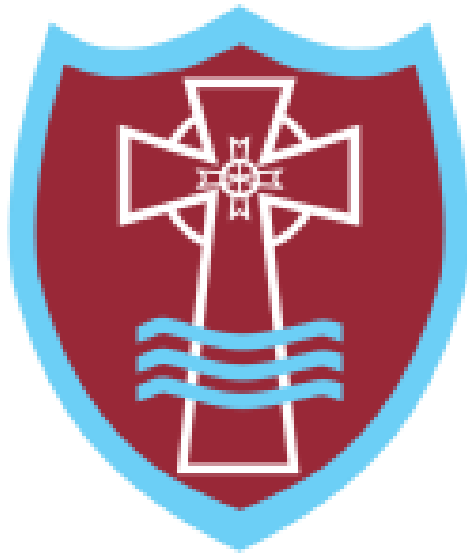


St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy



Opal Play Policy



Amended: September 2025

Review date: September 2026

Mission Statement

“Together we all enjoy learning, achieving, sharing and praying. Let Jesus’ love shine through in everything we do”

Our school vision statement

Here at St Aidan’s we are passionate about our children being happy, safe and healthy. We aim for children to learn in an inclusive, engaging environment; enabling them to be lifelong learners who know more, remember more and can do more in the wider world.

Introduction

At St Aidan’s we believe that every child has the right to play and to learn through play. We believe that play is an important part of a happy and healthy child. We aim to provide children with high quality play opportunities as our vision states that children should be happy, safe and healthy and be able to become lifelong learners. We believe that play has an important role in children’s mental health and well-being. It allows children to become risk takers, imaginative, creative, confident, independent and build on their social skills.

Rationale

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. 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, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

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.*”

Definition and value of play

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play 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 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, 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 allows children to become risk takers and it is fun.
- Play builds children's resilience.

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 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.
- Children are engaged and happy.
- We believe children learn best when engaged in play and that they should be supported to develop independence and autonomy to lead their own learning, while being adequately challenged through the support of experienced staff.

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 take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

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 (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) 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 *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

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', 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.

Clothing and weather:

During the colder and wet weather children will need to wear wellies and coats. Part of outdoor learning means children will get messy especially in the woodlands and mud kitchen area. We will try to reduce this as much as possible but free play allows children to explore. Please ensure children's belongings are all labelled.

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 recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision 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.

The Playleader will ensure that the outdoor space is safe and engaging for children and support children to make the most out of the opportunities available to them. Equipment

will be checked beforehand so it is safe for children to play with. Staff will be available in each area to support children and to help reduce any risks that may occur. Having adults in different areas will allow staff to gain an awareness of the kinds of play that is taking place.

The adult's role in play

Adults roles:

Mrs Campling: Opal manager
Miss Williamson- Curriculum lead
Miss LeGallienne- Play Co-ordinator
LSS team – OPAL Play team

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. Staff will wear pink high vis stating play team and will be responsible for facilitating areas and resources.

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.

There will be play team leaders from year 6 that will help set up the space alongside Miss LeGallienne. Their job will also include helping and engaging with the children around the school and having a voice to help develop OPAL. They will wear pink high vis jackets like the staff play team so they can be spotted around the playground.

Staff will refer to the *Playwork Principles to create a rich and engaging environment*.

https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pocket_guide_to_play_work.pdf

Play assemblies:

Every two weeks we will hold play assemblies for the whole school. In these assemblies we will talk to the children about what is going well and ask the children what they are enjoying. In this assembly we will also go through rules that encourage safe play. We will also introduce new resource's and talk about the new equipment the children will have.

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. Our school is a place where everyone is able to feel welcomed, valued, secure, loved and happy. Everyone who comes into our school will be treated with respect. We remember that Jesus said, "Treat others as you would like them to treat you."

1. St. Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy acknowledges and welcomes diversity among students, staff and visitors.
2. We do not discriminate against anyone, be they staff or students, on the grounds of their sex, race, age, colour, religion, nationality, ethnicity, national origins or physical or mental abilities.
3. We promote the principles of fairness and justice for all through the education that we provide in our Schools.
4. We ensure that all students have equal access to the full range of educational opportunities provided by the school.

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. It helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities. Children will develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

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

Play Zones:

The playground will be set up with different play zones for children to play and explore.

Small world: In this area we will have toys including lego and cars.

Home/role play: This area will include dressing up clothes, babies.

Water play: This includes three different tuff spots, pipes and containers.

Sand play: We will have a large sandpit area.

Large parts: The large loose parts will include, tyres, cardboard boxes and pallets.

Creative play: This is the indoor creative area where the children use different arts and crafts.

Quiet area: This area we will have reading books and colouring and drawing. It will also include cuddly toys and cushions for the children to sit with. This area is a calming space for the children.

Music play: This area has musical instruments such as, tins, pots and pans. Children are able to create music with a variety of resources.

Woodland/mud area: This area is based in our prayer garden. The children can explore different areas using natural objects around them.

Bikes/scooters: This is based in the KS1 playground. The children can play with the bikes and scooters. We are going to develop a scooter and bike track, where children can use their imagination and learn about road safety.

Parent involvement

Parents can donate resources for OPAL. We will hold regular parent play sessions so the parents can have a better understanding of how OPAL works and see their children in action.

Links to other policies

EYFS policy

Equalities policy:

Keeping children safe in education

Pupil premium policy

Safeguarding policy

Mental health and well-being policy

Behaviour policy

This policy has been agreed by:

... 

.....Date: September Headteacher

... 

.....Date: September Chair of Governors

Appendix 1

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

See PDF attached. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/chlds-play-statement.htm>

Appendix 2

Risk-benefit advice and record sheet

Risk-benefit assessment date:

Assessed by:

Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date
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Appendix 3

Rules of Play:

1. We respect one another and resources.
2. We are kind and share with one another.
3. We ask for help when needed.
4. We include others and help others.
5. We help to tidy up and take care of our equipment.
6. We help one another.
7. We love one another.
8. We stop when we hear the bell.
9. We use our hands to play and do wonderful things, not to hurt others.
10. We are responsible for our own belongings.
11. We walk to lunch and to our class line when instructed.

Appendix 4: 16 different types of play

SYMBOLIC PLAY

Using objects, actions or ideas to represent other objects, actions, or ideas, e.g., using a cardboard tube as a telescope.

ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display and it's friendly and positive. This type of play can burn up a lot of energy.

SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY

When children act out experiences, e.g., playing house, going to the shops or going to a restaurant.

SOCIAL PLAY

Any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game or while making something together.

CREATIVE PLAY

Allows children to explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different items, altering something and making something new.

COMMUNICATION PLAY

Play using words, gestures, e.g., charades, telling jokes, play acting, etc.

DRAMATIC PLAY

Play where children figure out roles to play, assign them and then act them out.

LOCOMOTOR PLAY

Movement for movement's sake, just because it's fun. Things like chase, tag, hide and seek and tree climbing fall into this category.

DEEP PLAY

Play which allows the child to encounter risky experiences and conquer fears, like heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects, etc.

EXPLORATORY PLAY

Using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them. An example of this would be a baby mouthing an object.

FANTASY PLAY

This is the make-believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild, and they get to play out things that are that are unlikely to occur, like being a pilot or driving a car.

IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply, like imagining you are a bee or pretending you have wings.

MASTERY PLAY

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments, like digging holes or constructing shelters.

OBJECT PLAY

Play which uses sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements, like using a paintbrush.

ROLE PLAY

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intensely personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone.

RECAPITULATIVE PLAY

Play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness.