

**WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**HEALTHY HEARTS; HEALTHY BODIES; HEALTHY MINDS**

**OPAL PLAY POLICY**

The Governing Board of *Whitefield Primary School* adopted this policy – FEBRUARY 2024.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the HEADTEACHER in the Autumn Term. Last reviewed FEBRUARY 2024.

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| Signed by: | | | |
|  | Headteacher | Date: |  |
|  | Chair of governors | Date: |  |

1. **Commitment**

WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL will refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children’s play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

1. **Rationale**

WHITEFIELD PRIMARY 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 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.”*

***Research shows that over 50% of children only play socially with other children at school.***

***Play makes up 20% of school life – this equates per year to 231 hours or 37 days or 7.4 weeks. This equates to 1.4 years of a child’s primary school life.***

*WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL holds our values of Healthy Hearts, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds at the forefront of our work, and this policy.*

*Through our Healthy Hearts, we will ‘embrace all of our community’ in our play and ‘continue to improve our school’ working ‘positively as a team’.*

*Through our Healthy Bodies, we will use our play to discover new ‘physical activities that keep our bodies healthy’ and keep ‘a healthy heart and mind’.*

*Through our Healthy Minds, our play will allow us to ‘show resilience – take risks, experience failure and bounce back’. We will ‘tackle the unknown with awe and wonder’.*

1. **Definition and value of play**

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated (for the child’s own motivations and reasons), 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, to be noisy and to assess and manage risks.

At WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL we recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty and make a mess. Children will be able to make their own decisions about play and be able to assess risk. We believe that the role of the adults is to support the play process through ensuring our children have access to resources that will enhance their play. The adults will supervise play through three elements – direct supervision (where the staff member is in full sight of the play), through remote supervision (where the staff member is visible and within reach) and through ranging supervision (where staff will support the children to manage their own risk).

We believe play has many benefits, including:

* Play is the most critical process of childhood
* Play is essential for the healthy, mental, spiritual, intellectual and social development of all children
* 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.
* Play contributes to language, arts, culture, science, maths and technology.
* Play aids the development of concentration and attention.
* Through play, our children will encounter, explore and make sense of the world and their place in it.

1. **Aims**

Our commitment to our children will be 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 and resources that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
* Provide a range of environments and resources 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.
* Allow children the right to assess risk, identify broken and damaged resources, get out and tidy away equipment

Our commitment to our staff will be to:

* Support staff to the rights stated above, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative practice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime.
* Provide the training and support needed to ensure staff can embed the play work principles.
* Provide regular opportunities for staff to feedback their observations and reflections on the children’s play.

1. **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.

1. **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)**

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

This links to our school vision of Healthy hearts, Healthy Bodies and Healthy Minds – ‘showing resilience, taking risks, experiencing failures, bouncing back’.

We will always make reference to the HSE Managing Risk Statement which is available alongside this policy.

1. **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.

WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL has generous ratios of adults to children for playtimes and lunchtimes.

* Our school will be supervised by our play team who will manage designated areas.
* In addition we will have nominated staff who will be available to provide support where a need is identified.
* We have adopted 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. The Play Team will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can move around the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging – this will include radios and hi-visibility clothing.

1. **The adult’s role in play**

We 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 Play Work Principles. Our Play Team (consisting of teaching assistants and welfare staff) will be trained in play work 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.

1. **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 other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

Our school ambassadors for equality and diversity will work alongside the Play Team to ensure we continue to meet every child’s play needs.

1. **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 hazards 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). This is a long term commitment and we will strive to develop our play offer to meet the needs of all our children.

At WHITEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL our play will allow children to fully utilise our extensive school grounds and ensure the children’s play supports their development physically and emotionally.

Our aim throughout the OPAL development is maximise our children’s access to all our school grounds on a daily basis. We will use our environment to embrace the opportunities that different seasons provide, including the chance to play in the rain and mud. Our uniform policy will reflect this and we will ensure we allow access to all weather play for all children.