



Play Policy

We learn to love and love to learn with Jesus

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PLAY POLICY

1. 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 that 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.

2. Commitment:

At Our Lady's, we are committed to this play policy to guide us in our planning and actions in providing excellent play opportunities for all children. We believe that play is an essential part of children's wellbeing and happiness. Enjoyable play supports the development of children who are independent, confident, imaginative, social, creative, resilient and therefore able to assess risks.

3. 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.*"

Because children spend up to 20% of their school week at play, it is essential that this time is effectively planned for.

Our Lady Catholic Primary School is acutely aware of the need for exciting play opportunities for all children, due to changes in society and play being less available to children.

Better play means happier children. When children are happy, there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude towards school, less time spent on resolving unnecessary conflicts, fewer accidents and subsequently, happier children and staff.

The Charter for Children's Play (drawn up by Play England) sets out a vision for play which states:

- Children need time and space to play at school;
- Adults should let children play;
- Children value and benefit from staffed play provision;
- Children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers;
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play.

Our Lady Catholic Primary School fully understands its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime.

4. 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.

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.

5. Rights, Equality and Access:

Our Lady Catholic Primary School acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. We believe that play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of age, stage, gender or background.

6. Health, Safety, 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 (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*.'

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

Our Lady Catholic Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) and 'The Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision (Appendix 1)' as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

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 recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for 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.

8. The Adult's Role in Facilitating Play:

The adults on the Play Team at Our Lady Catholic Primary School will:

- Ensure that the broadest range of play opportunities are made available to children;
- Observe, reflect and analyse the play that is occurring and select an appropriate mode of intervention or make changes to the play space if necessary;
- Ensure that the play spaces are inclusive, supporting all children of all abilities to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way;
- Encourage and support children to be reflective risk managers; innovative, creative thinkers and problem solvers.

9. The Play Environment:

At Our Lady Catholic Primary School, we will:

- Use the outdoor space effectively as a natural resource for learning and playing;
- Include the children when planning for outdoor play and learning;
- Ensure that the outdoor areas offer children the opportunity to investigate, explore, imitate, innovate, create, problem solve and use their imagination creatively;
- Encourage children to respect the outdoor environment, the resources available and care for living things; and
- Give children the opportunity to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors;
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of types of play and increase the play value (*see Appendix 2 for types of play*).

10. Strategic Aims and Practices:

Our Lady Catholic Primary School has entered into an agreement with OPAL Outdoor Play to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision.

The Outdoor Environment:

Our Lady will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation of the play space by the children.

Loose Parts:

Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The essential items for these experiences are loose parts; attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves.

Supervision:

Job roles of Play Leaders at Our Lady Catholic Primary School have been drawn up and shared with stakeholders. The school will move towards a much greater emphasis on 'playwork' roles and skills for play supervision, with the continued professional development and training needed to enhance this.

Monitoring:

The school will continue to use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor implementation of its play policy, strategy and action plan.

Health and Safety:

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis. These checks will be kept on file in the office.

Risk-benefit assessments for areas, equipment and activities will be held on file in the office for inspection. All new activities introduced, which involve potential significant risk, will be subject to individual or generic assessments as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate.

The play facilitators will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led by the play facilitator. Visiting carers, teachers and parents will be responsible for the conduct and behaviour of those in their care. They will be responsible for ensuring that those persons in their care use the site and equipment in a safe, controlled and appropriate manner to ensure the wellbeing of all users on site.

It is the responsibility of all visitors and staff to work within the agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments.

It is the responsibility of all staff to bring any potential hazard or concerns regarding the site, equipment or activities to the attention of the Play Team on duty.

It is the responsibility of the Play Team on duty to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Play Leader as soon as possible.

11. Monitoring and Review:

This Play Policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that all procedures are up to date. The policy was last reviewed and agreed by the Governing Body on 15th September 2026. This policy will be reviewed in Autumn 2028.

Policy Originator	Richard Curry
Governor Responsible	Kelly Donkor
Status	Statutory
Last reviewed	23rd September 2025
Ratified on	15th September 2026
Review period	Bi-Annual

Signed by Headteacher:



Date: September 2026

Signed by Chair of Governors



Date: September 2026

Appendix 1

At Our Lady Catholic Primary School we recognise 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.

Play, Challenge and Risk – Statement:

Play is an essential part of children's development. Quality active play can not only provide opportunities to develop a wide range of physical skills, but also allow for choice, introduce challenge and self-risk assessment, develop problem solving skills, promote cooperation, and increase confidence and independence. Active play provision will vary with age and ability, and the setting in which it is provided, but it is always important to provide opportunities for active play outdoors wherever and whenever possible.

Play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. "Freely chosen" means that the children choose when and which play activity to undertake. It is not part of a set programme or curriculum and does not have any steps that need to be completed. "Personally directed" means that the children themselves agree the roles or rules of the activity, they decide what outcomes they desire, if any. "Intrinsically motivated" means that it is done for its own sake and not for any externally provided reward or certificate. In short it is done for fun.

Play and Risk:

Children need and want to take risks during active play. Quality play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities, striking a balance between the risks and the benefits. This is done through risk assessment which:

- Ensures the likelihood of serious injury is extremely low;
- Makes sure potential hazards are clear; and
- Uses practical ways to manage reasonable risk.

Managing Risk in Play Provision:

"Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play is first and foremost for children and if it is not exciting and attractive to them it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents."

Managing Risk in Play Provision, Play Safety Forum, National Children's Bureau, 2002

“It makes clear that safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that inevitably there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is though that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play.”

Health and Safety Executive, in Managing Risk in Play Provision, 2002 Health & Safety Executive

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’.

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.

They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

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;
- Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday play schemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

If things go wrong:

Key message: ‘Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.’

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. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved.

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’.

CHILDREN’S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH, HSE, 2012

Appendix 2

Play Types:

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide play facilitators, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

Symbolic Play:

Play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth e.g. using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.

Rough and Tumble Play:

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.

Socio-Dramatic Play:

The enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.

Social Play:

Play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended e.g. any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols i.e. games, conversations, making something together.

Creative Play:

Play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, and equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell e.g. enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self-expression through any medium, making things, changing things.

Communication Play:

Play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles /emails/ internet, skipping games, group and ball games.

Dramatic Play:

Play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participant e.g. presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.

Locomotor Play:

Movement in any or every direction for its own sake e.g. chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.

Deep Play:

Play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear e.g. light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc. (e.g. leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump).

Exploratory Play:

Play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects e.g. engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.

Fantasy Play:

This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur e.g. playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be wherever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be - the list is endless as is a child's imagination.

Imaginative Play:

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply e.g. imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.

Mastery Play:

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments e.g. digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.

Object Play:

Play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements e.g. examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.

Role Play:

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.

Recapitulative Play:

Play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

References:

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

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<http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk>