



Opal Play Policy

SCHOOL POLICY

Review: Annually

Next Review Date: May 2027

Role	Name
Headteacher	Caroline Rodgers
Chair of Governors	Linda Mosley
Designated Governor	
Designated Senior Lead	Caroline Rodgers – Headteacher

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 motto 'The Brockley Way – Only my best is good enough' is at the heart of our philosophy; we support this through nurturing pupils' creativity, encouraging independent thinking and learning and showing that failure can be a learning opportunity.

We believe working collaboratively with other schools and agencies is extremely beneficial as it helps our staff reflect and adapt their practice, so that we improve our school's approach to teaching and learning – which leads to improved outcomes for our children. Working in this way also provides a platform where we can share and celebrate what we are good at too.

1. 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.

In relation to our school, we hope to:

- Ensure play is available and accessible to all.
- Improve behavioural challenges by allowing children access to nature and risky opportunities.
- Allow children the opportunity to be imaginative and creative outside.
- Encourage an all-weather approach to play time.

In order to effectively discharge this responsibility, the Headteacher should ensure that:

1. A school Positive Behaviour Support (including Physical Intervention) policy is in place and approved by the Governing Body, in line with the Local Authority Policy and Guidelines.
2. The school policy is understood and adhered to by all staff.
3. Best practice is kept up to date and modelled by the head teacher.
4. All staff know the physical intervention procedures, including who to report them to and where and how they should be recorded
5. Relevant staff are authorised to carry out Physical Interventions.
6. Adequate resources are available to ensure this policy is implemented.
7. Practice relating to Physical Interventions is monitored.
8. Training is available to staff relating to the use of Physical Interventions.
9. Risk assessments are in place and the use of Physical Interventions is planned wherever possible.
10. All incidents where a physical Intervention has been used are recorded and followed up.

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.

The safety of the children must come first, therefore if a child's behaviour contradicts 'The Brockley Way', staff reserve the right to withdraw OPAL benefits.

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.

Please see the HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) in the 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.

The play team have devised 4 zones of play and will have 1 member of staff in each zone.

The zones are:

Garden

Playground

Top field

Bottom field

Staff will communicate via walkie talkies.

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.

Brockley Primary School is dedicated to ensuring that all members of the school community and the wider community are treated equally, fairly, and with respect by the school and by each other. The Equality Act 2010 offers protection to people with 'protected characteristics'. These are:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

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

Having a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

11. Active Uniform

At Brockley, we are really proud of our OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) provision. It allows children to explore, take manageable risks, build confidence and develop important social skills through high-quality outdoor play. To make sure all children can enjoy these opportunities safely, it is really important that they come to school dressed appropriately for outdoor play every day.

What is an "Active Uniform"?

At Brockley, we have an active uniform, which supports our OPAL outdoor play approach and encourages children to be ready for learning and movement throughout the day.

An active uniform means that children come to school dressed in clothing that:

- Allows them to move freely and safely
- Is suitable for outdoor play, climbing and physical activity
- Can be worn all day, rather than changing for PE

What does this look like at Brockley?

Our active uniform keeps our school identity and colours, but adapts styles to be more practical:

- School-coloured tops (e.g. polo shirts, sweatshirts or hoodies with or without logo)
- Dark joggers, leggings or shorts (e.g. black, navy) instead of formal trousers or skirts
- Trainers suitable for running, climbing and outdoor play
- Weather-appropriate layers (e.g. school jumper, coat, waterproofs)

This approach means children:

- Can take part in active play straight away, without barriers

- Stay safe when climbing, exploring and playing outdoors
- Feel comfortable and confident throughout the day
- Spend more time learning and being active, and less time changing

It also better supports our OPAL provision, where children are encouraged to explore, take risks and develop independence in outdoor environments.

Our expectations

We will continue to:

- Keep a smart and consistent school identity through colours and simple guidelines
- Work with families to ensure expectations are clear, affordable and practical
- Support any families who may need help accessing suitable clothing

In simple terms...

An active uniform is about: keeping our school colours and pride, whilst making sure children are ready to learn, play and move all day

Why this matters

Our children regularly: Climb trees Explore long grass and natural areas. Build, balance and move in a variety of outdoor spaces These experiences are incredibly valuable, but they do mean children need the right clothing to stay safe and comfortable.

What we ask

Please ensure your child comes to school wearing:

- Closed-toe, secure footwear (no sandals, crocs or open-toe shoes) Clothes suitable for active play (e.g. trousers, leggings or shorts that allow movement)
- Clothing that covers legs where possible, especially for playing in grassy or wooded areas
- No loose items (such as scarves or long drawstrings) that could catch when climbing
- Weather-appropriate clothing (coat, waterproofs, sun hat, etc.)

If clothing is not suitable

If a child is not dressed safely for certain activities, we will always support them to:

Adjust what they are doing to keep them safe, or Use spare clothing from our storage area that we refer to as TK-Maxx - where we can. However, sometimes if we don't have anything or child does not wish to use our items, this may mean they are unable to take part in some of the more adventurous parts of OPAL play.

Working together

We understand that mornings can be busy and that not everyone has lots of spare clothing. If you need any support with this, please do let us know, we are always happy to help. Our aim is not to restrict play, but to make sure every child can take part safely, confidently and fully. Thank you for your continued support in helping us provide such a rich and exciting play experience for all our children.

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. 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 danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks¹ and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being 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'.

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

¹ The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers² should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

² Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

September 2012