



Low Ash Play Policy – updated April 2024

1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. Rationale

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. This is also equivalent to 1 day a week. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

The rationale of the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme which we are a part of 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."*

3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. Low Ash believes play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, different concepts and different ideas.



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- 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 helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights
- Play increases children’s social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors
- Play is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

4. Aims

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 which 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.

5. Rights

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

At Low Ash Primary we encourage all children ‘to be the best that they can be’. Opportunities for a range of play activities outside allows all children to succeed.



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6. Benefit and Risk

‘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.’

Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (2012)

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

‘Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children’s development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world’. (DCFS)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document ‘Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach’ (September 2012) – see Appendix 1- as the principle value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *‘Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide.’*

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. In the words of the play sector publication ‘Best Play’, 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’.*

In addition to standard risk-benefit 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. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. At breaktimes during the school day there will always be one or more adults present outdoors. The school recognizes OPAL’s three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take direct and remote 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. Adults will wear hi-vis jackets so that children can speedily see seek



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their help/advice if needed. Children in Reception will also wear hi-vis jackets so that they can be located easily. Walkie-talkies are provided for certain locations so that quick communication can be made when needed. Key adults will wear first aid bumbags so that minor injuries can be dealt with speedily.

8. The adult's role in play

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. 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.

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

See link to [Playwork Essentials & Principles](#).

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer 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

10. Environment

At Low Ash, 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. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

At Low Ash we

- 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 playing and learning outdoors
- ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks



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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 play value
- ensure that the playground be an integrated area where all children from reception to Year 6 can play
- 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 that belongs to them.



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Appendix 1

Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide play workers, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play.

They 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, poetry, and 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.



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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.

Appendix 2

Link to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Managing Risk Statement – Children's Play & Leisure – promoting a balanced approach

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

Appendix 3

The Principles of Playwork

School can benefit greatly by using the skills knowledge and principles of the playwork sector in areas of workforce development related to free play opportunities. These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

- 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 wellbeing of individuals.



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- 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.
- The prime focus and essence of play work is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
- For play workers, the play process takes precedence and play workers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
- The role of the play worker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
- The play worker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
- Play workers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the play worker.
- Play workers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All play worker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

Appendix 4

Type of Supervision

Direct – This is where the supervisor(s) will be able to see all areas of play, and be close at hand, circa a maximum of 20 metres away. Some play features in these areas such as play houses or planting may offer semi-hidden opportunities. This will be most common in nursery and reception classes.

Remote – This is where a supervisor or supervisors are located at a relatively static location some distance from an activity, e.g. supervisor on the playground and activity 20 metres or more away. This style is widely used in other countries and its purpose is for an adult to be present to respond rapidly to an accident or serious behaviour incident.

Ranging – This is where the supervisor moves around the play area, usually on a set course/schedule. The distance from pupils therefore differing but can be 20 metres or more away.

On a large site supervisors should have zones so that they know which parts of the site they are covering and they should modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk.



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DEFINITIONS

The following are the definitions for terms used in the document and some more detailed explanation where appropriate.

- a) Free Range Play – Free range play is where pupils are given permission to use and explore the school grounds or at least part of them without direct supervision.
- b) Level of Supervision – The number of supervisors (competent adults) undertaking supervision indicated as a ratio to number of pupils being supervised.
- c) Type of Supervision – OPAL Recommend that a paragraph on the school's intonated supervision styles is included in its play policy.
- d) Supervisor – This is the competent adult providing the supervision and can be a play team member, teacher, teaching assistant, lunch break supervisor or a volunteer.

In each case they will have been assessed as competent to provide the supervision necessary and been trained on what is acceptable practice, what to do if unacceptable practice occurs and what to do in case of accidents.