Staples Road Primary School

PLAY POLICY



Last reviewed on:	October 2026
Next review due by:	October 2028

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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.

The OPAL 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.*"

We believe that the play opportunities championed by OPAL allow children to express themselves creatively, build resilience to challenges and interact with their peers with kindness and positivity - key values in the Staples Road vision.

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. We believe 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.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions **rooted in kindness**, 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.

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- 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 builds resilience,** allowing them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- **Play activities can contribute significantly to the UK CMO's recommended 60-minute daily quota of moderate to vigorous physical activity for children and young people.**

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment (**STRIVE**).
- 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 (**RESPECT**).
- enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other (**HONESTY & KINDNESS**).
- aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively (**CREATIVITY**).
- 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 (**SUCCEED**).
- 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 to consider these rights seriously and listen to **and respect** children's views on their play.

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)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach'* (September 2012) (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.*

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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 (see Appendix 4).

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should 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, and for some children with special educational / physical needs, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial.* Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

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 (see appendix). 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 and experienced 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.

The school's OPAL Play Team structure, including current post-holders can be found in Appendix 3.

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.

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10. Environment

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, maintaining and celebrating our 'forest school' identity and enhancing play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.

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APPENDIX:

Appendix 1: Playwork Principles

The 8 Playwork Principles

1. 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 well-being of individuals and communities.

2. 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.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker interventions must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children

Appendix 2: Structure of adult roles in practice

OPAL Play Team

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This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at Staples Road School. As of June 2022, it consists of:

The Head Teacher (Nick Mallender)
Curricular Lead for Play (Mark Johnson & Claire Stephenson)
Play Co-ordinator (Danny WHeeler)
Play Leader (Penny Barker)
Site Manager (Graham Fitzgerald)
Parent Representative/ Associate Governor (Mel Tanner)

Staples Road Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes staff all should act as **PlayMakers**.

However more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

Curricular Lead for Play
(Leads on strategy, finance and planning)

Play Co-ordinator
(Supports Curricular Lead for Play and has responsibility for managing Play Squad)

Play Leader
(Leads and manages playtimes)

Assistant Play Leader
(Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)

Play Makers
(Support children's' play as describe in paragraph 5)

Play Squad
(Pupil helpers to support children's play)

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Appendix 3: Risk Benefit Assessment

Staples Road Primary School
Risk-Benefit Assessment

'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'. Health and Safety Executive 2021

The purpose of these **Benefit-Risk Assessments** are to enable us to provide challenge, progression, excitement, creativity and fun in our play environment. They cannot and will not provide complete 'safety' and this is not their purpose. They are to help us to think about, predict, and manage the most serious and most likely potential causes of harm. We use OPAL's approach which follows best practice advice from the Health and Safety Executive, The Play Safety Forum, Zurich Municipal Insurance, and Local Authority Health and Safety Advisory Teams. The recommended practice for supporting play provision – and all services where the activity is risky but has benefits – is to make the benefits explicit in the assessment process from the outset. This has been recommended practice for all play provision since 2012.
This document will be regularly reviewed and all children and staff supervising play should be aware of its content and use them to guide their play and practice. Every time a new item or section of play is opened up we will add to this document.

Standing Benefit-Risk Assessments

These will be reviewed annually or when significant changes take place. These include: tree management and tree climbing, fixed equipment and inspection, broken loose parts, rope tying (especially at height), water use and water features.

In addition, all play team members will be trained to constantly check for and remove hazards as part of their daily practice, with a clear knowledge of when to record and appropriate responses.

This document is regularly updated and can be found at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XikT7IGKWD5e18iQCrAg6SO_1wRrZdq7/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=104966227518544859764&rtpof=true&sd=true

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Dynamic Risk Management means that all staff should be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place.
The Play Team will support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action, if a member of the Play Team thinks that risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely.
Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm with preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.
Dynamic risk management in playwork requires that staff maintain 'relaxed vigilance'. The quality of play will suffer if the adult's attitude is one of hovering, anxious over-attention.

Most play is not dangerous and children can develop a high degree of competence, given practice, over time. However, staff should also be vigilant, and they should be aware of the kinds of play and resources being used in their patch, who is playing and what the likely risks are.

All play team staff **must** be trained and reminded that active risk management is an essential part of their job using the OPAL Online Playwork Essentials course and training book. They should be observant, mobile and attentive at all times.

Most of the time they will not need to intervene but should be ready to:

- **stop activity or manage the risk** if staff think that *serious harm* (meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation) is imminent or probable.
- **remain vigilant** if they think that serious harm is possible but not probable.
- **note and move on** if serious harm is very unlikely.

It is important that new staff joining the Play Team are trained to the same level as existing staff.

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Supervising risk during play



Remember the law does not require you not to have accidents, but to understand the reasons for the risk you provide and to demonstrate the reasonable steps you have taken to manage those risks.

All members of the Play Team will carry out daily, ongoing risk assessment and pass on any potential hazards to one of the OPAL Team Leaders (MJ,CS,JF, JC)

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Appendix 4: OPAL Play Guidelines

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xqFuEGoJihjj2HPWakq4PWdrxf--KODW_OLRZGTdpZc/edit?usp=sharing

Safeguarding

When supervising play, be vigilant about safeguarding. Safeguarding is EVERYONE'S responsibility. Follow the procedure on your 'aide memoire' [which should be on your lanyard] if a disclosure is made or you have a concern about a child.

You should report concerns to the designated leads:
Designated Safeguarding Leads:
Nick Mallender and Claire Dawson
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads: Mark Johnson and Claire Stephenson

Please take time to read the child protection policy and whistleblowing policy available on the school website [https://www.staplesroad.essex.sch.uk/policies/]

Other helpful information

- Please familiarise yourself with the procedures in the dinner hall and playground, should the fire alarm sound.
- You are welcome to bring hot drinks out to the playground if it is in a lidded mug.
- If you suffer an injury while on duty, please seek first aid and complete a staff injury form, available from the office.
- If you have any questions or suggestions please let an OPAL leader know.
- Key staff:
  - Mark Johnson [AHT and OPAL Lead]
  - Claire Stephenson [AHT and OPAL Lead]
  - Danny Wheeler [Play team Leader]
  - Penny Barker [Play team Supervisor]
  - Dawn O' Grady [Play team supervisor on Tuesday]
  - Sandra Pacitto [Office]



Staples Road Primary School

OPAL Play Guidelines

General Expectations

- **Be positive** and **encourage** children to have confidence to try new things
- Promote the values of **kindness**, **creativity**, **honesty** and **resilience**
- Check the **OPAL board** [in staff room], briefing notes and the Risk Benefit Assessment for updates
- Check the **rota** to ensure you know where you are
- You are entitled to a 30 minute break.
- Please do not take your beak between 12-1pm [KS1 staff] or 12.15-1.15pm [KS2 staff]
- Ensure you are **dressed appropriately** for the weather
- Please **do not use your mobile phone** on site

Sessions

- 12.00 pm-1pm (KS1 and Reception)
- 12.15pm-1.15pm (KS2)



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In the Lunch hall

- All available staff in the dinner hall must be aware and assist in all duties they are able.
- These might include cleaning plates, wiping tables, clearing spillages, supporting children, cutting up food, liaising with the kitchen, directing prefects and taking instruction from the supervisor.
- 1-1 support staff can assist when their child is settled and eating.
- Please do not eat your lunch in the dinner hall alongside the children.
- Try to ensure children walk [don't run] when inside the school building.
- Encourage children to go back if you feel they could eat more, and encourage good eating and social skills.

Playground Expectations

Your role is to supervise and provide a safe and stimulating play environment for the children

- Remember to ask children:
  - Are you having **fun**?
  - Are you being **fair**?
  - Are you being **safe**?
- If you see challenging play; **Watch**, **Wait**, **Move closer**, and then if needed **Intervene without shutting down the play**
- It is the duty of all play team members to constantly inspect the play environment to keep it free of hazards such as broken objects and litter. If you can deal with it then do, if not, report it to the supervisor on duty.
- **Dynamic risk assessment:** You need to be aware of the changing nature of the play taking place in your allocated zone. You should have an idea of where all children are in your zone, how risky their play appears to be, and what resources they are using. You should support children to assess and manage their risks as much as possible for themselves, but also be vigilant and take immediate action, if you think that a risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely.
- Any issue of poor behaviour should be dealt with using restorative practice.
- Serious incidents are recorded on the bronze ticket and this is given to the class teacher and SLT if necessary.
- All children must be encouraged to tidy the playground on the second whistle. Promote the values of kindness and resilience. If children do not respond or are rude, a bronze ticket may be issued.



Medical

- There are 2 medical areas.
- All lunchtime staff including 1-1 support staff are responsible for medical duties. Please communicate with each other to meet the need at the time.
- All medical slips must be fully completed and handed to the relevant classes at the end of lunch.
- Allergy/ medical books must be out on the medical station during break/ lunchtime and then put away at the end.
- Medical supplies should also be tidied and put away in the medical cupboard.

Wet Play

- Children should be kept outside unless it is heavily raining, ensure all children are wearing a coat
- Final decision rests with the Play Team Supervisor

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