



OPAL Play Policy

'Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.'
Kay Redfield Jamison



Article 31 (Right to play): A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

1. Introduction

At Langtoft Primary School, we recognise that play is an integral part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we believe in providing 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 Langtoft Primary School, we are firmly committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. 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. These skills link closely to our school values **'Ambition, Independence, Cooperation, Consideration, Confidence, Resilience and Respect'**, which were developed to encourage and teach essential life skills across the whole school day.

2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more essential.

Better-quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better-quality play opportunities, there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem-solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all our children and in particular for those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk-taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

We surveyed our learners in June 2023 for their views on playtime. Many were positive about the playground but some children's comments included; ***'There are not enough things to use if I want to make up a game or build something', 'I think the adults at our playtimes could do more to make play times more enjoyable', 'I enjoy some playtimes and do not enjoy others' and 'There are not enough nice places to sit at playtimes'.*** These comments by the children highlighted the need to improve our play resources and opportunities at Langtoft Primary School.



3. Definition of Play

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as: *'encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live'*.

At Langtoft Primary School, the children and staff think that:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development;
- Play allows children to be creative and co-operative, encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices and problem solve;
- Adults' roles in great play are to be responsive to children's invitations and requests and to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness;
- Play may be solitary or social;
- Play invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries;
- Play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better;
- Children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources and as long as it is safe regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background;
- Play is something you choose to do and that it is fun!

4. Benefit and Risk

A wealth of research studies have found that the social, physical and mental health 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 are 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. ***'Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children's development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world'***. (DCFS)

At Langtoft Primary School, we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) offers guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and states: ***'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)

Langtoft Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach', September 2012 (**Appendix 1**) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play.

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. ***'No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'*** - [Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide published for Play England 2012.](#)

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.

Ambition ~ Independence ~ Cooperation ~ Consideration ~ Confidence ~ Resilience ~ Respect



5. 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 foundation stage, the school does not believe in direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take a 'ranging' model so that children can quickly find an adult, and adults can patrol designated large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

6. Adults' Role in Play

The playworker's core function is to create an environment which will stimulate children's play and maximize their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences.

We, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground and field which will include regular play assemblies, school council meetings, surveys, and other pupil voice outlets. Staff will use and refer to 'The Playwork Principles' when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment which nurtures self-directed play.

The adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Langtoft Primary School. In addition to this, Langtoft's Play Team (**Appendix 3**) will work in collaboration with parents/carers, teachers, teaching assistants, governors and all other pupils to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. Playmakers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. Play-workers 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.

7. Children's Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (**Appendix 4**). It will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to:

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences;
- Respect and look after each other, their environment, equipment, and toys;
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour;
- Ensure that play times are fun for everybody.

This children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions, and dialogue in class, Opal Play Leaders meetings, Rights Respecting School Council meetings and with the Year 5/6 Play Leaders and Sports Captains.



8. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable risk and thereby offer the opportunity to explore both themselves, through their freely chosen play.

At Langtoft Primary School we will:

- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play;
- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors;
- Ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore and use their imagination and creativity;
- Expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things;
- Give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors;
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximize the variety of play types and increase play value;
- Ensure that the playground is an integrated area where all children from Foundation Stage to Year 6 can play safely;
- Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this;
- Promote children's pride for the outdoor space that belongs to them.

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





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 amount 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 risks¹ 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 about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that are 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 benchmarks 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 activity;
 - Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so 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.

¹ 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])

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 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, and 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 focus on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful;
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk.

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 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

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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.

Appendix 2 ~ OPAL Risk-Benefit Assessment

Please view our risk-benefit assessment here: <https://www.langtoft.lincs.sch.uk/OPAL.asp>



Ambition ~ Independence ~ Cooperation ~ Consideration ~ Confidence ~ Resilience ~ Respect

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Appendix 3 ~ Structure of Adult Roles in Practice

OPAL Team

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure the policy is in place and to develop play and outdoor learning at Langtoft Primary School. It consists of:

- Curricular Leads: Mrs Wood Mrs Mayon
- Play Governor: Mrs Ferdinand
- Play Co-ordinator: Mrs Murthwaite
- Play Team: Mrs Adams, Mrs Geeson, Mrs Malone, Mrs Weston, Mrs Kazakova, Mrs Simpson, Mrs Tarboton, Mrs Johnson
- Parent Representative: Mrs Ferdinand

Langtoft Primary School's Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes, all staff should act as Play Leaders.

However, more specifically at lunchtimes, the following structure exists:

- **Curriculum Leads for Play** (Leads and manages strategy)
- **Play Co-ordinator** (Leads and manages playtimes)
- **Play Team** (Facilitate and provide rich play experiences)
- **Opal Play Leaders** (pupil representatives from each class to support Opal play)



Appendix 4 ~ Children's Play Policy

We have the right to have fun at playtimes.

We have the responsibility to make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.

We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do.

We have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.

We have the right to choose who we play with.

We have the responsibility that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.

We have the right to play with lots of different toys and have a well looked-after environment.

We have the responsibility to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.

We have the right to explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks.

We have the responsibility to think about what we are doing and talk to a Play Maker about the risks we are taking if they ask us to.



