



Coldfall Primary School OPAL Play Policy

Approved by: Full Governing Body	Date: November 2023
Last Reviewed: November 2024	
Next Review Date: November 2025	
OPAL Play Link Governor: Sebastian Worbs	

Aims:

At Coldfall we aim to create a welcoming, caring environment where relationships are based on the value of respect and aim to develop positive self-esteem in each child. The opportunity to build good relationships through play at break times and lunchtimes is fundamental to each child's happiness, well-being and successful learning. Thus, all staff are committed to maintaining high expectations of play as an essential contribution to the educational experience at Coldfall.

Coldfall recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we endeavour to provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. At Coldfall we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. The school is working closely with the OPAL (Outdoor Play And Learning) organisation to transform the school's provision.

We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks.

1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions which 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 which allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. 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 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 Coldfall the opportunity to develop play opportunities also enables our child to live the school values in a number of different ways at break time and lunchtime. For example.

- Friendship in order to develop different play opportunities with different people across the school.
- Courage to take reasonable risks in their play and to expand their creativity.

- Perseverance to be creative and try out new things and to rebuild when things goes wrong.
- Respect so that boundaries that are put in place and respected so that children can share and look after the equipment that we provide.

The way we conduct ourselves inside the classroom, by demonstrating our school values, is replicated in the way we play together. We aim for the values and behaviours that we learn at Coldfall to be replicated in our play.

3. Definition and Value of Play

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. 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, different concepts and different 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 which will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- provide a range of environments which 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 take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

Alongside the rights of the children, we want all children to follow the school values and also to aspire for break and lunch times to be a positive, creative and happy experience for all.

It is our belief that all children can aspire to this at Coldfall and have the right, to being safe and enjoying play times, and demonstrating excellence in their play. Children's achievements at break times and lunchtimes will be acknowledged and highlighted to show the value of good play.

6. Benefit and Risk

'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'

Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (2012)

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach' (September 2012) as the principle value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm>



Entertainment and leisure

[How we work](#) →

[Fairgrounds](#) →

[Film, theatre and
broadcasting industries](#) →

[Leisure activities](#) →

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Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach

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. Such decisions are often based on misunderstandings about what the law requires. The HSE has worked with the Play Safety Forum to produce a joint high-level statement that gives clear messages tackling these misunderstandings. HSE fully endorses the principles in this Statement.

This statement makes clear that:

- Play is important 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
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

Children's Play and Leisure: [promoting a balanced approach \(PDF\)](#)

At Coldfall we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offers guidance on the provision of play in educational settings stating that:

‘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 dangers’. (HSE, 2013)

Coldfall will use the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

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.

(Full document attached as appendix 1)

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments (Appendix 2) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

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. In the words of 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.

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 recognizes OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging.

Except for new children in reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

This will be part of the school's dynamic risk assessment benefits as part of this we have taken on the use of OPAL's Rapid Response to managing risk.

OPAL have developed the five-part R.A.P.I.D. Response to managing risk in our school approach which should be followed alongside their guidance on managing loose parts.

1. Risk-Benefit Assessment - means you should look at your usual environment and practices at least annually, and also when significant changes take place, and keep a written record of the areas in the table below using the risk-benefit template provided. Your assessments should cover hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury.

Coldfall has developed its own Risk Benefit assessment and this has been shared with staff and parents, and is available on the school's website.

2. Assemblies - OPAL Play Assemblies. These are to be held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play. A brief written log must be kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed.

Regular assemblies will be delivered when new equipment is introduced into the school environment and to remind the children and staff of the Coldfall's values which relate to play.

3. Policy - a play policy approved by the governing body and leadership is essential and should form the basis for all staff understanding and decision making about managing risk in play. This should include formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance.

This information is part of the play policy section on supervision.

4. Inspection - technical reports of engineered fixed play equipment. Fixed equipment has an annual inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections should be carried out by a member of staff and a record kept.

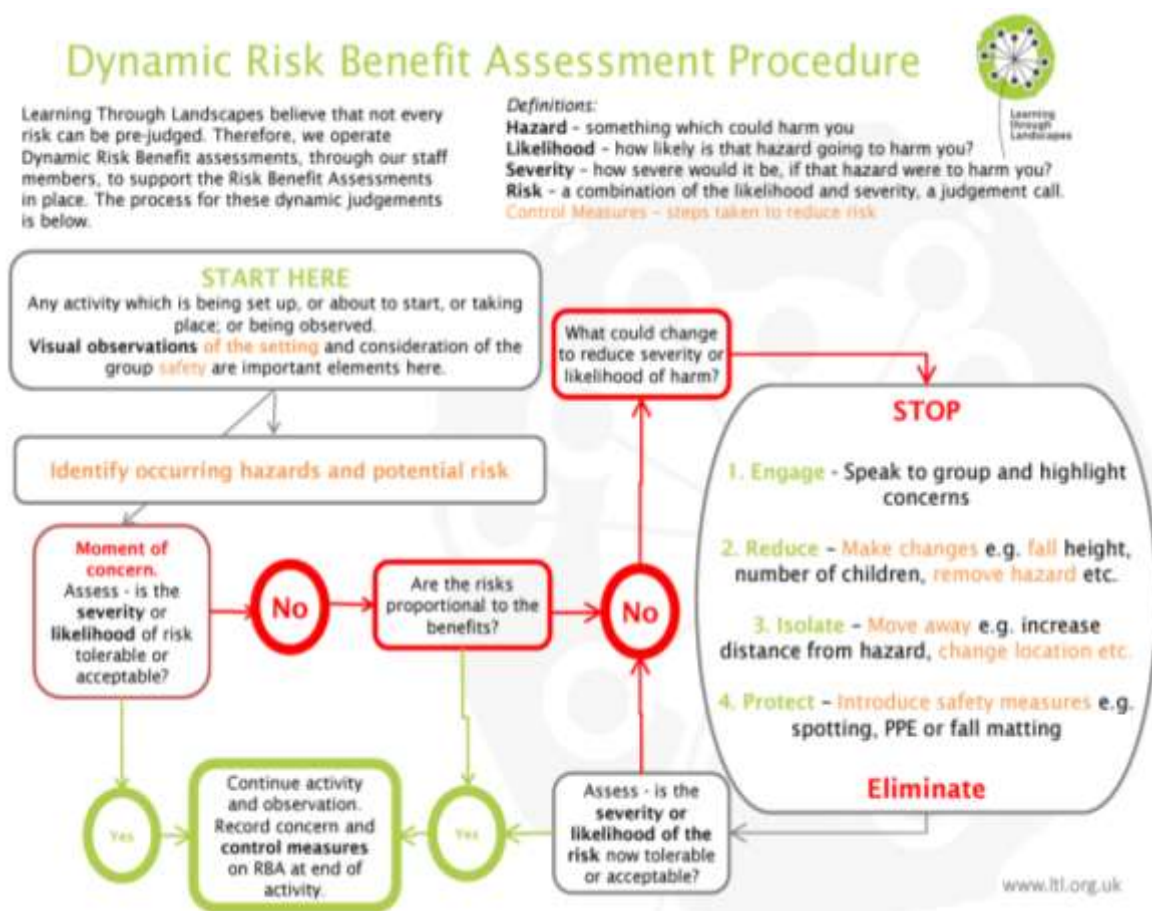
5. Dynamic Risk Management - means that staff should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that risk

of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm whilst preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

Dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. This means that the quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention. There should be an assumption that most play is not dangerous and that children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time. However, staff should also be vigilant, they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their zone, who is playing and what the likely risks are.

Intervention – if staff think that serious harm (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation), is imminent or probable they should intervene to either stop or manage the risk. If they think that serious harm is possible but not probable, they should remain vigilant. If serious harm is very unlikely then they should probably focus their attention elsewhere or act to further improve the quality of the play offer.

Dynamic risk assessment has been introduced to all members of staff as part of a school, Inset Day- regular meetings held with LBS (lunch break supervisors) around their use of dynamic risk assessments.



8. The Adults' Role in Play

The school will help children maximize 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 which nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment which 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. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable/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.

<https://www.playengland.org.uk/>