



**William Byrd**  
PRIMARY ACADEMY

## OPAL Play Policy

**2025 - 2026**



MIDDLESEX  
LEARNING  
PARTNERSHIP

**Approved by:** Primaries LGB

**Last reviewed on:** July 2025

**Next review due:** July 2027



## • Introduction

**William Byrd Primary 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.

## • Rationale

William Byrd 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 William Byrd Primary School, guided by the Therapeutic Thinking approach, our play policy supports the creation of emotionally safe, inclusive, and nurturing environments where all children can thrive. We view play not only as a means of enjoyment but as a powerful tool for emotional regulation, social learning, and building resilience. Staff are trained to observe and respond to behaviour through a therapeutic lens—seeking to understand the underlying needs behind actions and supporting children in developing positive relationships and self-awareness.

Through the implementation of this play policy, underpinned by our William Byrd values children will be exposed to the rich and varied **experiences** and **opportunities** we offer at our school. This means that everyone will leave us better prepared socially and emotionally for the next stage in their life journey.

- **Kindness** and **respect** are at the heart of what we do, and children are always encouraged to follow the same standards during play.
- We treat everyone fairly and equally and we always **embrace** difference and **diversity** during play and everything that we do.
- We have the **highest expectations** of ourselves and each other and we build resilience and perseverance whilst playing.
- Children **cooperate** and play together. They make good choices through play and develop skills such as **compromise** and **communication**.
- We are **curious** and **ready** to learn. Play allows children to investigate and question key learning concepts as well as developing big questions about the world.

## • 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.

### 3.1. At William Byrd Primary School 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.

## • Aims

In relation to play William Byrd 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.

## • 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.

As a Right Respecting School, William Byrd Primary School aims for our children to know, understand and exercise their rights stated in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Through Opal, the children at William Byrd will develop relationships that are positive and founded on dignity and mutual respect. The children will be safe and protected and know what to do if they need support. Their social and emotional wellbeing is a priority and through Opal they will learn how to develop healthy lifestyles. The children will be included and valued as individuals. They will value education and will be involved in making decisions about their outdoor learning.

## • 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)

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 line with our core values, we encourage our children to build resilience and try new things and learn from their mistakes.

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.

- **William Byrd 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).

**See full H&SE Managing Risk Statement for further details (appendix 1)**

## • 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.

Play supervision at William Byrd Primary School is underpinned by our commitment to:

- Safety and inclusion.
- Enabling—not restricting—play.

### **Staff act as:**

- Observers and facilitators.
- Guides who ensure safety and promote independence, cooperation, and resilience.

## • The adult's role in play

Adults play a vital role in ensuring the success and safety of play:

- Create inclusive, safe and stimulating environments
- Minimise hazards proactively
- Maximise opportunities for a wide range of experiences
- Participate in play if invited
- Encourage participation across all backgrounds and abilities.
- Observe to understand and support individual needs.
- Support, not direct, child-led play.
- Intervene only when necessary.
- Foster problem-solving and creativity.
- Model respectful and cooperative behaviours.
- Balance structured and unstructured opportunities.

The Play Team is committed to ensuring that all pupils experience a positive and enriching lunchtime each day. They are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive,

and stimulating outdoor environment that promotes social interaction, physical activity, and imaginative play.

In addition, the Play Team supports a calm and enjoyable dining experience for all children. They work to ensure that pupils have sufficient time to eat their lunch comfortably while also maximising opportunities for outdoor 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.

## See Play Principles Appendix 2

### • 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.

Please see William Byrd School Equality Objectives here:  
(<https://www.williambyrd.school/page/?title=Equality+Objectives&pid=171>)

## 10. Inclusion and accessibility

William Byrd Primary Academy is an inclusive school which will consider all pupils regardless of their Special Educational Needs. Admissions for SEND pupils follows the same route as all pupils' admissions in agreement with the Academy policy, based on the principles of equality of opportunity and access for all.

We believe OPAL can significantly benefit children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) by promoting physical activity, developing social and emotional skills, and fostering a sense of well-being. OPAL aims to create inclusive and engaging outdoor play experiences, encouraging children to take risks, self-regulate, and develop resilience.

### 10.1. At William Byrd Primary School we believe play has many benefits for pupils with SEND, including:

- **Physical Activity:** we encourage physical activity, which is particularly beneficial for children with SEND who may have limited opportunities for movement.
- **Social and Emotional Development:** we provide a space for children to interact, practice social skills, and develop their emotional regulation abilities.

- **Resilience and Grit:** through the Opal's approach to play we encourage children to persevere through challenges, develop grit, and build resilience.
- **Creativity and Imagination:** through Opal's open-ended play environments at William Byrd foster creativity, imagination, and storytelling skills, which can be particularly valuable for SEND children.
- **Self-Regulation:** through OPAL we provide opportunities for children to practice self-regulation through trust, freedom, and engaging activities.
- **Improved Mental Well-being:** studies have shown that children involved in OPAL programs report greater happiness and improved mental health.
- **Inclusive Play:** we aim to create fully inclusive play environments where all children, including those with SEND, can participate and thrive.

## 10.2. Children with physical limitations

At William Byrd Primary School, we aim to improve the quality of children's playtimes and enhance their overall well-being. We are focusing on providing a stimulating and challenging outdoor environment that encourages children to engage in active and creative play. While OPAL aims to benefit all children, including those with physical limitations, its design and implementation should consider these limitations to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

### How we address physical limitations at William Byrd Primary School:

- **Inclusive Environment:** we create play spaces that are accessible to all children, including those with mobility challenges, visual impairments, or other physical limitations.
- **Varied Play Opportunities:** we promote a variety of play experiences, allowing children to choose activities that suit their abilities and interests, whether it's running, climbing, swinging, or playing in the sand.
- **Risk Management and Supervision:** we emphasize the importance of managing risks appropriately and providing adequate supervision to ensure that children with physical limitations can safely participate in activities.
- **Individualized Support:** we acknowledge that individual needs may vary and encourages schools to provide individualized support and accommodations to ensure that all children can benefit from the program.
- **Collaboration with Parents and Specialists:** we emphasize the importance of collaboration between the school, parents, and specialists (e.g., occupational therapists) to develop tailored support plans for children with physical limitations.

- **Flexible Activities:** we encourage the use of "loose parts," which are natural and man-made materials that can be used to create a wide variety of play opportunities, enabling children to explore and experiment with different activities that suit their abilities.
- **Mindful Environment Design:** we consider the design of the outdoor play environment, including accessibility features like ramps, pathways, and accessible play equipment, to ensure that all children can participate.

## 11. 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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)

## Appendix 1

HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) as an appendix to your play policy.

### 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<sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>1</sup> 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]) 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 acti

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<sup>2</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> 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.

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

## Appendix 2

### The Playwork principles

#### 1. Understand Need

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.

#### 2. Understand Process

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. 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. Support Process

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. Advocate for Play

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

#### 5. Create Spaces

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. Learn and Reflect

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

#### 7. Understand Impact

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

#### 8. Choose Intervention Styles

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