ST JOHN'S
C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL
CATERHAM

EXCELLENCE
&
ENJOYMENT

# OPAL
# Play Policy

**March 2024**

Dear Children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.
1 John 3:18

Approved and Adopted by: Head Teacher

On: March 2025

Next Review Date: March 2027

# OPAL Play Policy March 2024

**Commitment**
At St John's we 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.

**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."*

**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. 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 and to assess and manage risks.

At St John's we recognise that play may mean children make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and are sometimes out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe that the role of the adults is to support the play process.

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.

*Play is how young children learn and make sense of the world around them. While they are having fun, they are working on critical parts of their development like building motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills. But the power of play extends beyond early learning: it also plays a key role in building your child's mental health. UNICEF*

*Ofsted suggest schools improve their overall rating and outdoor play provision and playgrounds. Some points made by them include:*

- *Outdoor learning is fun – The outdoor environment should be enthralling and stimulating, whilst also being thought-provoking.*
- *All seasons – Schools should extend all-year-round opportunities for learning outdoors and finding adventure.*
- *Good usage – Teachers should know the right time to bring children outside to learn and try to avoid excessive use or minimum use.*
- *Limitations to outdoor learning – Certain subjects/activities cannot be done since the school does not have a suitable learning environment.*
- *Playgrounds need focus and purpose.*

## Ofsted Recommendations for Primary School Play Areas

*Ofsted look for certain factors and features in playgrounds to see if the school promote a healthy lifestyle in both physical and mental aspects.*

- *Variety of experiences – playgrounds shouldn't just focus on one main activity, instead they should cover a wide range of different activities. With this, children will start to understand more about the world around them.*
- *Outdoor learning – some resources should be constructed to assist with outdoor learning due to the benefits it can carry with it.*
- *The playground should promote English and Mathematics skills*
- *Imaginative play – creativity and imagination should be encouraged by the use of equipment and activities that promote thinking and concentration.*
- *Outdoor learning should be as effective as indoor learning – even though indoor learning is a lot more common and well-known, Ofsted believe that outdoor learning is equally as important and should be focused on equally as indoor learning.*

**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.
- Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment
- Ensure adults respect these rights, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative justice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime.

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

**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.

St John's Primary School has generous ratios of adults to children for playtimes and lunchtimes. We recognise 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 move around the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

**The role adults' role**

At St John's we maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who will strive for 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.

**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.

**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