In the summer of 2012, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Play Safety Forum (PSF) jointly published a high-level statement on the provision of children’s play in all situations, including within parks and schools. The statement sets out HSE policy[[1]](#footnote-1), and it is this policy that OPAL follows.

*“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”.*

[*http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf*](http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf)

Both the Department for Education and Ofsted endorse the HSE high-level statement on children’s play. Therefore, OPAL recommends that schools should follow the best practice examples as set out in the PSF guidance on making *suitable and sufficient* risk-benefit assessments of children’s play.

OPAL advises clients to follow the published RIDDOR guidance on reporting accidents/incidents in the playground [[2]](#footnote-2), which are considered by HSE to be different from those occurring in a ‘workplace’:

“*Most playground accidents due to collisions, slips, trips and falls are not normally reportable. Incidents are only reportable where the injury results in a pupil either being killed or taken directly to a hospital for treatment.*

*Either is only reportable if they were caused by an accident that happened from or in connection with a work activity. This includes incidents arising because:*

* *the condition of the premises or equipment was poor, e.g. badly maintained play equipment; or*
* *the school had not provided adequate supervision, e.g. where particular risks were identified, but no action was taken to provide suitable supervision.”*

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/edis1.pdf>

**Notes:**

* An example of a ‘work activity’ could be a PE lesson but not children’s free time to play.
* Children’s play is defined as being a) *freely chosen, b) personally directed and c) intrinsically motivated*. If an activity does not meet all of these criteria it is not play. PE lessons, sports and adult-led games do not meet all three criteria.
* ‘Adequate supervision’ can only be properly assessed by the competent staff who supervise playtimes every day. Only they can intimately know the characteristics of their pupils and the play environment.
* OPAL takes the view that as children’s play naturally provides all of the same benefits as sport, only over a much longer period of each school week, risk levels within the play environment should be assessed by competent persons as being roughly the same as is traditionally acceptable in sports and games such as football, hockey, basketball or cricket. No feature or activity should be present in the play environment if there are not clear benefits that outweigh any risks.

**For further information on health and safety in children’s play please contact OPAL directly.**

1. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/edis1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)