



St Mary's Hampton

Church of England Primary School

Play Policy

Review Frequency: Annual
Next Review: Spring 2026
Introduced Spring 2025 & reported to Local Governing Committee February 2025

1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions affecting 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 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. Childhood is fleeting but OPAL play truly allows the 'children to be children' right up until they leave us in Year 6.

The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is: *"... 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 approach to play aligns with our school values of 'In Faith we Trust, In Hope we dream and in Love we Flourish'. Playtimes become a 'window, mirror and door' in which children have the time and space to be amazed at the awe and wonder of our world, reflect on their own insights and to create something new.

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.
- Play promotes a lifelong passion to explore, hopefully inspiring dreams for the future that will allow each child at St Mary's to flourish as the amazing individuals they are.

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.
- Develop children's spirituality through providing a 'door' in which all children at St Mary's can do or think something new, to go through a door of creative expression and of their own thoughts and conviction.

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 we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play. A rich play setting helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights.

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)*.

The school is committed to ensuring that all play opportunities are provided in a safe and secure environment. While play involves an element of risk, we will ensure appropriate supervision, risk assessments, and staff training to minimise hazards and promote a safe play experience.

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.

As stated earlier, in order for playtime at St Mary's to be a 'door' that opens up limitless possibilities, children need to be able to take managed risks so they can explore new ideas and create something new.

In line with the HSE Managing Risk Statement, the school will keep a risk assessment to keep a record of:

- Who might be harmed and how
- What is being done already to control risks
- The further action the school needs to take to control the risks
- The member of staff responsible for completing the action
- When the action must be completed by.

7. Supervision

The law requires 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 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.

Adults will be timetabled to supervise specific 'zones' of the playground and spread out accordingly so they will be easily accessible to children when needed. They will be responsible for managing risk in that zone, checking in with children's play periodically to assess levels of risk and intervene if necessary.

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.

All staff involved in play supervision have a responsibility to safeguard children and uphold the school's safeguarding policies. Any concerns regarding a child's welfare will be reported in accordance with our safeguarding procedures, ensuring a safe and supportive play environment.

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, but we understand child-led play is optimal to children's development.

For example, a play worker may question children about how to safely manage their own risks and support them in solving problems that emerge during play. They may also be involved in encouraging children to identify any broken or damaged resources in their zone and remove these if necessary.

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.

We are committed to ensuring our play provision is inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of ability, background, or individual needs. We will actively promote an environment where every child feels valued, respected, and supported in their play experiences.

10. Environment

We believe a rich play setting should ensure all children have access to stimulating environments free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play. At St Mary's we believe when children develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, it sets a key foundation for caring for the environment in the future.

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