

OPAL play policy for Westbury-on-Severn CE Primary School



2025-2026



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.

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."*

This rationale links to The Westbury Way:

Ready To Learn/Respect for Everyone/Safe at all Times

Plus our core values of

- Respect
- Friendship
- Hope
- Kindness

All of these values can be seen in action during a positive playtime. Pupils will be developing their friendships at playtime and learning to show respect for each other by sharing and taking turns.



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:

- 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 enables pupils to be highly active.
- Play outdoors and in nature, connected to the environment, the seasons and the weather supports pupils' understanding of curriculum areas such as Geography and Science.
- Play outdoors helps pupils learn respect for the environment/nature (particularly in Forest School) and supports our curriculum driver of sustainability.
- Play gives pupils' brains "downtime" to free range and decompress. This is necessary for mental wellbeing and supports improved concentration back in the classroom.

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. We seek feedback from pupils regularly through meetings with school council and pupil surveys.

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.

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 will be one or more adults present outdoors. One member of staff is on the playground and the other in the green areas (wearing wellies if necessary).

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. Staff use Walkie Talkies to contact staff indoors in an emergency.

Direct- 1:1 supervision for certain children may be necessary

Remote- Staff on duty are actively observing play, making suggestions if necessary

Ranging- Staff are actively moving around the play zones to ensure pupils are happy and safe

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.

- 1 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 and communities.
- 2 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 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 For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
- 5 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 The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
- 7 Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
- 8 Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.

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.

This policy complements our behaviour policy well, most specifically the PACE approach to interactions with pupils.

Playful

Accepting

Curious

Empathic



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, observing what excites children and building on their interests.

11. Play Ambassadors

The role of the Play Ambassador is to support pupils in their play and work with the OPAL staff to ensure all play equipment is fit for purpose. The Ambassadors from time to time can design and implement new play activities and they have responsibility for keeping all sheds tidy and orderly.

12. Play Assemblies

These are timetabled 3 x a year minimum and when changes to play provision occur. The Play Ambassadors help deliver these alongside the Headteacher and OPAL play team.

13. Family play afternoons

These are timetabled yearly every summer for all families to enjoy an afternoon of OPAL play together. Siblings (older and younger) are welcome.

14. Practical issues

As a staff we have devised guideline for pupils to follow regarding certain areas and play equipment:

- Ropes are for skipping and horse pretend play. Ropes are not to be tied to equipment.
- Digging takes place in the digging pit. Holes are to be dug as wide as they are deep. Overtrousers must be worn in the digging pit.
- In the muddy months, we will ask pupils to wear overtrousers at playtime, as well as coats and wellies, if they want to get wet and muddy. We will build a bank of

resources (Coats/Overtrousers/spare clothes and socks) and some children may bring their own.

- Staff on lunchtime duty will bring a walkie talkie with them. The Headteacher will have a walkie talkie with them 12-1 and a charged walkie talkie will be in the staffroom, to troubleshoot any medical or safeguarding emergencies. It is the responsibility of staff to keep their walkie talkies charged.
- Fully stocked First Aid kits are kept in the shed in the quiet area and are available to use at all playtimes. These are regularly checked and restocked.
- When the field is opened up for play, the playground is closed, due to staffing.
- Jumping from heights: Pupils can jump from a height no higher than their shoulder height.
- Climbing trees: There is a marker in climbing trees- pupils can climb that high and no higher. The OPAL play team will decide on which trees they can climb.
- Tyre swing- Queue up and stand clear of swing's path.

15. Daily and Weekly Routines

Play resources are freely available for pupils to "self-serve" every play time. The sheds can be opened up by the staff on duty, the table tennis table uncovered and gates opened, but accessing resources is for the pupils to do independently. We might make suggestions "Shall we get the dinosaurs out today?" but the decision about what to play with stays with the child.

The expectation at the end of every play time is that pupils will put away resources they have played with or bring equipment to the play shed for the play ambassadors to put neatly away. Adults may support/model tidying up, but they are not doing it alone. They are encouraging participation.

The bell is rung to indicate play has ended. This job is given to the winning house team weekly and pupils sign up on the play board. Pupils tidy and then line up.

Tidy Friday

On **Tidy Friday** a tidy up song is played on the beat box after the first bell – this song is voted for regularly by the pupils. Extra time is put aside for everyone to tidy up and put things away properly. On Tidy Friday the bell is rung at 12.50, every other lunchtime it is rung at 12.55. **All staff in school come out to help for Tidy Friday at 12.50.**

During the week, dens may stay in position, but they are dismantled on Tidy Friday and all loose parts are put back into storage.

Pupils line up on the second bell ring on Fridays only (12.59) and stand in line in year groups, waiting for their teacher. The expectation is that pupils do not wait for more than a few minutes and are then led into school by their teacher, who collects them at 1pm.

This policy is reviewed yearly by all staff.