

Oldswinford Church of England Primary School



OPAL Play Policy

***Approved by :
Review:***

Context

Oldswinford Church of England Primary School (OCEPS) is a voluntary controlled primary school within the diocese of Worcester. We are a much larger than average primary school averaging 420 pupils on roll. Children from Reception to Year 6 are taught in two classes in each year group. OCEPS is a popular school which is consistently over-subscribed.

“The pupils are polite, courteous, confident, articulate and keen to do their best. Children feel safe in school, and have great confidence in their teachers and other adults in school to help with any problems they have.”
Ofsted January 2018.

Vision, Values & Ethos

We fully embrace our distinctive church school ethos and wholeheartedly promote the whole child and the fullness of life, as set out in our ethos, vision and values:

‘Believe, achieve and shine brighter together’

At Oldswinford Church of England Primary School we believe that there is a light which shines within each of us – a light that has been given to us by God, which we should use to help us achieve great things.

We believe it is our job to help that light to shine in all that we do and all that we try to do.

Believe

‘Everything is possible for one who believes’

Mark 9:23

As a Church of England school we offer all children an invitation into the Christian faith, a chance for them to develop spiritually as well as intellectually, socially and morally. We want children to believe in their own abilities, to persevere when things are tough and we encourage them to aim high and follow their dreams. We want them to have the confidence to stand up to injustices and to make wise choices.

Achieve

‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart’ Colossians 3:23

We have high aspirations for all our learners and believe that every child should have the chance to reach their potential. We recognise that achievements come in many guises and we look to celebrate each child’s individual talents. We want to ensure our children are prepared for the next steps in their learning journey and they have all the skills they need to flourish and be happy.

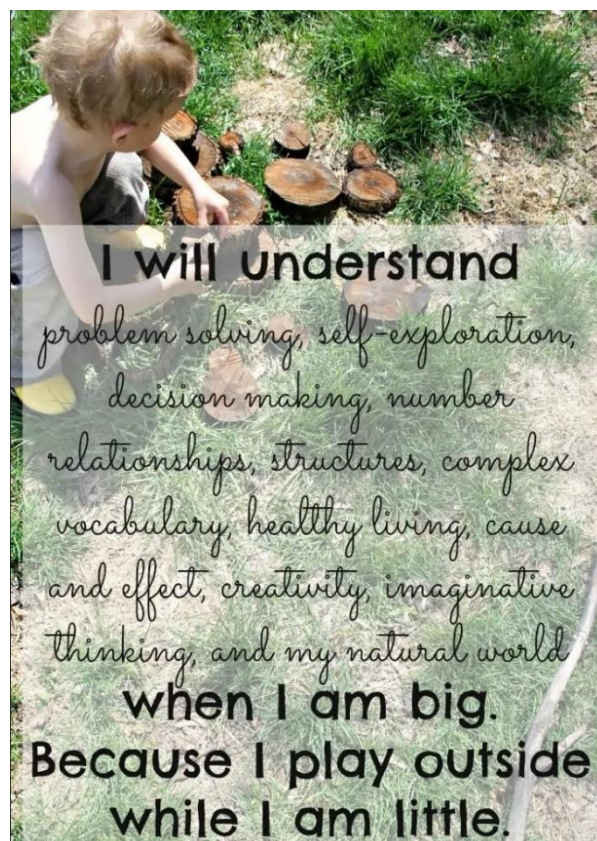
Shine brighter together

‘Let your light shine for others, so they may see your good works’

Matthew 5:16

We believe that we all belong to one big family and each of us has a special part to play. We understand the need for our children to be responsible citizens especially when caring about our world and the people around us. As individuals we are unique and special but together, with God, we can be exceptional.

Our vision and 7 key Christian values of love, respect, trust, courage, forgiveness, generosity and joy enable us to ‘believe, achieve and shine brighter together’.



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 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."*

The OPAL rationale clearly aligns with our school's vision and values.

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 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. Through this, play is proven to reduce childhood anxiety.
- 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.
- Each of our key Christian values of love, respect, trust, courage, forgiveness, generosity and joy, can be practised and applied through play.

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.

"I'm so happy that play is being valued like this - it is such a short and precious time of life that our children get to learn and grow through play." Parent feedback, 2024

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. This also aligns with our Promoting British Values policy. When consulted about the provision for play prior to OPAL, children shared concerns around being bored at lunchtime, especially if they weren't sporty, as well as not being able to play with friends or siblings in other year groups. They stated that they would like to be able to play on the field more often and have a bigger range of activities on offer. Designated 'Play



Detectives' and regular OPAL assemblies ensure that the children's voices are heard and their views and ideas are an integral part of the decision-making and development of play at lunchtime.

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 (see Appendix). 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'*. Children at OCEPS need access to play opportunities that enable them to experience, risk taking and challenge: key concepts which develop resilience and reflect the skills needed to be successful learners in the classroom. This is supported in our Teaching & Learning policy and upheld by our vision and values.

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.

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.

Lunchtime Supervisors will adopt the roles of Playworkers, overseeing designated zones, supervising and supporting children's health and safety and well-being through their play experiences. They will also support access, storage and tidying of play equipment. Lunchtime supervision ratios have been increased with the addition of a Play Co-ordinator and Curricular Lead for Play who will support the Playworkers and children at lunchtime.

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 (see appendix). 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 Playwork Principles Appendix)

The playworker's voice is an integral part of validating, modelling, promoting, encouraging and enriching children's play. Expected language and vocabulary might include:

- "I wonder why....."
- "But what if...."
- "I love the way...."

"Being a play worker is so much better than being a dinner lady. We get to share the children's joy instead of always nagging them and telling them no." Playworker feedback, 2024.

9. 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. As an inclusive school and in line with the Equality Policy, reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure fair and equitable access to play opportunities for all. Consideration will also be made to amending the school's uniform policy to remove barriers and ensure unrestricted access to play.

"Our autistic child has benefitted a great deal from the sensory play provided. A play area for digging meant he could ground himself so that he was calm and regulated. He was ready to learn in the afternoons and able to concentrate better." SEND Parent Voice 2024.

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.

OCEPS will develop a rich play environment which:

- Supports safeguarding
- Helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights;
- Increases children's social and emotional capabilities;
- Helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment
- Gives children opportunities to apply our school vision and values
- Creates joy and freedom

11. Roles & Responsibilities:

The Curricular Lead for Play is responsible for driving all play-related initiatives forward within the school. They are the person who has responsibility for the school's play action plan and the inclusion of play in the school improvement plan. (See Job Description Appendix)

The Play Co-ordinator will support and facilitate meaningful and productive child-initiated play during the school day in accordance with the play policy. (See Job Description Appendix)

Parent Governor Play Champions will:

- Observe and assess play within the school.
- Evaluate and monitor play within the school.
- Give feedback and support to the play team.
- Help to make improvements to play in the school.
- Attend play team meetings once a term.
- Gain feedback from the children.
- Report to and share with governors what has been observed and how play has been developed within the school.
- Support other parents to understand the school's approach to play.
- Advocate OPAL's approach and for children's play within the PTA and school community.
- Share contributions and ideas from parents and the wider community.
- Create links in the community that will develop play in the school, eg for sourcing loose parts or encouraging local councillors to see the importance of, and prioritise, play.

The Governing Body will ratify the Play Policy and Job Descriptions

Appendix: Playwork Principles

The Playwork 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.

Where the Principles refer to children and young people, they mean **all** children and young people.

- 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.

The Playwork Principles are held in trust for the UK playwork profession by the Scrutiny Group that acted as an honest broker overseeing the consultations through which they were developed.

HSE Managing Risk Statement

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 risks¹ 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

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 burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

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 providers² 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

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

² 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.

