



OPAL Play Policy

'Play is essential for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the aim is not to eliminate risk but to balance risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool' (Health and Safety Executive, 2012)

In partnership with OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning)

At Leadgate Primary School, we are committed to providing high-quality, enriching and inclusive play opportunities for every child. Through our OPAL provision, we aim to transform how we value, plan for and enable play as an essential part of each child's school experience. As children spend up to 20% of their time in school playing, it is vital that this time is purposeful, positive and developmentally beneficial.

We believe that play is fundamental to children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. Through high-quality play, children learn about themselves, others and the world around them, developing skills that cannot be taught through the classroom alone.

Our Aims

Our school aims to:

- Provide a stimulating, varied and challenging play environment.
- Enable children to take considered, acceptable risks.
- Offer a diverse range of play opportunities that support learning across the curriculum and foster curiosity about the wider world.

We aim to give children opportunities to:

- Explore, investigate and understand the world around them through playful experimentation.
- Develop key social skills including communication, collaboration, tolerance and problem-solving.
- Build resilience, confidence and emotional strength.
- Think creatively and imaginatively.
- Develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others.
- Strengthen physical health, coordination and gross-motor skills.



- Support emotional wellbeing through freedom, choice and shared understanding of rights.
- Learn to assess and manage risks safely and responsibly.

What is Play?

Play is any freely chosen, self-directed and personally satisfying activity. It may be energetic or quiet, structured or spontaneous, solitary or social. It does not always require equipment or adult involvement, nor does it need to produce an end result.

We recognise that play may involve noise, mess, creativity, challenge and freedom, and that children benefit from opportunities to play across different ages and abilities. Our role as adults is to support, not direct, the play process, ensuring children have the time, space and permission to explore, imagine and take ownership of their experiences.

Value of Play

Play is recognised as a vital component of child development and is central to effective learning. High-quality play supports physical development, emotional wellbeing, communication, creativity and problem-solving, and is consistent with national curriculum principles and the Characteristics of Effective Learning. As children spend a significant portion of their school life engaged in play, it is essential that playtimes are planned, purposeful and enriching. Through our OPAL approach, we view play not simply as a break from learning, but as a powerful learning experience in its own right.

Risk, Challenge and Play

Risk-taking is a natural and necessary part of childhood. Through play, children learn to understand their limits, develop judgement, build confidence and acquire new skills. Our OPAL Risk–Benefit Assessment outlines the benefits and considerations for each type of play offered.

We manage risk by:

- Using professional judgement to balance safety with challenge.
- Making risks clear and understandable to children through assemblies, discussion and ongoing practice.
- Designing spaces where hazards are visible and manageable.
- Controlling risks that children cannot foresee.
- Providing staff with training to supervise and support play effectively.



As Play England states, *“Children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities.”*

Roles and Responsibilities

All members of the school community play an active role in ensuring that play provision is safe, inclusive and high-quality. Our designated ‘Play Team’ are responsible for supporting children’s play in a positive, respectful and developmentally appropriate way, using observation and low-intervention approaches wherever possible. Children are encouraged to care for equipment, manage risks appropriately and play cooperatively with others. The Play Team oversee the strategic development of play, provide necessary training and ensure that play remains an integral part of school improvement.

Remote Supervision

We acknowledge that effective supervision does not require constant direct visibility of every child. Staff will move around the play spaces, observing, engaging and monitoring where children choose to play ensuring safety while preserving children’s freedom and autonomy.

Inclusion

All children have the right to access welcoming, inclusive and meaningful play opportunities regardless of gender, background, culture, ability or need. We are committed to removing barriers so that every child can participate fully and enjoyably in the play experiences available across our school.

Clothing and All-Weather Play

We are committed to ensuring that children have access to high-quality play in all weather conditions. To support this, children are encouraged to wear clothing appropriate for the season, including waterproofs, warm layers, sun protection or sturdy footwear, depending on the weather. The school provides guidance to families about suitable clothing and may offer systems for storing playtime items such as wellies or waterproof layers. Our aim is to ensure that outdoor play remains enjoyable, safe and accessible throughout the year.