

1. Commitment

Our 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.

2. Rationale

At St Mark's CofE Primary School we recognise the importance of play for all children, viewing it as a vital way for them to explore and engage with their environment and each other. We are committed to ensuring that play opportunities are inclusive and accessible to every child, regardless of their background, identity, or abilities.

We believe that growing and learning together in God's love includes improving playtimes. By making play more active and creative, children become happier and healthier. This leads to better attitudes toward learning, more effective lessons, fewer behavioural issues and accidents, and a more positive school environment for both students and staff.

3. 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.

As a school, we promote a vision of nurturing confident, resilient, lifelong learners who contribute positively to the world. Our commitment to inclusive, meaningful play reflects our core values of faith, forgiveness, hope and love, with a focus on service and belonging. Through play, children build relationships, develop resilience, and grow as curious, confident learners—embodying our vision of nurturing lifelong learning within a caring and inclusive community.

4. Our Aims for Play at St Mark's CofE Primary School

At St Mark's, we believe that play is a vital part of every child's development and a reflection of our Christian values and learning behaviours. In line with our school vision, we aim to:

- Create varied, stimulating, and inclusive play environments that inspire curiosity and creativity.
- Encourage children to take appropriate risks, using a common-sense approach to explore challenges and build confidence.
- Foster positive relationships through play, helping children learn cooperation, empathy, and respect.
- Promote care for our environment and for one another, nurturing a sense of responsibility and community.
- Support the holistic development of every child—physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and intellectually.
- Provide imaginative and exploratory play opportunities that enrich learning and reflect the world around us.
- Reinforce curriculum learning through playful experiences that deepen understanding and engagement.
- Cultivate independence and teamwork, empowering children to lead, collaborate, and grow together.
- Build emotional and physical resilience, preparing children to face challenges with courage and perseverance.

5. Rights

At St Mark's, we value play as a vital part of every child's growth and wellbeing. Rooted in our Christian values, and guided by 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 aim to:

- Provide inclusive, stimulating play environments that inspire creativity and exploration.
- Encourage safe risk-taking to build confidence and resilience.
- Foster friendships, teamwork, and mutual respect.
- Support children's holistic development—physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual.
- Enrich learning through imaginative and purposeful play.
- Listen to children's voices and involve them in shaping their play experiences.

6. 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)

At St Mark's CofE Primary School, we believe that play involving risk and challenge is essential for children's development. Rooted in our Christian values and learning behaviours, we aim to nurture children who are confident, resilient, and ready to face life's challenges with courage and compassion.

We recognise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to play (Article 31) and the right to be heard (Article 12), and we are committed to listening to children's views on their play experiences.

In line with the Health and Safety Executive's guidance -[Appendix A](#)- and the Play Safety Forum's risk-benefit approach, we:

- Provide stimulating and challenging play environments where children can explore and grow.
- Encourage children to take acceptable risks, helping them develop resilience, independence, and sound judgement.
- Practice dynamic risk management, supporting children in identifying and managing risks themselves.
- Embrace risk as a way to build faith in their abilities, hope for their future, love for learning, and the forgiveness to learn from mistakes.

Through this balanced approach, we help children flourish—physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually—within a safe and supportive environment. We do this knowing that ‘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, 2012](#)).

We recognise that risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Our 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 practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Dynamic Risk Management - means that staff should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action if they think that risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm whilst preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

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 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.

<p>Direct</p> <p>This is where the supervisor(s) will be able to see all areas of play, and be nearby, around a maximum of 20 metres away.</p> <p>Some play features in these areas, such as playhouses or planting, may offer semi-hidden opportunities. This will be most common in nursery and reception classes.</p>	<p>Remote</p> <p>This is where a supervisor or supervisors are located at a relatively static location at a good vantage point some distance from an activity, eg supervisor on the playground and activity 20 metres or more away, or supervisor in the middle of a flat school field.</p> <p>This style is widely used in other countries and its purpose is for an adult to be present to respond rapidly to an accident or serious behaviour incident.</p>	<p>Ranging</p> <p>This is where the supervisor moves around the play area, usually on a set course/ schedule.</p> <p>The distance from pupils therefore differs but can be 20 metres or more away. On a large site, supervisors should have zones so that they know which parts of the site they are covering, and they should modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk.</p>
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For the purpose of play, our school site has been zoned and adults will be ranging each zone. All adults will be visible and have walkie talkies to communicate. The expectation of play and zone boundaries will be communicated to staff and explained to children during play assemblies (held a minimum of once per two week period).

8. 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- Playworkers. 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.

What will our playteam do?

Our play team's core function is to create an environment that stimulates children's play and maximises opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. This involves:

- Designing engaging spaces (indoors and outdoors)
- Providing diverse materials (loose parts, natural elements, tools)
- Fostering a positive, inclusive culture
- Observing and reflecting on children's play
- Assessing risk through dynamic risk assessment
- Joining in play—but only when invited

What This Looks Like in Practice:

For Staff:

- Before school: Set up a "loose parts" area with cardboard tubes, fabric, and crates.
- During play: Observe without interrupting. If a child invites you to join, follow their lead.
- After play: Reflect with colleagues—what worked? What could be improved?

For Governors:

- Support policies that prioritise child-led play.
- Ensure training budgets include playwork CPD.
- Visit the setting to see play in action and talk to children about what they enjoy.

For Parents:

- Understand that messy, risky, and imaginative play is valuable.

- Encourage play at home with open-ended materials (e.g. cardboard boxes, kitchen utensils).
- Trust that our play team are trained to balance freedom and safety.



Download the Playwork Principles

You can download the full Playwork Principles PDF here:  [The Playwork Principles](#)

(Note: this document is for Wales but the Playwork Principles are the same across the UK)

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offering, 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. [Equality Policy](#).

10. 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

A rich play setting is vital for children's development and wellbeing. It enhances safeguarding by creating safe, supervised environments where children can explore and express themselves freely. Through collaborative play, children build confidence in teamwork, learn to advocate for their own rights, and develop strong social and emotional skills. Additionally, engaging with the natural world through outdoor play fosters a deep love for nature, laying the foundation for environmental stewardship and a lifelong appreciation of the outdoors.

Appendix A:

HSE Statement – Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach (2012)

Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (HSE, 2012)

This document outlines the HSE's position on managing risk in children's play, emphasizing that:

- Children need and want to take risks when they play.
- Play provision should aim to allow children to experience risk in a controlled and supportive environment.
- The goal is not to eliminate all risk, but to strike a balance between safety and developmental benefit.

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