



# Strathmore OPAL Play policy

(Based on OPAL model policy)

**Policy Ratified: Spring Term, 2025**

**To be reviewed: SpringTerm, 2026**

## **1. Commitment**

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.

## **2. 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, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is that *"... better, more active and creative play times 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."*

This rationale aligns with the Strathmore vision 'Nurturing Brilliant, Resilient Minds' ensuring that children are given the opportunity to explore risk, problem solve, socialise and have fun during their outdoor times. It provides pupils with the opportunity to live our values in a number of different ways at break and lunchtime. For example:

- Be Safe - learn to assess and navigate risk and how to support each other to be safe while exploring new opportunities.
- Be Kind - opportunities to share, be supportive, encourage and enjoy spending time together.
- Be Resilient - opportunities to problem solve, try out new things and to rebuild when things go wrong.

## **3. 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.

At Strathmore, our school council define play as "When we aren't told what to do and we can have time and space to be with our friends and have fun." Our Early Years curriculum highlights the role of play in supporting children to learn knowledge and develop skills and our outdoors play policy ensures that these vital learning opportunities are provided to all pupils across the school.

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 responsibilities 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 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.

Our Play Policy aligns to our Behaviour Policy, Curriculum Policy and our Early Years Curriculum.

#### 4. 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.

#### 5. 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. Alongside the rights of the children, we want our children to demonstrate our school values of 'Be Safe, Be Kind and Be Respectful.' It is our belief that children can aspire to these values and our school vision *Nurturing Brilliant, Resilient Minds*; to enjoy and thrive during our play times. Children's achievements at break and lunchtimes will be acknowledged and highlighted to show the value of respectful play.

#### 6. 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, 2012)

**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)*.

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'*.

Our role as playworkers is to provide opportunities for children 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. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs. In supporting children to identify and manage risks, we are supporting pupils to take responsibility for their own safety, reflect on the choices they make and to be resilient when things are challenging to them. This links to our school vision and underpins our curriculum.

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.

Please see Appendix A - HSE Managing Risk Statement.

## **7. 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 should be 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.

As a school we have zoned our site into 5 zones. Each session we will determine the correct number of zones to open based on the staffing numbers available. All supervisors will receive training and clear instructions before the launch of OPAL. This training will then form part of all new staff members' induction programs.

## **8. 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 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 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 the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers 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.

See Appendix B - Playwork Principles

### **9. Equality and diversity**

Through providing a rich play offer, we aim to meet every child's needs and 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.

This aligns to our Equality Policy and is a key priority on our School Development Plan and Governor Strategy.

### **10. 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)

A rich play setting supports safeguarding through ensuring all children have access to a safe environment to navigate risk in a secure setting. It helps children develop: confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, speaking and listening skills including the language needed to facilitate cooperation and compromise, social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.