



Learning through faith

"At St Mary's we believe that ordinary people can choose to be extraordinary"

OPAL Policy

Ratification date: March 2025

Chair of governors: Mrs C Standing

Headteacher: Mrs P Nightingale

Review Date: March 2026

Safeguarding Statement

At St Mary's C.E Primary Academy we respect and value all children and are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our pupils so they can learn, in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. We believe every pupil should be able to participate in all school activities in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from harm. This is the responsibility of every adult employed by, or invited to deliver services at St Mary's. We recognise our responsibility to safeguard all who access school and promote the welfare of all our pupils by protecting them from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect and bullying.

Introduction

This policy sets out St Mary's C.E Primary Academies commitment to ensuring that quality play opportunities are available for all children. In line with article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Play Principles and the Department for Children, Schools and Families publication 'Managing Risk in a Play Provision', our school believes that all children need opportunities to play which allows them to explore, manipulate and experience their environment, free from unacceptable levels of risk. 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. At St Mary's, we recognise that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children.

Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. This means that play opportunities at school are even more vital. Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:

'encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live'.

This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness)

Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination)

Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes)

Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

At St Mary's C.E. Primary Academy, the children and staff think that play:

- Gives the freedom to express yourself
- Is doing what makes you happy
- Gives you energy, refreshes you and makes you feel good inside
- Is fun!
- Builds confidence and understanding
- Helps to promote and develop skills
- Allows children to be creative and co-operative
- Invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries
- Is time with your friends from any class
- Enables children to process their experiences of the world

Aims

Our aims at St Mary's C.E Primary Academy are:

- To provide children with a play setting which is both stimulating and challenging.
- To develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving.
- To encourage children to develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others.
- To allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
 - To develop skills in self-assessing and managing risk.
 - To enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
 - To aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
 - To provide children with a range of environments which will support their learning across the curriculum and about the world around them.
 - To promote self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
 - To build emotional and physical resilience.

Risk and Benefit

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

'Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children's development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world'. (DCFS)

At St Mary's C.E. Primary Academy, we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way.

The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that:

'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 dangers'. (HSE, 2013)

St Mary's C.E. Primary Academy will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play. Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching

opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments (**Appendix 2**) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

Adults Role in Play

All staff at St Mary's C.E Primary Academy are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. The adult's role in play will be governed by the Play Work Principles (**Appendix 3**) Adults will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies, School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.

An adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at St Mary's C.E. Primary Academy. In addition to this, the Play Team (**Appendix 4**) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. The play team ensures that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Remote supervision

Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

Children's Role in Play (Appendix 5)

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy.

In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences
- Respect and look after each other, the environment, equipment and toys.
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, interactions with the School Council and during discussions and dialogue in class.

Clothing

Children will be given the opportunity to play outside at all times of the year regardless of the weather where possible. Therefore, it is vitally important that all children must have wellies in school at all times. All children and staff must wear the appropriate footwear when in the OPAL area. Welly storage will be provided for children to store their wellies. All footwear/clothing must be labelled. Children should also wear coats during cold/wet weather. Children will be outside in light rain, wind or light snow – therefore the correct clothing/footwear is vital to their enjoyment of play.

It will be the decision of the head teacher, or play co-ordinator to decide if play can go ahead.

Appendix 1

Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm>

Appendix 2

Risk Assessment Date.....

Assessed by.....

	Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or Utility Or Related Policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action Date

Appendix 3

Play work Principles

1. **Understand Need**- All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals.
2. **Understand Process**- Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. **Support Process**- The prime focus and essence of play work is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. **Advocate for Play** - For play workers, the play process takes precedence and play workers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. **Create Spaces** - The role of the play worker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. **Learn and Reflect**- The play worker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, reflective practice.
7. **Understand Adult Impact**- Play workers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the play worker.
8. **Choose Intervention Styles**- Play workers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All play worker interventions must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

Appendix 4

St Mary's C.E Primary Academy Play Team

The Headteacher/Play Coordinator – Mrs. P Nightingale
PE Lead/Play Coordinator- Mrs. C. Bell
Play Coordinators (on duty) – Mrs. C Stevenson, Mrs. R. Taylor & Mrs. T. Finch