

We have carefully considered and analysed the impact of this policy on equality and the possible implications for pupils with protected characteristics, as part of our commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

NKS Play Policy



2025- 2026

NKS Play Policy

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 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.*”

Play should also align with the school's values:

Be Kind to Yourself – looking after your physical, social and mental wellbeing through play. Risk assessing and problem solving for your own safety and empowerment.

Be Kind to Others – sharing and collaborating through play. Helping others to problem solve and keep themselves safe, identifying hazards and making suitable choices on how to remove them.

Be Kind to the Environment – looking after resources and the school grounds. Respecting nature and sharing the responsibility of tidying up at the end of playtime.

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.

- 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.

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.

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.

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.'

Joint HSE/Play Safety Forum statement, July 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). (Appendix 1)

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.

Children today have much less free play in their lives. Even those who attend many after school activities, experience these through a highly structured and supported approaches which means they rarely get to problem-solve for themselves. Without experience of personal risk management, children have very few resources to draw upon when they are faced with a challenge. Play is an ideal way for children to experience risk and challenge and to use this to build resilience and their own personal toolkit for facing and solving problems in later life.

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 staff at NKS will have assigned areas for ranging supervision. A common-sense approach should be used with staff moving according to the play the children are involved in. For example, should a large proportion of children be in one area; it would be logical for more staff to move from other areas to this area to support play. Communication between lunchtime supervisors is key.

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 Opal's Playwork Principles (Appendix 2). 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.

9. Equality and diversity

By offering a rich play environment which meets every child's needs, we will ensure 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 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 (Appendix 3).

A rich play setting supports safeguarding and the school's RSHE curriculum (SCARF) by helping children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increasing children's social and emotional capabilities. Furthermore, play helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

Appendix 1

HSE CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

The document can be found here:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide

This document can be found here:

<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/8625/1/00942-2008DOM-EN.pdf>

Appendix 2

Playwork Principles

OPAL Playwork Principles can be found in the Playwork Essentials document which can be found here: <https://www.north-kidlington.oxon.sch.uk/media/pages/policies/739e58c5ad-1730281774/5.1-guidance-playwork-essentials.pdf>

Appendix 3

Best Play

The document can be found here: www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

Reviewed: October 2025

Next Review: October 2026

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