OPAL Play Policy

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School

Approved by:	Governing Body	**Date:** April 2024	
Last reviewed on:	July 2026		
Next review due:	July 2028		

1. Introduction
2. Rights Respecting
3. Aims
4. Definition and Value of Play
5. Benefit and Risk
6. Education
   6.1 CIN Assemblies
   6.2 The RAPID Approach
7. Supervision
   7.1 Models of Supervision
   7.2 Conflict Resolution
   7.3 The Adult's Role in Play
8. Outdoor Play and Learning Uniform
9. Health and Safety
10. Equality and Diversity
11. The Role of the Governing Body
12. Conclusion
13. Monitoring and Review

---

1. Introduction

The rationale behind our Outdoor Play and Learning Policy is to enhance the overall well-being and development of our pupils. Outdoor play fosters physical activity, promotes mental well-being, encourages creativity, and supports social interactions. By providing structured opportunities for outdoor play, we aim to nurture a love for the natural environment, enhance problem-solving skills, and improve concentration levels among our students.

Our policy is based on the belief that OPAL play has the best interests of our pupils at heart by:

- helping to create a sense of co-operation and belonging
- ensuring equality and equity
- being practical and designed with health and safety in mind, particularly in line with our active day and engaging in outdoor play and learning
- is considered good value for money
- ensures as a Gold Rights Respecting School that we fulfil the rights of our pupils

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.

2. Rights Respecting

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School is a Rights Respecting School, based upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The rights within this convention cover basic needs, including education, health, being heard and experiencing a safe and secure environment.

We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play. At St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, we promote children's rights and responsibilities. We see children's rights are a central focus in everything we do, as a framework for our teaching and learning and at the heart of our ethos. In our communal areas, such as the playground, and dinner hall, we use the following rights.

Article 12
The right of children to be listened to on matters important to them.

Article 31
The right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural life and the arts.

3. Aims

Our Outdoor Play and Learning Policy aim 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.

4. 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 responsibility 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 be creative.

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

5. Benefit and Risk

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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

6. Education

6.1 To support the implementation of our Outdoor Play and Learning Policy, we have established CIN assemblies, which stand for Celebrate, Inform, Negotiate and Innovate.

These assemblies serve as a platform for recognising the achievements of students engaged in outdoor play, disseminating information about upcoming outdoor activities, collaborating with stakeholders to create outdoor play opportunities, and integrating outdoor play in innovative ways into the curriculum.

6.2 The RAPID Approach

Our school follows the RAPID approach to manage outdoor play effectively. This involves:

- Conducting risk benefit assessments to ensure that outdoor play activities are safe yet challenging.
- Organising regular assemblies to discuss the importance of outdoor play and reinforce safety guidelines.
- Developing and reviewing policies related to outdoor play to ensure compliance with regulations.
- Carrying out inspections of outdoor play areas and equipment to maintain high standards of safety.
- Implementing dynamic risk management strategies to address any potential hazards promptly.

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios.

7.1 The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision:

- Direct
- Remote
- Ranging

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.

- Play Leaders are designated to:
    - Ensure all children are in designated play zones.
    - Move around throughout lunchtime in their designated area, finding out where children are playing.
    - Check in on children's play throughout lunchtime.

7.2 Conflict Resolution

All staff will use the Conflict Resolution approach when supporting children in the playground.

The protocol is as follows:

1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.
2. Acknowledge children's feelings.
3. Gather information.
4. Restate the problem.
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together.
6. Be prepared to give follow-up support.

7.3 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 OPAL 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 attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting.

Playworkers are channels 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.

8. Outdoor Play and Learning Uniform

Our pupils have access to outdoor spaces throughout the school year and, unless weather conditions are extreme, will be able to go out and play if they have suitable clothing and footwear.

Each classroom has a welly rack for children to store labelled wellies and storage for outdoor shoes in class – parents should ensure this footwear is always in school.

At different times of year, children will also need:

- Waterproof coat
- Hat / gloves / cap
- Suncream

9. Health and Safety

The health, safety and wellbeing of all pupils is paramount at St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School. We recognise that children benefit from opportunities to experience challenge, uncertainty and managed risk through play, which supports the development of resilience, confidence, independence and decision-making skills.

In line with guidance from the **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**, the school adopts a **risk-benefit approach** to outdoor play, recognising that play necessarily involves some level of risk and that the benefits of play should be considered alongside any potential hazards. We aim to provide a stimulating and engaging environment where children can explore, take appropriate risks and learn how to assess and manage these safely.

To support this approach, we:

- Conduct regular inspections and maintenance of play equipment and outdoor environments.
- Undertake risk-benefit assessments for play spaces and activities.
- Carry out dynamic risk assessments during play sessions.
- Provide appropriate supervision in accordance with OPAL principles.
- Ensure staff are familiar with school health and safety procedures and emergency protocols.
- Promote children's understanding of risk and encourage them to make informed decisions about their own safety and the safety of others.
- Consider the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND and medical conditions, when planning and managing play provision.

By following HSE guidance and OPAL principles, we seek to create an environment that is **as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible**, allowing children to enjoy rich play experiences while developing the skills needed to assess and manage risk responsibly

10. 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 special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

11. The Role of the Governing Body

The governing body supports the headteacher in implementing the school uniform policy. It considers all representations from parents regarding the uniform policy and liaises with the headteacher to ensure that the policy is implemented fairly and with sensitivity.

It is the governors' responsibility to ensure that the school uniform meets all regulations concerning equal opportunities and is generally in line with social norms while allowing policy enables children to dress safely, in line with weather conditions, and practical.

The governing body monitors and reviews the school uniform policy through its committee work by:

- Seeking the views of parents.
- Considering, with the headteacher, any requests from parents for individual children to have special dispensation regarding school uniform.

12. Conclusion

The Outdoor Play and Learning Policy at St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School is designed to provide a comprehensive framework for promoting outdoor play while ensuring the safety and well-being of our students.

By following the principles outlined in Articles 12 and 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we aim to create a nurturing environment where children can thrive, learn and grow through outdoor play experiences.

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.

13. Monitoring & Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and links to the following policies and procedures:

- Child Protection Policy
- Equal Opportunities
- Health & Safety
- SEND
- Rights Respecting School Policy

This policy will also be monitored through:

- Governor visits
- Staff feedback
- Pupil voice
- OPAL audits
- Behaviour and wellbeing data