



Alsager Highfields Primary School

Mighty oaks from small acorns grow

Opal Play Policy

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Chair of Governing Body: A I Stancliffe

Signature:

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1. Commitment

Our school is dedicated to prioritising play in all decisions that impact children's well-being and development. We are committed to providing both strategic direction and operational support to ensure high-quality play opportunities for all students. This includes maintaining safe, inclusive, and engaging play environments that foster creativity, social interaction, and physical activity.

2. Play Philosophy

Our school believes that all children deserve opportunities to play in ways that encourage exploration, creativity, and engagement with their environment. We are committed to providing inclusive and accessible play experiences for every child, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, culture, or individual abilities.

The OPAL Primary Programme aligns with our school's core values—determination, aspiration, kindness, and respect—by emphasizing the importance of high-quality play. It highlights that "better, more active, and creative playtimes lead to happier, healthier children. In turn, this fosters a more positive attitude toward learning, more effective classroom experiences, fewer behavioural issues, reduced playground accidents, and a more supportive and enjoyable environment for both students and staff."

3. Definition and value of play

Play is a self-directed, intrinsically motivated process chosen freely by the child. It holds inherent value and purpose, whether or not it involves equipment or interaction with others. We believe that play offers numerous benefits, including:

- Supporting holistic development - Play is essential for children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual growth.
- Encouraging exploration - It enables children to engage with their environment, test ideas, and understand new concepts.
- Fostering social connections - Through play, children build self-esteem and learn about others in various social settings, including peer groups and diverse communities.
- Enhancing communication and negotiation skills - Play helps children balance their right to independence with their responsibility toward others.
- Building emotional resilience - It allows children to experience and manage a range of emotions, from joy and confidence to frustration and disappointment.
- Promoting creativity and problem-solving - Play nurtures self-confidence, decision-making skills, and imaginative thinking.
- Inspiring lifelong learning - It keeps children open to new experiences, helps them develop their abilities, and encourages them to push their limits.

4. Aims

Our school is committed to fostering a rich and supportive play environment that enhances children's development and well-being. We aim to:

- Create diverse and engaging play settings that offer variety, challenge, and stimulation.
- Encourage risk-taking by allowing children to assess and manage risks using a common-sense approach.
- Support social development by providing opportunities for children to build and strengthen relationships.
- Foster respect for the environment and for one another.
- Promote holistic development, supporting children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual growth.
- Offer environments that inspire exploration and imaginative play.
- Integrate play into learning by providing spaces that support the curriculum and help children understand the world around them.
- Cultivate independence and teamwork through collaborative and self-directed play experiences.
- Strengthen emotional and physical resilience to help children navigate challenges with confidence.

5. Rights

At Alsager Highfields we strive to create a secure, caring environment where all children feel happy, motivated, and relaxed, enabling them to reach their full potential. We believe that every child has the right to enjoy play, and with that right comes the responsibility to be ready, respectful, and safe during playtime. This means:

- Following instructions and using equipment safely.
- Assessing risks and tidying equipment after play.
- Engaging in play that is inclusive and enjoyable for all.

Adults support and respect these rights by:

- Providing creative, stimulating, and exciting play opportunities.
- Conducting daily risk assessments and encouraging children to do the same.
- Helping children develop responsibility for their play environment.
- Using emotion coaching and conflict resolution strategies, in line with our behaviour policy, to support all children.

6. Benefit and risk

"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."

— *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

Our school follows the Health and Safety Executive's guidance document, *Children's Play and Leisure - Promoting a Balanced Approach (2012)*, as the principal value statement for managing risk in play. In line with *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)*, we adopt a risk-benefit approach, recognizing that risk-taking is an essential element of play.

Play provision should:

- Provide children with opportunities to encounter acceptable risks in a stimulating and managed play environment.
- Balance the need for challenge and adventure with the responsibility to keep children safe from serious harm (Best Play)
- Encourage dynamic risk management, where children are actively involved in assessing and managing risks with adult support.

By fostering a balanced approach to risk, we empower children to develop independence, resilience, and critical decision-making skills within a safe and engaging play environment.

See Best Play document - Appendix 1

See HSE Managing Risk Statement - Appendix 2

7. Supervision during playtime

While the law requires that children in school have supervision, there are no specific ratios mandated for primary school playtimes. During the school day, at least one adult will always be present outdoors to ensure a safe play environment.

Our school follows OPAL's three models of supervision:

- Direct supervision - Close, continuous monitoring (used for new Reception children as they acclimate to the school environment).
- Remote supervision - Adults are visible and accessible while allowing children the freedom to explore.
- Ranging supervision - Staff patrol large play areas to observe play, assess risks, and remain available when needed.

We believe that direct supervision is neither feasible nor beneficial for most primary-aged children. Instead, our approach prioritises ranging and remote supervision, allowing children to develop independence while ensuring they can quickly access adult support when necessary. To maintain a safe and engaging play environment, we will continuously assess the number of supervising staff and their positioning across play zones, ensuring adequate support based on the number of children and the nature of activities taking place.

8. The role of adults in play

Our school is committed to maximizing the benefits of play by providing trained staff who are guided by the Playwork Principles. Staff will refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, ultimately striving to create an environment that nurtures self-directed play.

The primary role of playworkers is to stimulate and enrich children's play experiences by:

- Designing and resourcing engaging play environments.
- Fostering a positive and inclusive play culture.
- Providing access to new materials, tools, and experiences.
- Acting as a supportive presence while allowing children to lead their own play.
- Participating in play when invited by the children.

The adult's role in play is guided by the Playwork Principles, which state:

- *"The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process."*
- *"The role of the playworker is to recognize their own impact on the play space and to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play."*

At Alsager Highfields Primary School, all adults are committed to supporting children, facilitating learning through play, and ensuring that play remains a valued, enriching, and exciting part of each school day.

9. Equality and diversity

Our school is committed to providing a rich and inclusive play environment that meets the needs of every child. We ensure that all children—regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or other special needs—have equal opportunities to develop, thrive, build strong relationships, and enjoy their school experience through play.

By fostering an inclusive and diverse play culture, we create an environment where every child feels valued, respected, and empowered to explore, learn, and grow.

10. Environment

We believe that a high-quality play setting should provide **all children** with access to **stimulating environments** that are **safe from unnecessary risks** while allowing them the **freedom to explore and engage in self-directed play**.

To enhance play opportunities, we are committed to:

- **Continually improving** the quality and diversity of our school's outdoor spaces.
- **Ensuring a balance** between safety and challenge, allowing children to develop independence and resilience.
- **Using the guidance from *Best Play*** to shape our approach to creating a **high-quality, engaging, and inclusive play environment**

(www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf).

By prioritising **varied and dynamic play spaces**, we aim to foster creativity, exploration, and enjoyment for all children.

10. Managing Risks in Play

To ensure a safe and engaging play environment, our school implements a **proactive risk management approach** that balances **safety with the benefits of challenge and exploration**. We will:

- **Conduct regular Health and Safety Checks** of play areas, carried out by our site team.

- **Empower the OPAL working party and play staff** to assess and address potential risks while supervising children outdoors.
- **Divide play areas into designated zones**, incorporating both **quiet spaces** for relaxation and **active areas** for physical play, ensuring a well-balanced and inclusive play environment.

This approach supports **safe, dynamic, and developmentally beneficial play experiences** for all children

1. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>
2. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf