



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 Play rationale aligns with our school values @Caring, Creative and Confidence' Embedding and threading our 3 R's throughout: Respect, Responsibility and resilience.

Ofsted Inspection Toolkit for behaviour and attitudes:

- Introducing and embedding OPAL Play will directly support the expectations set out in the Ofsted inspection toolkit for behaviour and attitudes. The toolkit highlights the importance of pupils learning self-discipline, managing their emotions, resolving conflict, and showing high levels of respect for others. High-quality play opportunities create daily contexts for pupils to practise these skills in real situations, developing positive relationships and resilience. By providing structured yet flexible opportunities for play, OPAL enables children to build social skills, self-regulation and independence, while reducing low-level behaviour incidents. This aligns with Ofsted's emphasis on schools establishing high expectations for behaviour, consistent routines, and cultures that are highly conducive to learning.

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.

We have created this new policy in 2025 based on parent, staff and children surveys:

Our children wanted..

- 'To play even when it's raining.'
- 'To listen to music and dance.'
- 'To play high up and climb everywhere.'
- 'To play in sand and water just like reception.'

Our parents suggested..

- Zones for different play types
- Provide equipment and loose parts
- Encourage inclusive games and supported interaction
- To increase the limited amount of creative, imaginative and quiet options.
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Our staff felt..

- We have behaviour issues due to lack of activities/boredom
- Limited space and resources
- Some children can be isolated or left out
- Want to support play and not dealt with just poor behaviour choices.

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'*.

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.

At Butler's Hill Infant School, we believe that experiencing risk and challenge is an essential part of childhood and learning. By giving children opportunities to explore, problem-solve and test their own limits in a safe and supportive environment, we help them grow into *caring, creative and confident* individuals. Risk-taking encourages children to show *responsibility* for their choices, demonstrate *respect* for others, and develop *resilience* when things don't go as planned. Through these experiences, children learn to persevere, adapt, and celebrate successes—skills that prepare them for life both in and beyond school.

See HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) as an appendix

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.

Agreed Supervision for Play – Infant & Nursery School

- **Zoned Supervision** – staff are allocated to specific areas of the playground (e.g. climbing, loose parts, quiet zone, messy play) to ensure full coverage.
- **Dynamic Risk Assessment** – staff continually scan for potential hazards while allowing children to take appropriate risks.
- **Active Engagement** – staff observe closely, support when needed, and join in to model positive play and behaviour, without directing or controlling play.
- **Positive Language** – use encouragement and guidance rather than restrictions, supporting independence and confidence.
- **Ratio Awareness** – maintain agreed adult-to-child ratios, ensuring younger children (nursery/reception) are supervised with higher vigilance.
- **Inclusive Practice** – ensure all children, including those with additional needs, are supported to access play equally.
- **Boundaries and Expectations** – staff reinforce clear, consistent play rules (e.g. safe climbing, respecting others, using materials appropriately).
- **First Aid Readiness** – at least one trained first aider is always present outdoors, with easy access to first aid equipment.
- **Visibility and Communication** – staff remain visible to each other, use walkie-talkies/hand signals if needed, and report concerns promptly.
- **End-of-Play Routine** – clear systems for tidying up, gathering children, and transitioning back into class safely.

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.

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.



OPAL and Equality, Diversity and Safeguarding

Our OPAL approach supports the school's Equality and Diversity policy by ensuring that every child, regardless of background, ability or need, has equal access to high-quality play. A rich play environment promotes safeguarding by providing safe opportunities for children to take risks, build confidence, and develop teamwork and leadership skills. OPAL also encourages children to advocate for their own rights, strengthens social and emotional capabilities, and fosters a love of the outdoors, laying the foundations for care and respect for the environment.

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

