



Play policy

March 2026

Version 1.1

Date of approval by headteacher: 23.03.26

Date of ratification by governors:

Next review date: March 2027

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Sonning Common Primary School recognises the foundational importance of play in every child's development. This policy outlines our commitment to the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Primary Programme.

2 Our Commitment

- 2.1 The school commits to embedding this policy, ensuring leadership oversight, staff development, and continuous improvement of play provision.
- 2.2 Sonning Common Primary School is committed to ensuring every child experiences joyful, rich and meaningful play every day.

3 Rationale and Aims

- 3.1 Modern childhood limits free play opportunities; therefore school-based play is essential for wellbeing, behaviour, and readiness to learn.
- 3.2 Play is freely directed by the child and freely chosen, intrinsically motivated. Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing and essential for their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- 3.3 We aim to provide a rich, inclusive, challenging, and stimulating play environment based on OPAL principles and aligning with our own school values: kindness, politeness, respect and truth.

4 Rights of our Pupils

- 4.1 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).
- 4.2 We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

5 The OPAL Approach in Our School

- 5.1 We will undertake a whole-school audit, develop an action plan, provide INSET training, and work towards OPAL accreditation.

6 Risk, Safety and Challenge

- 6.1 Risk is managed through risk–benefit approaches, enabling children to experience challenge safely.
- 6.2 We 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 our approach to managing risk in play (see Appendix A). We acknowledge that risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and we aim to offer the children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating play environment.
- 6.3 In addition to standard risk-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.

7 Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

- 7.1 All play spaces and opportunities will be accessible and welcoming to every child, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs.

8 Environment and Resources

- 8.1 We will enrich our outdoor spaces with varied resources, natural elements, and opportunities for creativity, movement, and social play.

9 Staffing and Supervision

- 9.1 The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there will be one or more adults present outdoors.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 The school will help children maximised 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 (Appendix B).

- 9.4 The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximised their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools and they can act as a stimulus for children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited by the children.

10 Dissemination

- 10.1 The Policy is available on the school website and a paper copy of the policy is available from the school admin office on request.

11 Reviewing the Policy

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head teacher, informed by OPAL audits, pupil voice and leadership evaluations and monitored by the Governing Body to ensure that the policy is relevant and up to date.

12 Appendix A



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 amounts 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

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])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is 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 bench marks 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

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 providers² 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, 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 focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

² 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.

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 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.
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

13 Appendix B

Playwork Principles

Playwork Principle 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 well-being of individuals and communities.

Playwork Principle 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.*

Playwork Principle 4

For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

Playwork Principle 6

The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

Playwork Principle 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 well-being of children.

Playwork Principle 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.

Playwork Principle 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.

Playwork Principle 7

Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.