Fossdene Primary School

OPAL Play Policy

2024 - 2025

This policy sets out Fossdene Primary School's commitment to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children. As a school we aim to improve the way we think and provide opportunities for play. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. In a time where outdoor play environments and opportunities are on the decline, the school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

Rationale
Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school attendance in playtime. This time is valuable and needs careful planning. Better play means happier children. Happier children mean fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, more effective lessons, core skills development, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary problems, fewer accidents and happier staff.

We believe that play has a vital role in children's happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to self-assess risks.
Play England drew up The Charter for Children's Play which sets out a vision for play and states that:

- 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 play workers
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

Fossdene follows and aligns to the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) rationale:

"… 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."

The OPAL programme mirrors the Fossdene way and supports in creating the happy and secure environment that enables our children can reach their potential – spiritually, morally, culturally, physically and academically. Through this play approach, children are encouraged to be responsible for their own actions, and a culture of independence and respect is promoted.

Links to Learning
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. 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.

Our Aims
Our school aims are:

- To provide children with a play setting which is enjoyable, stimulating and challenging
- To allow children to take risks
- To provide children with a range of play opportunities which will support children's learning across the curriculum and about the world around them

We aim to give the children the opportunity to:

- Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- Develop social skill, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving
- Encourage resilience and self-confidence
- Think creatively
- Develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others
- Develop physical health
- Develop emotional health, allowing the balance between acting freely and allowing everyone to have their rights
- To develop skills in self-assessing and managing risk

What is Play?
Play is any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It may be serious or light hearted. It may produce something, or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children an opportunity to be creative and make decisions.

We recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe the role of the adults is to support the play process. Children will also have the opportunity for 'free range' play within the school grounds.

As a result of implementing this policy within school we believe that children will:

- Be happier
- Increase self-awareness and self-esteem
- Improve language and communication skills
- Improve concentration
- Improve imagination, independence and creativity
- Improve social skills
- Be resilient, confident, problem solvers
- Be ready for anything as a result of negotiation and independence of thought
- Develop life skills
- Improve physical development, co-ordination and fitness

Respecting Rights
All children have a right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of activities (Article 31).
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At Fossdene Primary School, we promote children's rights from the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. We see children's rights as a central focus in all we do.

Through our belief in children's rights, we aim to provide a secure, caring environment where all children are happy, intrinsically motivated, relaxed and able to reach their potential.

Children have the right to an education (Article 28) therefore to respect this right the children must follow instructions, use equipment without hurting others and have fun. Adults respect this right by providing opportunities for creative, exciting play, use conflict resolution to support children and supporting children who have additional needs at playtime.

Children have the right to be safe (Article 28) therefore to respect this right children must follow instructions, use equipment without hurting others, assess risk and tidy equipment away. Adults respect this right by assessing risk daily, encouraging children to assess risk also and helping children to tidy up.

Children have the right to play and relax (Article 31) therefore to respect this right the children must follow instructions, use equipment without hurting others and help others who need it. Adults respect this right by developing new opportunities for play, listening to children's ideas about play and supporting children who have additional needs to access play.

Benefit, Risk assessment and play
An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risk develops their ability to judge risk independently and learn new skills.

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. (Play England)

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk assessments of all play provision within the school should be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change or development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances takes place. The benefit risk assessment at Fossdene Primary school is reviewed annually in line with the Play Policy.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the following guidelines:

- Recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals
- Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children
- Design spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed
- Provide staff with training to supervise play setting

Striking the right balance:

- Weighing up risks and benefits.
- Focussing On and controlling the most serious risks.
- Recognising that the introduction risk might form part of play opportunities and activity.
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk.
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full.

Adult's Role in Play

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 which will include regular play assemblies, School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.

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 Warden Park Primary Academy. In addition to this, Fossdene Primary School Play Team (Appendix 2) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Teaching assistants will take on the role of the play team. 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. The play team ensures that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Children's Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy. (Appendix 4) In 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, the environment, equipment and toys.
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, interactions with the School Council and during discussions and dialogue in class.

Environment and Clothing

To be able to enjoy the activities children should wear the appropriate clothing for the weather. We try to keep all of the school play zones open all year so the children will play, even in the rain. In the winter, they are expected to wear wellington boots and waterproofs, particularly in poorer weather. A welly store has been created in the sheltered areas of the playground and children have been asked to provide wellies or old outdoor shoes for use at playtimes. Children then return to the welly store and place their shoes back on. Hand washing facilities are provided both in classroom and bathroom areas.

At Fossdene 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 play 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 maximise variety of play types and increase the value of play
- Ensure that the playground is an integrated area where all children from nursery 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.

Remote Supervision
We may not be able to see every child all of the time, however Play Leaders are designated to an 'area' daily. It is expected that staff will move around throughout playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Staff can then check in on the children's play throughout playtime. All staff will follow the school's behaviour policy over lunchtimes and playtimes with the aim of solving conflict by working alongside children where possible. For further details please see school's Behaviour Policy.

Inclusion
All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure adequate provision is provided. Play opportunities will hold no barriers to any of the children within our school.

Appendix 1:

4.8 RESOURCE Zurich Durham Risk Report.pdf

Appendix 2

Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Risk Assessment Date….. Assessed by……

Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	**Benefit or Utility or Related Policy**	**Description of risk management and maintenance agreed**	**Nominated person**	**Action Date**

Appendix 2

Structure of adult roles in practice

OPAL Team

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

The Head of School	Sarah Jowett
Curriculum Play Lead	Joanne Bradley/Yolanta Zalecki
Play Co-ordinator	Amandine Reascos
Premises Manager	Stephen Farr
Parent Play Champion	

Lead Governor for Play Nick Edwards

Play Team

Fossdene Primary School Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy.

However more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

Curriculum Play Lead
(Leads and manages strategy)

Play Co-ordinators
(Leads and manages playtimes)

Play Team
(Support children's play)

Appendix 3

Chidren's Play Policy

We have the right to:	**We have the responsibility to:**
● Have fun at playtimes	● Make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this
● Make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do	● Make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way
● Choose who we play with and include others	● Make sure no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to
● Play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment	● Take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys
● Explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks	● Think about what we are doing and talk to an adult from the play team about the risks we are taking if they ask us

Review
This policy will be closely monitored by the Head of School and curriculum play leader. A working play group, led by the Head of School, comprising of curriculum play lead, play co-ordinator and play governor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play.

This policy has been shared by the whole school community.

Revised and reviewed on 29/08/2024 by Joanne Bradley, OPAL Curriculum Play Lead.

Ratified by Governors on ……