



OPAL – Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

Review Date	Autumn 2024
Review Frequency	Bi - Annual
Date for Next Review	Autumn 2026
Governor Approval	Autumn 2024

This policy also operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Anti-Bullying
- Behaviour
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Health and Safety
- PE, School Sport and Physical Activity
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Commitment

Caedmon Primary 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

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."*

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.

At Caedmon, we recognise that children may need to get dirty, make noise and make a mess to fulfil their play journey. We also recognise the value of children mixing with their peers and different age ranges. There is a need to have a sense of free flow with the children so they can have as many opportunities for different types of play as possible.

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

At Caedmon, our aims for play are 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.

To support this at Caedmon, we have the following staffing structure in place:

Play Curricular Lead	Mrs Bergamino/Mrs Hill
Play Co-ordinator	Mrs Brede
Additional OPAL working party members	Miss Fellows
Play team members	All members of our support and teaching staff who are outside during lunch time play

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.

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

To manage the risks at Caedmon:

- Our Play Coordinator performs regular Health & Safety checks of the play areas.
- The OPAL working party and all playtime supervision staff will check for dangers/ risks when outside with the children.
- The OPAL working party will meet regularly and ensure equipment is sufficient as well as being plentiful and varied.
- The children will be made aware of possible risks and helped to manage those via staff alerting them, for example of slippery or wet surfaces.
- Separate the play area into zones to maintain a risk/benefit management system, creating quiet areas as well as areas for physical play.

- Regular assemblies will take place regularly to discuss with children the risks of play (should there be any) alongside introducing children to exploratory ways to access their outdoor area.

Further information can be found in the HSE Managing Risk Statement in the appendix to this policy.

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.

Each supporting adult will oversee one or two zones and will have the relevant training and knowledge of how to best support the children playing in those zones. Older children will also be trained in supporting and guiding the other children in the school and will take on a leader role.

1. 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. 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.

The Playwork Principles

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 wellbeing 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 and 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 wellbeing of children.

Staff will use and refer to 'The Principles of Playwork' when appropriate interventions are needed, but ultimately, will strive for facilitating an environment which nurtures 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 play-worker 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 available to participate in the play if invited. Training focussed on the Playwork Principles, different types of play and on benefit and risk analysis will be provided regularly for staff who supervise play

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.

3. 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

Safeguarding

In addition, a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

Please read the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy for comprehensive information regarding the safeguarding and protection of all children in our care.

Throughout our curriculum, we will provide activities and opportunities for children to develop the skills they need to identify risks and stay safe. This will also be extended to include material that will encourage our children to develop essential life skills. Embedding OPAL within our school environment will promote children's abilities to problem solve, manage risks in a safe and secure setting alongside developing their abilities to listen, learn and communicate effectively. We teach children about their personal safety and making the right decisions which will benefit them beyond the gates of our school through the use of play.

Our effective safeguarding arrangements throughout school mean that we have:

- A whole-school approach to safeguarding and a safeguarding culture which is embedded in all that we do.
- Clear risk assessments written to protect children in each activity which is provided for the education of our children during play.
- Well-developed strategies in place to keep children safe and to support them to develop their own understanding of risks and in learning how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Regular training provided for staff – as a whole school and the play team – to ensure the children's safety and correct procedures are in place to safeguard the child.
- Regular training for staff in order to ensure that they know and understand the indicators that may suggest a child is suffering or at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or harm. This includes the risk of abuse and neglect in the home, as well as risks outside the home such as sexual and/or criminal exploitation, radicalisation, bullying, sexual harassment or violence, and children going missing.
- Adults who understand the importance of challenging inappropriate and abusive behaviours between children - not allowing them to become normalised.
- Staff who recognise that children do not always speak out about abuse. They take steps to build trusting relationships with children. Staff are appropriately professionally curious and always speak

to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or Deputy) when they have concerns. Adults take the appropriate and necessary action in accordance with local procedures and statutory guidance.

- Adults who understand that children's poor behaviour may be a sign that they are suffering harm or that they have suffered/are suffering abuse.
- Adults who are clear about procedures where they are concerned about the safety of a child. There is a named Designated Safeguarding Lead who is empowered to play an effective role in pursuing concerns and protecting children.
- Staff who respond with clear boundaries about what is safe and acceptable, and they seek to understand the triggers for children's behaviour.
- An online monitoring and recording system (CPOMS) which is used to ensure that written accounts are recorded in an appropriate and timely way. These records are shared appropriately with other agencies and professionals where this is necessary to safeguard the child, while complying with data protection legislation.
- Written procedures for managing safeguarding allegations/concerns about members of staff and other adults working in the school. This is detailed in our Safeguarding and Child Protection policy as well as in our Whistleblowing policy.