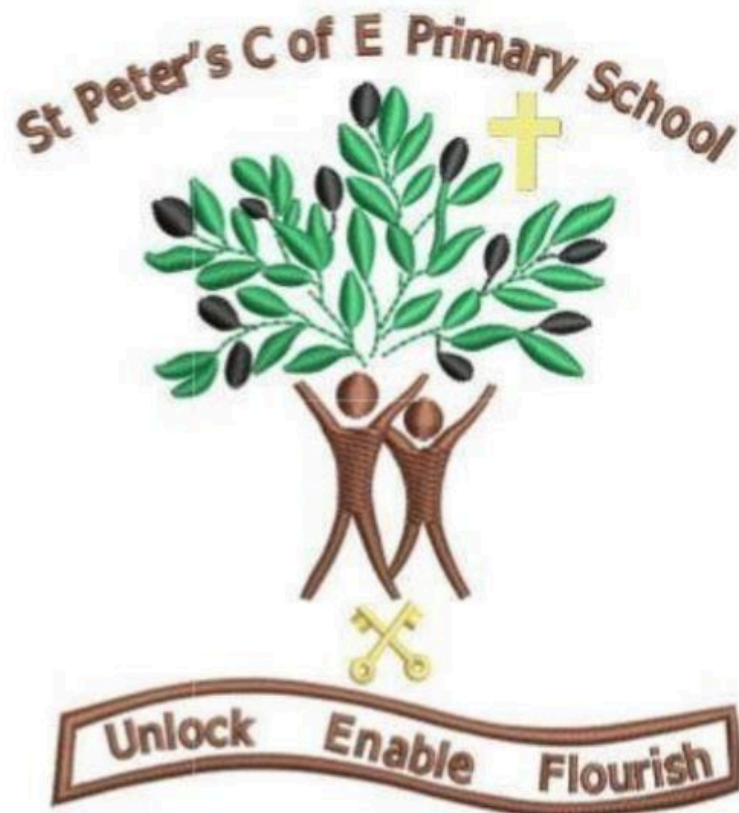


# Unlocking the Potential for Everyone to Flourish in the love of Christ.

'But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God.' Psalm 52:8



*St Peter's Church of England Primary  
School*

**Play Policy**

**September 2025**

This policy sets out St Peters Primary Schools commitment to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children. Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect 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.

## **1. Rationale**

Our school believes that 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. 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 believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development as it is a fundamental part of childhood.

*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."*

Our mission statement underpins everything that we do:

**'Unlocking the Potential for everyone to flourish in the love of Christ.'**

Play provides children with the time and opportunity for them to flourish holistically. It provides children with the opportunity to meet our school values: kindness, peace, courage and belonging. OPAL enables children to spend time in God's world and appreciate all that he has given us by appreciating the outdoor environment in all elements.

## **2. 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. It may be serious or light hearted. It may produce something or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children an opportunity to be creative, to make decisions and to assess and manage risks. At St Peters' Primary school, we recognise that play may include making a noise, getting dirty and making a mess. We believe that the role of the adults is to support the play process. We aim for children to have the opportunity for 'free range' play within the school grounds.

We believe that:

- 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. It enables children to develop problem solving skills.
- 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.

### 3. 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.
- Provide inclusive, accessible, and diverse play opportunities for all children.

### 4. 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 that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play. This contributes to our mission statement of enabling the children in our care to flourish.

### 5. 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,

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).

Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to judge risks independently and to learn new skills. All children need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capabilities. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs and ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving the risk of injury. Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. 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'. This enables children to demonstrate courage as they will have God's strength to support them.

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.

## 6. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there are 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 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. Staff are aware of their

responsibilities, they are dispersing around the playground and intervening when appropriate.

## **7. The adult's role in play**

St Peter's Primary 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.

The play worker'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 play worker 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. Play workers 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. Play workers on the playground patrol the areas and remain vigilant to keep children safe. When intervening the play workers will ask the children- 'Are you keeping yourself safe?', 'Are you keeping others safe?' and 'Are you keeping the environment safe?' If children answer no to any of these questions, they reconsider their play.

## **8. Environment**

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. 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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)

To manage risks:

- Our caretaker performs daily Health & Safety checks of the play areas
- The Opal working party and all playtime supervision staff will check for dangers/ risks when outside with the children
- The children will be made aware of possible risks and helped to manage those via staff alerting them, for example slippery or wet surfaces
- Separate the play area into zones to maintain a risk/benefit management system creating quite areas as well as areas for physical play.

## Appendix 1

### CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE - PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. 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 danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks<sup>1</sup> and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary

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<sup>1</sup> The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])



interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

### **Recognising the benefits of play**

*Key message: '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'.*

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.
8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:
  - Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
  - Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
  - Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
  - Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of

even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed

- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

**What parents and society should expect from play providers**

*Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits - not on the paperwork'.*

10. Play providers<sup>2</sup> should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced

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<sup>2</sup> Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful. Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

### **If things go wrong**

*Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play - but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'*

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

**September 2012**

## Appendix 2



## Doc 5.3 GUIDANCE Language to support play

### Supporting play: How to supervise challenging play outdoors

We encourage play supervisors to follow these helpful steps before intervening in play they feel is challenging or risky. This approach allows for the adult to fully comprehend the situation so their intervention can be more informed and effective. It also provides some time for children to practice independent risk assessment and conflict management.

#### 1. Watch:

Get a good understanding of what is going on, and determine if children are managing risk independently.

#### 2. Wait:

Check-in with yourself, and weigh your fear against actual risk.

#### 3. Move closer:

Get another perspective. Does your presence cue the children to manage the situation differently?

#### 4. Intervene without shutting down the play:

Inform children about the risks and provide guidelines for them to manage those risks.  
Negotiate some modifications with the children to manage the risks differently (eg by moving activity from asphalt to grass).

### Play prompts

#### Language to support play

These prompts were developed by an OPAL school in Canada to support children taking responsibility for their play. This same language is used to guide discussions about play inside the school in the classroom, at assemblies and on school display boards.

- ❓ Are you having fun?
- ❓ Is it safe enough *for you*?
- ❓ Are you including others?

#### Instead of saying no - try these!

Many social conflicts and behavioural issues during play time are motivated by feelings of frustration or anger towards the many restrictions during playtimes. Instead of saying no, try to support the child's play and help them to work through solutions to continue playing safely and make better decisions in the future.

#### When children are play fighting with loose parts:

- ❓ "Are you still having fun? If not, maybe you should play with something/someone else."
- ❓ "Have you checked in with your partner? Is she/he still having fun?"
- ❓ "What would happen if you hit each other's face/head/eyes?"
- ❓ "Are you aiming below the shoulders?"

#### When children are climbing managing heights:

- ❓ "Do you feel safe?", "What would happen if...?", "What's your next step?"
- ❓ "Do you think that's stable? How can we make that work?"
- ❓ "Look around. Have you checked to see if anyone near you could get hurt?"



## When children are in an area that is challenging to supervise or off limits:

- ? "Why have you chosen this spot to play?  
Is there any spot in the grounds that has the same features  
(eg shade, privacy, slopes, mud etc)?"
- ? "Do you know why this area is out of bounds?"
- ? "Is there anywhere else you could play?"



## Other helpful communication prompts<sup>1</sup>

- ✓ Stay focused on what you're doing.
- ✓ What is your next move?
- ✓ Do you feel safe there?
- ✓ Take your time.
- ✓ Does that branch feel strong and stable?
- ✓ Find more space!
- ✓ Before you throw that rock, what do you need to look for?
- ✓ That rock looks really heavy! Can you manage it?
- ✓ Please give each other lots of space so that no one feels like they need to push and no one gets knocked over by accident.
- ✓ I'm here if you need me.
- ✓ Please find a safe spot for your stick while you're running.
- ✓ I've noticed that this is a really busy area. What are some of the things we need to watch out for with so many kids around?" (And give some examples). Or,
- ✓ Let's move this to a lower-traffic zone.
- ✓ Do you feel stable/balanced?
- ✓ Do you need more space?
- ✓ Check in with each other. Make sure everyone is still having a good time.
- ✓ Ask her if she's ok.
- ✓ Ask him if he's still having fun.
- ✓ I've noticed that there are a lot of fallen trees and sticks to trip on here.
- ✓ Should we move this game to a more open area?
- ✓ Sticks need space. Mike, please back up from Sarah. She's holding a big stick!
- ✓ Sticks need space. Look around. Do you have enough space to swing that big stick?
- ✓ What's your plan with that big stick?
- ✓ Rocks need space!
- ✓ Did you like that? Make sure you tell her if you didn't like that.
- ✓ If you need to run, meet me at the next trail marker!
- ✓ Let's check this cave/fort to make sure it is safe to hide in.

<sup>1</sup>Eperjesi, P. (2017, June 22). When you want to say be careful! [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://childnature.ca/when-you-want-to-say-be-careful/>

