



Play Policy 2025

St Mary's Banbury

Approval date: March 2025

Review date: March 2028

Signed Chair of Governors.....

Signed Headteacher.....

Date.....

St Mary's Banbury
Southam Road
Banbury



St Mary's Church of England
OPAL Play Policy and Strategy

Our Vision and Values

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is a place to learn, transform and grow.

Positive, caring relationships based on our Christian values of truth, endurance, compassion and koinonia are at the heart of our philosophy.

Through our vision we aim to;

- Enable all children to develop their capabilities as determined, motivated learners.
- Provide a safe, happy, caring and stimulating environment to enable every child to transform into confident members of our community.
- Help all children to prepare for their future and grow into creative, resilient, successful contributors to society.

School vision through play

- To enable all children, members of the school community and the wider community to contribute to school life.
- To promote high standards and provide opportunities for all to achieve their full potential.
- To encourage a sense of self-worth and confidence empowering children to fulfil a contributing role in society.
- To create a diverse and challenging learning environment in which children are cared for and feel safe.
- To provide leadership and management which focuses on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of all members of the school community.

Commitment

At St Mary's Church of England Primary School we are committed to this play policy in order to guide our planning and actions in providing excellent play opportunities for all children. We believe that play is an essential part of children's wellbeing and happiness. Enjoyable play not only supports in developing our school vision of Learning, Transforming and Growing but also supports the development of children who are independent, confident, imaginative, social, innovative, resilient and therefore able to assess risks.

The St Mary's Church of England Primary School Pledge

- To gradually and systematically implement the changes within the St Mary's Play Policy in consultation with key stakeholders.
- To listen to our children in order to establish exciting play spaces that will engage, enthuse and challenge children in an environment where they feel safe to take measured risks and explore the world around them.
- To create a strong partnership with parents and the community in order to make use of local expertise.
- Build projects collaboratively, respecting existing boundaries.



Rationale

Because children spend up to 20% of their school week at play, it is essential that this time is effectively planned for. Due to changes in society over time such as busier lifestyles, heavier traffic, less play areas and acute awareness of risks have all led to 'play poverty' for most of today's children. This makes exciting play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better play means happier children. When children are happy, there are fewer behaviour problems; a more positive attitude towards school; an emphasis on core skill development; less staff time spent on resolving unnecessary conflicts; fewer accidents and subsequently, happier staff.

The Charter for Children's Play (drawn up by Play England) sets out a vision for play which states:

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 playworkers

Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

St Mary's Church of England Primary School fully understands its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime.

Learning Links

Findings confirmed by many early childhood studies recognise the important contribution play makes to education and life-long learning. Research indicates that play not only offers social interaction opportunities but also enhances problem solving skills and language development. The impact that play has on educational development is evident in the inherent value of various play types such as: exploratory play in formal and informal situations, allowing children to experiment, attempt new activities and push their boundaries.

'Learning through play incorporates a significant social and environmental element, where children interact with others and their setting to modify existing and adopt new ways of thinking.' (Vygotsky, 1978; van Oers, 2003; Rogoff, 2008). When play is thoughtfully directed by adults, the learning outcomes are further enhanced.

One of the current concerns expressed is that children's opportunities for imaginative play and its educational benefits are being limited due to the demands of the school curriculum which threatens to make school play times shorter.

Recent studies by Quibell et al. (2017), which explored the impact of an informal outdoor learning approach on attainment in core curriculum areas, demonstrated the positive impact of learning outside of the classroom on children's attainment in numeracy and literacy.

As a result of implementing St Mary's Church of England Play Policy, we believe that children will:

- be happier;
- be more resilient, confident, effective problem solvers;
- be responsible, independent thinkers who can negotiate;
- have increased self-awareness and self-esteem;
- have improved language and communication skills;
- have improved concentration;
- have improved imagination;
- develop life skills ;
- have improved physical development, co-ordination and fitness.



What is play?

At St Mary's Church of England Primary School, play is a freely chosen, self-directed physical or mental leisure activity (that is undertaken purely for enjoyment or amusement) and is intrinsically motivated.

Play in its richest form satisfies the four main areas of child development:

- Physical (with a direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development and imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes) and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

St Mary's Church of England Primary School therefore recognises that:

- Great play allows children the freedom to be creative and co-operative;
- Great play involves responsive adults who will engage in play on invitation by children
- Great play may be solitary or social;
- Great play invites investigation and
- Great play makes children happy and therefore happy children become better learners.

Rights, equality and Access

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and recreational activities. St Mary's Church of England Primary School acknowledges that all children are entitled to the freedom of choice in suitable play opportunities no matter the age, stage, gender or background.

Health, Safety, Benefit and Risk

Uncertainty and challenge involved in children's play is a very large part of the appeal to them; it also enhances brain and body development, making them more resilient and adaptable as they grow. Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk; it includes the uncertainties involved in forging new friendships, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through attempting new experiences with the possibility of failure.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be rather than devoid of risk. The benefit of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. At St Mary's Church of England Primary School, we will adopt a risk-benefit approach to manage our duty of care to protect and our duty of care to provide for children's needs.

The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in education settings and state that:

'HSE fully supports the provisions 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 2013)



St Mary's Church of England Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) and 'The Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision' (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

The Adults' Role in facilitating Play

We strongly believe that it is the role of the play facilitator is essential in order to:

- ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are made available to children; observe, reflect and analyse the play that is occurring and select an appropriate mode of intervention or make changes to the play space if necessary;
- ensure that the play spaces are inclusive, supporting all children of all abilities to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way;
- encourage and support children to be reflective risk managers; innovative, creative thinkers and problem solvers.

The Play Environment

At St Mary's Church of England Primary School we, will:

- use the outdoor space effectively as a natural resource for learning and playing;
- include the children when planning for outdoor play and learning;
- ensure that the outdoor areas offer children the opportunity to investigate, explore, imitate, innovate, create, problem solve and use their imagination creatively;
- encourage children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things;
- give children the opportunity to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors.
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value (Appendix 2).

Strategic Aims and Practices

St Mary's Church of England Primary School has entered into an agreement with Opal Outdoor Play to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision.

1. The Outdoor Environment

St Mary's Church of England Primary School will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation of the play space by the children. Our ultimate aim is to have an integrated play space from Nursery to Year 6.

2. Loose Parts

Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The essential items for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves.

3. Supervision

Job roles of Play Leaders at St Mary's Church of England Primary School have been drawn up and shared with stakeholders. The school will move towards a much greater emphasis on 'playwork' roles and skills for play supervision, with the continued professional development and training needed to enhance this.



4. Monitoring

The school will continue to use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor implementation of its play policy, strategy and action plan. An annual report will be presented to governors and stakeholders.

5. Health and Safety

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis. These checks will be kept in accordance with the Health and Safety Policy.

Risk-benefit assessments for areas, equipment and activities will be held on file in the office for inspection. All new activities introduced, which involve potential significant risk, will be subject to individual or generic assessments as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate.

The play facilitators will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led by the play facilitator. Visiting carers, teachers and parents will be responsible for the conduct and behaviour of those in their care. They will be responsible for ensuring that those persons in their care use the site and equipment in a safe, controlled and appropriate manner to ensure the well-being of ALL users on site.

It is the responsibility of all visitors and staff to work within the agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments.

It is the responsibility of all staff to bring any potential hazard or concerns regarding the site, equipment or activities to the attention of the Play Leaders on duty.

It is the responsibility of the Play Leader on duty to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Play Leader as soon as possible.

Appendix 1

Play, Challenge and Risk - Statement

Play is an essential part of children's development. Quality active play can not only provide opportunities to develop a wide range of physical skills, but also allow for choice, introduce challenge and self-risk assessment, develop problem solving skills, promote co-operation, and increase confidence and independence. Active play provision will vary with age and ability, and the setting in which it is provided, but it is always important to provide opportunities for active play outdoors wherever and whenever possible.

Play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. "Freely chosen" means that the children choose when and which play activity to undertake. It is not part of a set programme or curriculum and does not have any steps that need to be completed. "Personally directed" means that the children themselves agree the roles or rules of the activity, they decide what outcomes they desire, if any. "Intrinsically motivated" means that it is done for its own sake and not for any externally provided reward or certificate. In short it is done for fun.

Play and Risk

Children need and want to take risks during active play. Quality play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities, striking a balance between the risks and the benefits. This is done through risk assessment which:

- ensures the likelihood of serious injury is extremely low;
- makes sure potential hazards are clear and
- uses practical ways to manage reasonable risk.

Managing Risk in Play Provision

"Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play is first and foremost for children and if it is not exciting and attractive to them it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents."

Managing Risk in Play Provision, Play Safety Forum, National Children's Bureau, 2002.

"It makes clear that safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that inevitably there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is though that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play."

Health and Safety Executive, in Managing Risk in Play Provision, 2002 Health & Safety Executive 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'.

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH, HSE, 2012



Appendix 2

Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide play facilitators, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

1. **Symbolic Play** – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth e.g. using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.
2. **Rough and Tumble Play** – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.
3. **Socio-dramatic Play** – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.
4. **Social Play** – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended e.g. any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols i.e. games, conversations, making something together.
5. **Creative Play** – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell e.g. enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self-expression through any medium, making things, changing things.
6. **Communication Play** – play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, and poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles / emails / internet, skipping games, group and ball games.
7. **Dramatic Play** – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator e.g. presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.
8. **Locomotor Play** – movement in any or every direction for its own sake e.g. chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.
9. **Deep Play** – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life-threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear e.g. light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc. e.g.: leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.

10. **Exploratory Play** – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects e.g. engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.
11. **Fantasy Play** – This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur e.g. playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be where ever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be the list is endless as is a child's imagination.
12. **Imaginative Play** – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply e.g. imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.
13. **Mastery Play** – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments e.g. digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.
14. **Object Play** – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements e.g. examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.
15. **Role Play** – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature e.g. brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.
16. **Recapitulative Play** – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

References

<http://www.playengland.org.uk>

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<http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk>