

West Walker Primary School

Play Policy 2019

This policy sets out the school's commitment to ensuring that quality opportunities for play are available to all our children. We aim to improve the way we think about, and provide, opportunities for play. We believe that all children need opportunities to play which allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment within challenging settings, free from unacceptable levels of risk. We are working with consultants from OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning); they will provide support and guidance in the development of play across the school.

Definition

Play is recognised as any activity that a child enters into that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated and that actively engages the child.

Rationale

Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school attendance in playtime. This time is valuable and needs coherent planning. Changes in culture and society have led to 'play poverty' in childhood which has numerous negative impacts.

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.

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 playworkers Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play.

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'

We commit to using the values and principles set out in this policy to guide all of our decisions which have an impact on children's play.

Purpose

We define play as any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We want to improve play opportunities because:

- Play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual welfare and development
- Play enables children to explore their physical and social environment and develop different concepts and ideas
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make informed choices
- Play is critical to children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing
- Play enables children to explore and develop the balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others
- Play is a right for all children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31.
- Play encourages creative thinking and problem solving

Play and Risk - Managing Risk in Play Provision

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 risks develops their ability to independently judge risks and learn new skills. As a team we feel taking risks in play has these benefits:

- Enables children to develop their own boundaries, knowing where and when to take a risk
- Builds confidence
- Develops independence
- Promotes peer interaction and reciprocity
- Extends experiences and develops life skills for the future.

It is the school's responsibility to strike a balance between the risks and the benefits of play. This policy sets out the school's overall objectives for risk management in play provision, and the school recognises the challenge that this brings. Our guidelines are:

- Recognising the need for professional judgements in setting the balance between safety and other goals
- Ensuring risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children
- Designing spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent
- Ensuring that hazards that children may not appreciate will be controlled and managed
- Providing trained staff to supervise play settings.

The Role of Adults in Play

We believe that it is the job of a play worker to 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. Play workers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. 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 wellbeing of ALL users on site.

West Walker Primary School will use the nationally recognised Playwork Principles (Appendix 1) as key guidance in the development of play.

The Play Environment

We believe that a rich play environment supports both play and learning. We will be guided by the principles set out in 'Best Play What Play Provision Should Do for Children' and Play England's 'Design Guide for Play' in the development of our outdoor environment.

1. The Outdoor Environment West Walker Primary School will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation and recreation of the play space by the children. 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 vital ingredients for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves. The school intends to provide plentiful loose parts in a PlayPod and to get the necessary training for this to run successfully.

2. The Wood Research shows that children using green spaces are more creative and play imaginatively and collaboratively. West Walker Primary School will develop and build appropriate areas such as: the wooded area with seating, den making and musical equipment.

3. Supervision The playground will be divided into Zones with one member of staff supervising each area.

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

5. Health and Safety All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis.

Risk-benefit assessments will be carried out for all Zoned areas, equipment and activities. All new activities which involve potential significant risk will be subject to individual or generic assessment as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate.

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

Megan McNab September 2018

To be reviewed September 2019

Appendix 1

The new Children's Plan from the DCSF recognises that 'children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.' The new draft national play policy and strategy states that 'the Government attaches considerable importance to children having recreational time during the school day' and goes on to say 'there are ways in which the nature and quality of children's opportunities can be enhanced'.

In relation to concerns about over protective health and safety regimes, the draft national play policy states 'The Government is committed to addressing these concerns and to tackling safety issues and perceptions that are preventing children from enjoying play'.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.

HSE fully supports the provision 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 danger.

HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities. (HSE 2012)

OPAL Guidance: Health and Safety

In schools the significant findings are normally identified by considering the potential issues and how these can be managed within the school environs. The decisions made then being compiled into a safe practice document.

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 – This can be one of the following:

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.

Remote – This is where 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.

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.

d) Supervisor – This is the competent adult providing the supervision and can be a 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.

OPAL Guidance:

For Reception/Nursery Pupils (Under 5) – No free range play. The view is that they are generally less steady on their feet so more prone to falling over and tend to be unaware of risks. They will also usually be in a separate enclosed play space and no parental expectation that would be outside of this area unless under direct supervision.

For Infant aged Pupils (KS1) – Free range play limited to more open fields with some use of hedges, borders and informal natural areas. Pupils tend to have a mix of fixed play equipment whilst use of natural and man-made materials is to be encouraged. Some heavier loose materials like bricks, planks etc., may be unsuitable for the age group as they are difficult for them to carry or manipulate.

For Junior aged Pupils (KS2) – In general terms any of the spaces identified as acceptable for free range play should be available to them as should most materials.

Supervision of Free Range Play

In most cases competence will be based on the person having a level of authority with the pupils combined with instruction/training on where they are expected to be, how they are expected to supervise, what is acceptable interaction with the pupils and what to do in the case of accidents/incidents, which will include disciplinary issues.

This will require training to be provided to the supervisors as a group as it is essential that consistency is applied in respect of what is allowed and disallowed. This means that the misuse identified earlier in the risk assessment needs to be discussed and rules established. These rules must also be made clear to the pupils.

Staff should be aware of the benefits of free range play and of their role in deciding how to balance these benefits against the risk of possible harm.

PRACTICE AND REVIEW

Having established what is felt to be the appropriate safe practice it is a case of introducing it slowly so that the practice and the rules can be reviewed. This could be by allowing one year group at a time to exercise free range play or one class at a time, thus allowing an opportunity to see how accurate the initial assessment was.

CONCLUSION

The use of school sites for free range play is encouraged as it allows pupils to experience a level of risk in a managed environment in line with current Government policy. It is however accepted that

injuries will occur as a result but these will be relatively minor and happen in a place where support can quickly be obtained. Schools must, however, have evidence in place that proves they have assessed the risks involved and have practice in place based on this assessment.