playwork principles



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.

To promote equality and diversity at Westlands Primary School, we complete the following:

- Provide specific training to staff on the Equality Act and their responsibilities.
- Provide regular cyclical opportunities for staff development on equality and diversity throughout the year.
- Setting up a family THRIVE hub to provide support for families of children with special educational needs (SEND).
- Providing specific courses for parents on SEND.
- Thrive as an approach is embedded across our school and it is interwoven with the Opal Play offer

Westlands Primary School recognizes play as a universal right and experience for all children, regardless of gender, race, ability, or special educational needs (SEND).

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

At Westlands Primary School, we believe a rich play setting is fundamental to a child's well-being and development. Here's how our play environment fosters positive outcomes:

- **Safeguarding:** A well-resourced and supervised play environment allows children to explore freely within clear boundaries, promoting a sense of security and reducing risks.
- **Team Building and Advocacy:** Play often involves collaboration and negotiation. Children learn to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and advocate for themselves and others within the play scenario. This builds confidence in teamwork and assertiveness.
- **Social and Emotional Skills:** Rich play settings provide opportunities for children to develop empathy, share, take turns, and manage emotions through interaction with peers. This strengthens their social and emotional intelligence.



- Love of the Outdoors: By offering stimulating outdoor play areas, we encourage children to connect with nature. This fosters a sense of wonder and appreciation for the environment, laying the groundwork for future environmental stewardship.