



Chapelford Village Primary School

OPAL Policy

Version Number	2.0
Date policy last reviewed	July 2025
Policy Type	School – Good Practice
Owner	Headteacher
Approved By	Local Governing Body
Approval Date	18 th September 2025
Next Review Date	July 2026

Summary of changes

Date of review	Summary of changes
January 2024	New Policy
January 2025	Policy Review
July 2025	Updated Policy

APPROVED BY: Headteacher & Chair of Governors – September 2025



Commitment

At Chapelford, we recognise the importance of play in the development of children. Play is not just a fun activity; it is a vital part of learning, well-being, and social development. Our OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Play Policy reflects our commitment to ensuring that every child at Chapelford has access to high-quality, engaging, and inclusive play opportunities.

We have developed this policy because we understand that play has a profound impact on children's emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. It fosters creativity, problem-solving skills, social interaction, and independence. As a school, we believe it is essential to create a rich and stimulating play environment that supports children's learning and well-being both inside and outside the classroom.

This policy will guide all our decisions related to play, ensuring that play is considered in all aspects of school life. We are committed to using this policy as a framework for planning, developing, and assessing the play opportunities available to our children. It will serve as a compass for our strategic and operational leadership, helping us to continually improve and enhance play provision within our school.

By applying this policy, we will ensure that play is valued, promoted, and integrated into the daily experiences of all our children. Through strong leadership, we will provide the necessary resources, training, and support to sustain a culture of play that benefits every child. Our approach will be inclusive, ensuring that all children, regardless of background or ability, have equal access to high-quality play opportunities that support their development.

Rationale

Chapelford Village Primary School recognises the vital role that play has in the development of children and believes that it should be a key consideration in our decision-making processes, allocation of time, and use of resources. We are committed to addressing play in a holistic and meaningful way, ensuring it is central to the experiences of our children at school.

In today's world, children face unique challenges that impact their ability to engage in free, unstructured play. Changes in childhood, such as increased screen time, less outdoor activity, and busy family lives, have reduced the opportunities children have to engage in creative and physical play. Additionally, some children may not have access to safe or stimulating play environments outside of school, making it even more important for schools to provide high-quality play opportunities.

By addressing play in our decision-making, we are investing in the overall well-being and development of our children. Play supports physical health, social skills, emotional resilience, and cognitive development, providing children with the chance to learn through experience and exploration. We believe it is essential to provide children with the time and space to engage in play that encourages curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.

We also recognise that every child has the right to play. At Chapelford, we are committed to making play accessible and inclusive for all. Our play provision is designed to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social background, cultural heritage, or individual abilities, have equal opportunities to participate in meaningful play. By fostering an environment that is welcoming and accessible, we aim to create a space where every child can feel valued, included, and empowered through play.

This commitment to play in our planning, time allocation, and resource use reflects our belief in the transformative power of play for every child and our responsibility to ensure that all children can thrive in a supportive and engaging 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.*”

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.

Chapelford strongly believes that play has many benefits. These are outlined below.

Play is critical to children’s health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development (personal development).

Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas where it may not be possible for them to outside of school.

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. This supports the existing work that children complete through PSHCE and the RESPECT framework.

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. Playing provides children with opportunities to problem-solve and regulate their emotions with limited teacher input.

Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative in a safe and well-managed stimulating and risk-managed environment.

Play maintains children’s openness and confidence to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

Aims

In relation to play, Chapelford Village Primary School aims to:

- **Provide a Varied, Challenging, and Stimulating Environment:** We will create play settings that allow children to freely explore, engage, and make choices about what they want to do and how

they do it, ensuring they have a broad range of opportunities to stimulate their creativity, curiosity, and learning.

- **Encourage Risk-Taking with Risk-Benefit Management:** We believe that children should have opportunities to engage in a reasonable degree of risk in their play as an important part of their holistic development. We will support children in understanding how to manage risks, helping them to learn from their experiences and understand the benefits of calculated risk-taking.
- **Develop Positive Relationships:** We aim to provide opportunities for children to interact with their peers, fostering teamwork, communication, and cooperation through collaborative play. This will help them build strong social bonds and learn important interpersonal skills.
- **Foster Respect for Others and the Environment:** Through play, children will learn to appreciate their surroundings, value the resources they use, and respect each other's differences. We aim to create an environment where mutual respect and care are embedded in all aspects of school life.
- **Support Holistic Development:** Play is essential for children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual growth. We will ensure that our play provision promotes a balanced development across all areas, encouraging well-rounded development.
- **Promote Imaginative Exploration:** Our play settings will offer a variety of environments where children can explore, create, and imagine. This will support the development of creativity and critical thinking through imaginative play.
- **Support Cross-Curricular Learning:** Play will be designed to support children's learning across all subjects of the curriculum, enabling them to explore new concepts and understand the world around them in a hands-on, engaging way.
- **Encourage Independence and Teamwork:** Our play policy will foster both independent thinking and collaborative teamwork, providing children with opportunities to take responsibility for their actions while also learning to work together with others.
- **Build Emotional and Physical Resilience:** Play will offer children a chance to face challenges, learn coping strategies, and develop resilience, both emotionally and physically, as they navigate through various activities.
- **Develop Problem-Solving Skills:** We will provide play experiences that encourage children to solve problems, think critically, and work creatively to overcome challenges, helping to strengthen their cognitive abilities.
- **Embed the CVPS Values:** Our play environments will reflect and support the values of HPL, fostering these values, such as collaboration and open-mindedness, through play activities.
- **Provide Screen-Free Play Opportunities:** Recognising that many children may not have access to screen-free play opportunities at home, our school will ensure that children have access to play environments free of screens and digital technology. This will give children the chance to engage in more traditional, active, and social play.

Through these aims, Chapelford Village Primary School is committed to ensuring that play remains an integral and enriching part of every child's educational experience, supporting their development, learning, and well-being.

Rights

At Chapelford Village Primary School, we recognise and uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically Article 31, which asserts that every child has the right to play, rest, and leisure. We believe that play is not just a privilege but a fundamental right of every child, and it is essential to their overall development, health, and well-being. This right to play supports children's creativity, problem-solving skills, social interaction, and emotional growth, all of which are integral to their education and development.

We also acknowledge Article 12 of the UN Convention, which states that children have the right to be heard in matters that are important to them. This includes decisions about their play and the environments in which they play. At Chapelford, we are committed to ensuring that children's voices are heard and valued when it comes to their play experiences. We actively encourage children to express their opinions, ideas, and feedback regarding the play opportunities available to them.

By listening to our pupils and involving the OPAL ambassadors in decision-making processes related to play, we ensure that their rights are respected and that the play provision is truly reflective of their needs and desires. This approach helps us to create a play environment that is engaging, inclusive, and supportive, and it fosters a sense of agency and ownership in children.

We take our duty to protect and promote children's rights seriously, and this commitment is embedded in all aspects of our play policy. By prioritising the rights of children to play and to be heard, we strive to provide a play experience that is meaningful, enriching, and beneficial for every child at Chapelford.

Equality

Chapelford Village Primary School is firmly committed to ensuring that all children, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or any other characteristic, have equal access to high-quality play opportunities. We believe that play is a fundamental right for every child, and it should be an inclusive experience that supports the development and well-being of all children, regardless of their individual circumstances or abilities.

Our commitment to equality and access means we provide a wide range of play opportunities tailored to meet the diverse needs of all children. We ensure that both younger and older pupils have access to stimulating environments where they can explore, take appropriate risks, and engage meaningfully with their peers in a supportive setting. All children are enabled to play in ways that are meaningful to them and appropriate to their phase of development, ensuring play remains inclusive, enriching, and accessible to everyone.

In line with our broader school policies, including the *Equality and Diversity Policy* and the *Inclusion Policy*, we will work to eliminate barriers to play for any child, ensuring that no child is excluded or disadvantaged. This commitment extends to ensuring that all children are respected, supported, and given the same opportunities to thrive through play, regardless of their background or individual needs.

Through this approach, we aim to foster a sense of belonging and ensure that every child, regardless of their differences, can experience the full benefits of play. We will regularly review our play provision to ensure it continues to be inclusive and accessible, reflecting our ongoing commitment to equality in all areas of school life.

Benefits and Risk Management

Play is a fundamental and vital part of a child's development and well-being. Through play, children develop essential life skills such as problem-solving, creativity, social interaction, and emotional resilience. It helps them understand the world around them and promotes physical health, cognitive development, and emotional balance. For the school, providing quality play opportunities contributes to a positive, engaging school environment that supports overall student success.

We acknowledge that with the benefits of play come potential risks. However, the goal is not to eliminate all risk but to create a balanced approach where risks are considered and managed effectively. By offering children opportunities to take acceptable risks, we empower them to develop essential skills in risk assessment and decision-making, helping them grow into confident, capable individuals. As Health and Safety Executive (2012) states, "No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool."

Our commitment is to ensure that children have access to challenging and beneficial play while managing potential harm. The Health and Safety Executive's guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (2012) will support our decision-making. In line with this guidance, we will adopt a risk-benefit approach to play, considering both the potential benefits and the risks associated with each play opportunity, including where children play.

We will base our approach to managing risk in children's play on the Health and Safety Executive's

guidance *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (see appendix). In line with OPAL's risk management principles, we will adopt a risk-benefit approach that supports sound decision-making and ensures a well-maintained, 'safe enough' environment for play.

Furthermore, we believe in empowering children to take part in identifying and managing risk themselves. As part of their play experience, children will be encouraged to assess risks, make decisions, and take responsibility for their safety with adult support. This approach will be regularly reviewed by the OPAL working group, through discussions with the OPAL ambassadors and Play Team, to ensure it remains effective and responsive to the needs of the children. This is shared during half-termly OPAL assemblies, messages delivered by the OPAL Working Group and in memos sent to support staff to share with their class.

By fostering a culture of responsible risk-taking, we aim to provide a play environment that promotes safety, learning, and development, allowing children to reap the full benefits of their play while minimising the risk of serious and unnecessary harm.

Supervision Styles

At Chapelford Village Primary School, we understand the importance of effective supervision during playtimes to ensure the well-being of all children. While the law requires that children have supervision during school hours, it does not specify a set ratio for primary school playtimes. Our approach to supervision is informed by OPAL's three models: Direct, Remote, and Ranging.

While direct supervision is important for new children in Reception, who may need additional support to adjust to the school environment, we do not believe that constant direct supervision is necessary or beneficial for all children. Instead, we focus on using ranging and remote supervision models, which allow children to play freely while still being safely monitored. This approach enables children to take ownership of their play and build independence, while ensuring that adults are available to intervene if necessary.

Guidelines for Supervision at Chapelford:

- **Zoning:** Supervisors will be assigned to specific areas of the school grounds, as determined by the OPAL curriculum lead. These zones will be clearly marked on a map of the school grounds to ensure that all children are adequately supervised. The areas will be chosen to ensure visibility and coverage across the site.
- **Visibility:** All adults responsible for supervising children will wear high-visibility vests to ensure they are easily identifiable by both children and other staff members.
- **Communication:** To ensure effective communication and prompt response to any situation, all supervisors will carry walkie-talkies. This will allow for rapid coordination between staff members across the different zones.
- **First Aid:** Designated staff members with first aid qualifications will be assigned specific zones and will be equipped with first aid supplies to address any medical needs that may arise.
- **Monitoring and Support:** Two Play Coordinators will support the OPAL lead to monitor and check that the supervision plan is being adhered to effectively. They will ensure that all areas are covered and that supervision is taking place as planned.
- **Flexibility:** Our supervision plan will allow for flexibility in case staff members need to leave their designated zones for any reason. Adequate staffing levels will be in place to maintain reasonable levels of supervision, and adults will regularly patrol the playground to stay aware of the types of play and the emerging risks.

Through this approach, we aim to balance safety and freedom, allowing children to engage in imaginative and challenging play while maintaining a strong support system and exercising the school's duty of care. This system of supervision will be regularly reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect the needs of the children and ensure continuous improvement.

The Play Team's Role

At our school, we recognise the vital role that all adults play in supporting children's play to ensure every child has access to high-quality, enriching play opportunities. While our staff are not trained playworkers, we utilise teachers, teaching assistants, and lunchtime staff to supervise and support OPAL playtimes. Their approach is guided by playwork principles, with staff encouraged and supported to adopt a playworker-informed mindset. This is achieved through training provided by OPAL College and in-house development led by our OPAL Working Group. Our goal is to remove barriers to play and to help create an environment that stimulates and maximises opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. At Chapelford, we believe that the adults supporting children's play should create flexible and stimulating environments that are adaptable and controllable by the children themselves. Adults are not there to direct play but to facilitate it, ensuring that children have the freedom to explore, take risks, and learn at their own pace. The playworker's role is to provide the necessary resources, guidance, and support for children to extend their play experiences and challenge themselves within a secure and supportive environment.

The role of the adult, as outlined in the Playwork Principles, is informed by these principles and they guide the way we support children's play. These principles focus on providing environments that promote children's autonomy, creativity, and self-directed play. Key aspects of the playworker's role include:

- **Removing Barriers to Play:** The primary task of a playworker is to identify and remove any obstacles that may prevent children from fully engaging in their play. This could include ensuring children have sufficient time, space, permission and resources for play, and offering appropriate support when needed.
- **Creating a Flexible and Stimulating Environment:** Adults are responsible for creating a rich play environment that offers a variety of materials, spaces, and activities for children to explore and enjoy. This environment should encourage children to be curious, creative, and active participants in their own learning and development.
- **Supporting Self-Directed Play:** Adults should not direct the play but facilitate it by providing the conditions that allow children to make choices and control their own play. This approach helps children develop independence, problem-solving skills, and resilience.
- **Observing and Listening:** Playworkers should observe children during play, noting their interests and play behaviours. By listening to children, adults can better understand their needs and desires, and can adjust the play environment or offer new challenges to extend their play experience.
- **Enriching the Play Experience:** Adults can enrich children's play by introducing new materials, ideas, or challenges that encourage exploration, risk-taking, and learning. This could involve introducing a new tool, a different resource, or facilitating a group game that encourages collaboration and cooperation.

As members of the senior leadership team, we are committed to supporting the playworker's role by ensuring that all staff are trained and informed by the Playwork Principles. We will provide ongoing professional development opportunities and ensure that all adults working with children on the playground have the skills and knowledge to facilitate high-quality, self-directed play.

We believe that adults should be both supportive and reflective in their approach to play. While intervention may sometimes be necessary, it should be in response to the child's needs and in a way that nurtures the child's self-confidence and ability to navigate challenges independently. This means we will support staff in understanding when to intervene and when to step back, allowing children the space they need to take risks, solve problems, and learn.

Our commitment to supporting the playworker's role is central to our philosophy of play at Chapelford. We

will continue to monitor and evaluate how adults are supporting children's play, ensuring that our approach remains in line with best practices and is always focused on maximising the benefits of play for every child. OPAL training, including the Play Worker training and a formal induction with the Curriculum Lead, is given to all new members of staff.

For further information on the Playwork Principles, staff are encouraged to refer to the [Playwork Principles Guide](#).

Environment

We believe that a rich play environment is one that stimulates children's creativity, curiosity, and independence, while offering them the freedom to explore and learn through their play. A rich play setting allows children to engage with their surroundings, take risks, and make choices in a secure and supportive environment. We are committed to providing a play environment that is free from unnecessary or unreasonable risks, ensuring that children can engage in freely chosen play without fear of serious harm.

Our collective view, based on the feedback collected from staff and pupil voice and the principles outlined in the publication *Best Play*, is that a quality play environment should include a variety of stimulating, open-ended materials and spaces that allow children to engage in imaginative, social, physical, and cognitive play. These environments should support risk-taking and challenge, while also being adaptable to children's evolving interests and developmental needs. Play settings should be inclusive, ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or background, can participate in and benefit from the play experiences offered.

In line with this view, the school is committed to continually improving the quality and diversity of our school grounds to enhance play. This includes the creation of varied play zones that offer different experiences, such as quiet areas for reflection, spaces for physical activity, and places where children can explore nature and engage in creative play.

The school also recognises the importance of environmental sustainability in providing a rich play setting. We are committed to protecting the environment and using natural, recycled, and sustainable materials to minimise waste and ensure that our play areas remain well maintained, well managed and inspiring for play.

As part of our commitment to providing a high-quality play environment, we will use the *Best Play* document to guide our decisions on what a rich play environment should contain. This resource provides a comprehensive framework for creating a diverse and enriching play space.

Through our ongoing efforts to develop and maintain our play spaces as part of OPAL, we will continue to review and improve the environments we offer, ensuring that they meet the evolving needs of our children and provide opportunities for growth, exploration, and fun.