

Outdoor Play & Learning Policy

2024-2025



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**Statement of Intent**

At North Duffield Primary School our vision is to ensure we enable all our children to achieve our school vision "Growing Learners for Life”. This incorporates high quality teaching of a diverse curriculum in the classroom, alongside an inclusive and stimulating outdoor play environment designed to develop independence, creativity and resilience.

Our school will refer to this policy in all decisions that affect children’s play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to deliver and maintain quality outdoor play provision for all of our pupils.

**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. Play accounts for 20% of the time that children are in school and therefore deserves attention and resources to make it effective, enjoyable and beneficial.

Feedback from staff, parents and pupils, gathered through OPAL Play Surveys, highlight the importance that our school community places on play. We endeavour to ensure our play offering is deemed as ‘excellent’ by the majority of stakeholders – we will achieve this by providing a fully inclusive, rich play environment which offers a wide range of unregulated activities that can be freely chosen by the children.

Many adults who completed the survey believe that our children have far fewer opportunities to explore their neighbourhood and play outdoors in a safe environment than previous generations, who took these experiences for granted. This, coupled with the increase in childhood obesity and mental health issues, drives us to make play provision a priority for our pupils every single day.

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.”*

At North Duffield Primary School our ambitious play curriculum has been expertly tailored to enable pupils to become co-operative and managed risk-takers who make considered play choices in line with our metacognition behaviours of resilience, reciprocity, reflectiveness and resourcefulness. Our committed Play Team Working Party will ensure pupils are given opportunities to gain important skills and knowledge to develop their learning journey through the means of play, shaped by our curriculum drivers – diversity, possibility and spirituality.

**Definition & Value of Play**

Play is the fundamental way that children enjoy their childhood and is essential to their quality of life. Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. It 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 fun, it is how children enjoy themselves and is critical to their mental health and wellbeing.
* Play is essential for children’s 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.

Play encourages physical activity, provides children with a chance to encounter nature, allows children to develop friendships, enables them solve problems and achieve goals. Well planned play provision offers children a place where they can play freely and creatively in the ways they choose without direction from adults, a place to socialise, challenge themselves and explore their abilities safely. Quality, accessible play provision can also help parents and carers by reducing conflict and relieving stress levels inside the home. Thoughtful play zones can improve fine motor skills, core strength, communication and language skills, stimulate the vestibular system, encourage logical thinking and develop metacognition. This is by no means an exhaustive list but just a few of the benefits we work towards and recognise within school.

**Aims & Vision**

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 that 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.

To achieve our vision we aim for all pupils, staff, governors, parents and the community to:

* Always be looking for new ideas to improve our school
* Provide a safe environment where children become self-disciplined and confident
* Respect the equal rights of all our pupils
* Teach through multisensory approaches, understanding that everyone is unique and has a different range of strengths

**Benefit & Risk**

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. As outlined in the play sector publication ‘Best Play’ (Appendix 1), 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’*.

Our school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (Appendix 2) 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 the Play Safety Forum’s *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Appendix 3). All of our Play Team Working Party are trained in R.A.P.I.D Risk-Benefit through OPAL College.

*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.* (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

Our ‘OPAL Risk Benefit Assessment’ details the associated risks and benefits for each Play Zone aimed at striking a balance between safety, risk and challenge in respect of play - this is a working document which is regularly reviewed by the Play Curriculum Lead and Play Coordinator. In addition to this, the school will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where trained adults are present to support them.

We believe that to ‘Grow Learners for Life’ it is our responsibility to offer our pupils adventurous play experiences, specifically designed for that purpose, to help them deal with many of the everyday risks they will encounter throughout their lives. We are also conscious that some particularly adventurous children will seek physical challenges and excitement in other, less well-managed environments if these are not provided at home or at school. The world is full of hazards and it is our aim that our children will learn to recognise and respond to them in order to protect themselves – this can only be done through self-directed experience, encountering, assessing and responding to hazards as they arise.

*An essential part of the process of a child becoming an adult is the need, and the desire, to explore limits and to try new experiences. Minor injuries are part of every child’s learning process and are a far more normal part of their lives than us the case for adults.* (CEN 2006)

**Supervision & Environment**

Our school recognises OPAL’s three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging (Appendix 4). Except for new children in EYFS, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. The Play Team will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large areas to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

During outdoor play sessions we commit to a minimum of one trained member of the Play Team on our Broadmanor playground to supervise children and one trained member of the Play Team on our main playground to supervise all other children. Throughout the session, other Play Team members will supervise the various OPAL Play Zones responding to pupil numbers.

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 (Appendix 5). 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. Staff are also available to participate in the play if invited.

The school facilitates the use of outdoor play equipment only during school hours, children are not permitted to use our OPAL resources or Play Zones before 8.50am or after 3.30pm, even with guidance - parents/carers are fully responsible for their children at these times.

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.

Our school will enrich the children’s play experiences both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. We believe a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children’s social and emotional capabilities developing a love and enjoyment of the outdoors - which is a key foundation for understanding the natural world and caring for our environment.

**Rights**

Everyone at North Duffield Primary School has the right to feel welcome, secure and happy. It is the responsibility of the Governing Body and Headteacher to ensure that all members of the school community are provided with a safe and enabling environment. Our policies have been developed in line with the school’s vision, aims and values.

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). Children have the right to relax and play and join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children’s views on their play.

**Equality & 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.

Our school follows the North Yorkshire County Council Single Equality Scheme, all of our pupils are protected from discrimination and we promote equality of opportunity in all of our play provision. We are also committed to addressing any actions which are identified to improve our inclusive practice.

**Sanctions**

Our Behaviour Policy requires effective, consistent and positive use of the school expectation system and all members of the school community model these at all times. In certain circumstances a child may be required to miss 5-10 minutes of morning or afternoon break time for fighting, swearing or hurting another child. They will always be given an outdoor break at lunchtime where they can access our OPAL Play Zones.

Our children have the right to play and enjoy OPAL and we have the responsibility to ensure everyone can do so safely and happily. Our school community agree to follow and model our Play Charter (Appendix 6) which was drawn up with input from the children themselves and the Play Team. This is reinforced during playtimes and in our Play Assemblies.

**Linked Policies**

* Safeguarding Policy
* Behaviour Policy
* School Expectations
* SEND Policy
* Anti Bullying Policy
* Single Equality Scheme

**Appendices**

1 - Best Play

2 - Managing Risk Statement (HSE)

3 - Managing Risk in Play Provision (Play Safety Forum)

4 - Models of Supervision (OPAL)

5 - Playwork Principles

6 - Play Charter