



Ravensdale Infant &
Nursery School



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Ravensdale Infant and Nursery School: OPAL Play Policy

Approved by

W. Blanchet
____ (Head Teacher) Date: __19.11.2025__

[Signature]
____ (Chair of Governors) Date: _____19.11.2025__

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1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play during school lunchtimes. 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. 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.

During 2024, our school invested in the Opal Primary Programme (Outdoor Play and Learning Programme) that aims to improve the quality of play for all children in schools, with a focus on inspiring and developing creativity, independence, active play and social and emotional wellbeing.

Our school values *Ready, Respectful and Engaged* are woven throughout all we do at school and will continue to be embedded during school lunchtimes. In addition, we allow children to be curious, to collaborate, to make creative choices and have the freedom to explore through play.

The OPAL Primary Programme rationale is that “... *better, more active and creative playtimes can mean happier and healthier children, resulting 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 a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value, is performed for no external goal or reward and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We believe play has many benefits:

- 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, the ability to make choices, to problem solve, to be creative, to innovate and develop imagination.
- Play encourages children to make discoveries using senses.
- Play encourages language development and enhances communication.

- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Play encourages children to assess and take risks, and to challenge themselves at their own pace.

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging, stimulating and unstructured 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, promoting teamwork.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings, play equipment, natural environment 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 enhance opportunities to learn about the world around them.
- Promote independence, build emotional and physical resilience.
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- Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment.
- Ensure adults respect these rights, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative justice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime.

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 take these rights seriously and listen to 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 (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.

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 and

assess acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. It aims to encourage children to manage risks for themselves and to consider others around them, developing an empathetic, caring and nurturing attitude towards others.

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.

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.

Ravensdale Infant and Nursery School has suitable ratios of adults to children at lunchtime to supervise both indoor eating times and outdoor play. We recognise 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.

AT Ravensdale Infant and Nursery School, we will adopt the 'Ranging' supervision model, where the lunchtime play supervisors (Play Team), will move around an identified zone throughout the lunchtime break. The play team including (school based staff) will be responsible for identifying any high-risk activity and will act on this as appropriate and as outlined in the risk benefit training and any internal CPD that staff will receive.

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 Play work 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 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.

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer, we aim to meet every child's needs and 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

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 refer to the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

A rich play setting support safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment. At Ravensdale Infant and Nursery School, we are passionate about using the outdoor environment as a learning and experimental place for our children.

We aim to develop our play provision and grounds, alongside our children to understand what play opportunities our children want, need and those that will be appropriate to support their play and ideas. This will include meetings/play assemblies with children, discussions with the school council, an open 'suggestions box'.