

Tanworth-in-Arden Church of England Primary School and Nursery



*In God's family, learning, loving,
growing to be our very best.*

Play Policy using OPAL

March 2025

Head teacher: S.Bamford

Chair of Governors: S.Joseph

Introduction

This Play Policy outlines our school's commitment to providing high-quality play opportunities to enhance the learning, development, and well-being of all children. Complying with the 2014 National Curriculum in England and integrating the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Programme, our aim is to promote a holistic approach to play, recognising its significance in fostering creativity, social skills, physical development, and emotional resilience, aligned with our Christian vision of "In God's Family, learning, loving, growing to be our very best," and inspired by the theological root "Live life in all its fullness" (John 10:10).

Rationale

Play is an essential part of childhood and supports learning across the curriculum. Engaging in play encourages children to explore their environment, develop critical thinking skills, and build relationships. Our policy aims to ensure play experiences are enjoyable, inclusive, and educational, embodying our Christian values of growth and community.

Aims and Objectives

- **Safe and Stimulating Environment:** Ensure a secure environment where children can freely engage in play.
- **Developmental Promotion:** Facilitate physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development through diverse and age-appropriate play experiences that connect with the curriculum.
- **Fostering Relationships:** Enhance positive interactions among children and between children and adults, nurturing a spirit of inclusivity rooted in our Christian ethos.
- **Creativity and Self-direction:** Offer opportunities for self-directed play and creativity to fuel imagination and innovation.
- **Outdoor Play:** Encourage outdoor play experiences in line with the OPAL Programme, integrating environmental consciousness and learning.
- **Inclusive Play:** Address the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), by providing appropriate resources and support.

Principles of Play

1. **Child-Led Play:** Empower children to direct their own play, making decisions about their activities under adult supervision.
2. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Provide accessible play options that respect diverse needs, backgrounds, and interests, reflecting the community's diversity.
3. **Learning Through Play:** Recognise play as a valuable method for learning across all curriculum areas, with deliberate links to educational objectives.
4. **Risk and Challenge:** Offer managed risk-taking opportunities to build independence, resilience, and problem-solving capabilities.

Right to Play

Tanworth-in-Arden CofE Primary 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. OPAL Children's Play Team hold regular meetings and feedback children's thoughts about play. The members take photos of playtime and discuss what is going well and what can be improved. The regular OPAL assemblies also ensure the children's voices are heard

Implementation

Planning for Play

- **Curriculum Links:** Integrate play with the National Curriculum, tailoring activities to developmental stages and subject interests.
- **Play Spaces:** Design both outdoor and indoor play areas that encourage imaginative play, physical activity, and social interaction, using varied resources.
- **Adult Involvement:** Ensure that staff facilitate play effectively, providing guidance and resources to enrich children's play experiences.

Monitoring and Evaluation including supervision

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

- **Observation:** Conduct regular assessments of children's play to monitor development in key areas such as social skills and creativity.
- **Feedback:** Gather insights from children, parents, and staff to assess and enhance our play provisions.
- **Policy Review:** Annually review and update the policy with feedback from a dedicated committee of staff and parent representatives.

Training and Development for staff (Play Team)

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 play team's (see appendix 2) 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 team 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 Team members 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.

The Play Team will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed.

The above will be achieved through:

- **Professional Development:** Organise workshops focused on child-led play, risk management, and inclusive play strategies, drawing on current educational best practices.
- **Continuous Learning:** Keep staff updated on the latest developments and research in play theory and the OPAL Programme's guidelines. All Play Team staff to have access to OPAL College.

Health and Safety/Risk Benefit Assessment

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)

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)

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’.

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.

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 (See Opal Risk Benefit Advice Document)) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

The above will be achieved through:

- **Benefit Risk Assessments:** Regularly evaluate play environments and materials to ensure they meet safety standards while promoting exploratory play and continually review Benefit Risk Assessments
- **Staff Training:** Equip staff with essential health and safety knowledge to effectively oversee play activities and complete Benefit Risk Assessments

Children, Parents and the Community

- **Children's role:** Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences. Follow the school rules of ready, respectful and safe in their play. Follow the Children's Play Policy. (appendix 1)
- **Communication:** Regularly inform parents about the role and benefits of play through various channels such as newsletters and workshops.
- **Parental Involvement:** Encourage parents to contribute to play resources and participate in events, strengthening community ties.

Conclusion

This policy is a cornerstone document that steers our approach to ensuring all students enjoy rich and valuable play experiences. By integrating play into our educational ethos and applying the OPAL Programme's strategies, we aim to cultivate a vibrant and nurturing environment that supports all learners' growth, reflecting our commitment to "learning, loving, growing to be our very best" as guided by "Live life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). This policy will be shared with staff, parents, and the wider community to promote understanding and support for our play initiatives.

Appendix 1:

Tanworth-in-Arden CofE Children's Play Policy

We all have the responsibility to make sure everyone enjoys playtime by making sure:

- everyone chooses what to play
- we share equipment fairly and kindly
- we take care of the equipment
- we treat each other how we like to be treated
- we keep everybody safe
- we are kind to others
- we help people if they need us
- we allow people to join in games
- we ask the Play Team if we need help to sort out our problems
- we listen to one another
- we play safely
- we all have the right to play and enjoy OPAL

Appendix 2:

OPAL Play Team

OPAL Working Party:

Mrs Shelley Bamford

Miss Alice Hodges

Miss Tracey Chambers

Mrs Catherine Vanderson

OPAL Play Team:

Miss Tracey Chambers

Mrs Zoe Hemming

Miss Sarah Buckingham

Mrs Sarah Coffey

Mrs Katy Hall

Mrs Sheila Walton

Miss Nadine Jones

Miss Emily Davies