Wordsworth Play Policy

Date	Review Date	Coordinator	Nominated Governor
May 2026	*July 2027*	*Annette Hixon*	*Liz Wagner*

1. Commitment

Wordsworth Primary School undertakes to 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 our children.

2. Rationale

Wordsworth 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.*"

At Wordsworth Primary School, we champion play as a catalyst for holistic development and community enrichment. Play promotes experiential learning, nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. By enabling our pupils to express themselves and collaborate freely in their play, we cultivate trust and empowerment, fostering autonomy, decision-making, and leadership skills. At Wordsworth, we believe that play provides a nurturing space for emotional growth, resilience, and empathy and that through play, we strengthen community bonds, celebrate diversity, and promote inclusivity.

3. Definition and value of play

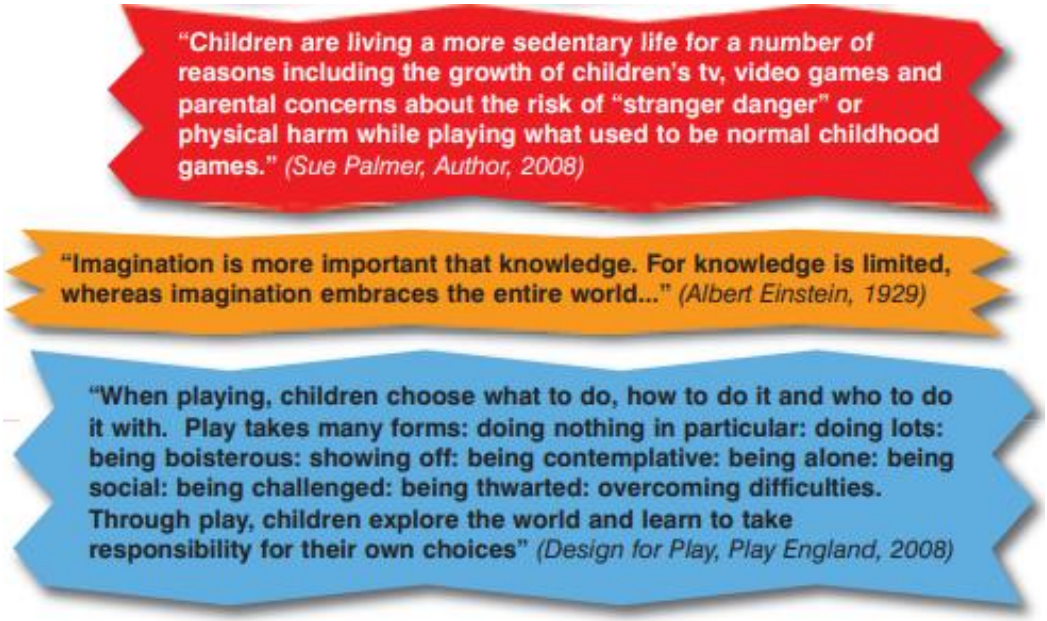
Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We intend that play provides essential personal development to all pupils. 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.

- Play encompasses a variety of activities pursued for the sheer pleasure and delight they bring. Characterised by being self-chosen, self-directed, intrinsically motivated, imaginative, and performed without external goals or rewards, play constitutes a fundamental and integral part of healthy development for children and society as a whole.



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4. Aims

In relation to play Wordsworth Primary School aims to:

- Ensure the school provides a challenging and stimulating environment, providing variety and equality of opportunity for our children.
- 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 unite through developing 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

Wordsworth Primary 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.

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'*.

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.

At Wordsworth, we believe that experiencing risk is essential for empowering our pupils as it helps them develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and confidence. It encourages creativity and innovation, preparing them for a future where they can confidently navigate challenges and pursue dreams beyond their imagination.

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.

The lunchtime staff to pupil ratio is 1:40. In areas with higher risk activities such as tree climbing, den building, construction, and the scooter area, one adult will be assigned to directly supervise the children. Additional adults will provide remote supervision. Our Higher-Level Teaching Assistant and Play Co-ordinator will have a more ranging role to support any pupils who may need additional support or guidance.

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.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm7IfAEsjqI



Our Playworkers are trained to:

- **Expanding Horizons:** Challenge children's existing knowledge by introducing materials or experiences that build upon what they already know, fostering a love for learning and exploration.
- **Empowering Choices:** Granting children the freedom to make choices not only empowers them but also allows them to lead their own learning adventures based on their interests and abilities, nurturing their sense of autonomy and trust in their capabilities.
- **Engaging Conversations:** Adults can enrich and support children's play by simply interacting with them during playtime, fostering a sense of trust and connection. By conversing with children about their play, adults demonstrate investment in their interests and respect for their decisions while facilitating learning through dialogue.
- **Acknowledging Efforts:** Supporting play not only brings joy but also communicates appreciation for their efforts, nurturing a sense of trust and security in their relationship with adults.

- **Enhancing Play:** Through active participation in play when invited, our adults will expand children's understanding and help them forge new connections, fostering a sense of trust in learning from others and building on shared experiences.
- **Preventing Issues:** By actively engaging in play, adults are well-positioned to intervene if needed, whether it's to address interpersonal conflicts, problems, or safety concerns. However, it is crucial to allow children opportunities to independently practice problem-solving and conflict resolution skills, nurturing their ability to trust in their own capabilities and fostering a sense of responsibility and independence.
- **Supporting Inclusion:** Sometimes, children may require assistance to engage in or join activities. Carefully considered adult involvement in their play can serve as a bridge to help children feel at ease initiating and participating in play experiences, fostering a sense of trust and belonging within the group

9. Equality and diversity

At Wordsworth Primary School, we promote an inclusive and collaborative ethos. 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.

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 Wordsworth Primary 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

A rich play setting serves as a multifaceted environment that not only fosters enjoyment and exploration but also plays a crucial role in safeguarding children and nurturing their holistic development. Play also supports various aspects of children's growth:

- **Safeguarding:** A rich play setting provides a safe and supervised space where children can engage in activities under the watchful eye of responsible adults. Clear boundaries and guidelines ensure physical safety, while open communication channels enable children to express any concerns or discomfort they may encounter, thus fostering a culture of trust and protection.
- **Confidence in Team Building:** Through collaborative play experiences, children learn valuable teamwork skills such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Working together towards common goals within the play setting builds confidence in their ability to navigate group dynamics effectively, preparing them for future social interactions and collaborative endeavours.
- **Advocacy for Rights:** In a supportive play environment, children are encouraged to voice their opinions, preferences, and boundaries, thus empowering them to advocate for their own rights. By respecting and acknowledging children's choices and perspectives, adults reinforce the importance of self-advocacy and instil a sense of agency and autonomy in children, empowering them to assert themselves confidently in various contexts.
- **Social and Emotional Capabilities:** Rich play settings offer ample opportunities for children to navigate social interactions, manage emotions, and develop empathy and resilience. Engaging in imaginative play, negotiating roles and rules, and resolving conflicts contribute

to the development of essential social and emotional skills, equipping children with the tools to navigate complex social landscapes and build meaningful relationships.

- **Love and Enjoyment of the Outdoors:** Immersive outdoor play experiences foster a deep connection with nature and promote environmental stewardship from an early age. Exploring natural environments and experiencing the wonders of the outdoors instil a sense of wonder, curiosity, and appreciation for the natural world, laying a foundation for a lifelong commitment to caring for the environment.

Appendix:

PLAYWORK PRINCIPLES

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. **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 and communities.**

2. **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. **The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.**

4. **For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.**

5. **The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.**

6. **The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.**

7. **Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.**

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well being of children.

[HSE Managing Risk Statement]

HSE

Health and Safety Executive

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[1] and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary 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[2] 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
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

[1] 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 orders on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

[2] Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holida playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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