

The venue Infant School

PLAY POLICY

Signed on behalf of the Governing Body: Mr S Miller

Position: Chair of Governors

Date: 8th July 2025

Review date: July 2027

Play Policy

July 2025

This policy sets out The Avenue Infant School's commitment to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social and intellectual development and to improve opportunities for creativity, co-operation, resilience, coordination, imagination and enjoyment through improved playtimes in our school. In a time where outdoor play environments and opportunities are on the decline, the school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

Rationale

During their time in school, our children will spend 20% of their time at play, which is equivalent to 1.4 years of primary school. This time needs to be well planned and coherent, with as much care and attention given to play as to other subject areas in school. Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play which allows them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment.

The OPAL 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 Value of Play

We strongly believe that: "Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community" (Play Council 2001).

At The Avenue Infant School we believe that play has many benefits including:

- Enhancement of children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions e.g. within peer groups, with individuals, with groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicities and cultures.
- Critical for child's health and wellbeing
- Exploration of the physical and social environment and different concepts and ideas
- Experience of wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness, happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration, fascination, fear, confidence etc.
- Encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative
- Maintains an openness to learning, develops children's capabilities and allows them to push boundaries of what they can achieve
- Communication and negotiation skills

Links to Learning

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it

is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries

Our Aims

Our school aims are:

- To provide children with a play setting which is enjoyable, challenging and stimulating
- To allow children to take risks
- To provide children with a range of play opportunities which will support their learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them

We aim to give the children the opportunity to:

- Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- Develop physical strength
- Develop skills in self-assessing and managing risks
- Encourage emotional resilience and self-confidence
- Think creatively and play imaginatively
- Develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others
- Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving
- Develop emotional health
- Develop their relationships with each other and to have respect for their surroundings and each other

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 (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 principle 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.

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. In the words of 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. We believe it is important for children to learn to manage their own risks to develop their independence and resilience, in line with our core learning behaviours.

cf. Playtime OPAL Risk Benefit Assessment 2025

Supervision

During the school day there will be adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging.

Direct: This is when adults need to see what every child is doing at every moment and all children are in relatively close sightlines of adults. This would be applicable in situations where there is considerable danger of death or serious injury, it is judged that children have very low levels of competence and where they are unlikely to be able to manage risk or self-regulate behaviour.

Remote: This applies when adults are visible and reachable by children within the play environment so that they can quickly respond to an accident or incident. 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 be quickly be identified and acted on. It is expected that risk will be controlled by managing the environment and building competence in the children.

Ranging: This applies on large school sites which might have areas away from open view, such as around corners, over mounds, in woodland or long grass. Supervisors would range over the site so they have an idea of what kind of play is 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.'

Follett, M. 'Creating Excellence in Primary School Playtimes' 2017, p.87

Except for new children in Reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or practical. Supervision will take remote and ranging models, so that children can quickly find an adult, and adults can patrol the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. The vast majority of our supervision will be remote due to the nature of our site.

The adult's role in play

The school will help children maximize 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.

All playworkers will have access to in house training, and new members of the playteam will be trained as part of induction.

cf. Playwork principles

Environment

We believe that a rich and diverse play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating and creative environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer our children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

Inclusion

All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or individual abilities.

All adults engaged in providing play are committed to providing equal access to all children, all activities will be considered to ensure that all children who wish to take part can do so, and there are no barriers – physical, emotional, social or behavioural which will inhibit children from playing the things they want to play.