



# Timothy Hackworth Primary School

‘Respectful and resilient; being the best that we can be’



## OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Policy

CRC Article 29- All children have the right to be the best that they can be.

CRC Article 31- All children have the right to rest and play.



Date policy approved/adopted:	<b>January 2026</b>
Next review date:	<b>January 2027</b>
Approved by:	<b>Governing Body</b>
Head Teacher signature:	<i>L. Boulton</i>
OPAL Lead signature:	<i>S. Simpson-May</i>
Chair of Governors signature:	<i>P. Crook</i>



## 1. Commitment

CRC Article 31- All children have the right to play and rest.

This policy sets out Timothy Hackworth Primary School's commitment to the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme and provision across our school. Our school refers 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. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. In a time where outdoor play environments and opportunities are on the decline, the school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

OPAL Lead: Mrs. Sara Simpson-May

OPAL Working Party

OPAL Pupil Voice Group

## 2. Rationale

Children spend 20% of their primary school years on the playground. This is equivalent to 1.4 years of a child's attendance with us. As a school, we recognise how in recent years, childhood play has changed. This time, therefore, needs thoughtful planning and careful consideration and time is set aside for key staff, as Duty Bearers, to plan these outdoor opportunities.

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."*

Our rationale for implementing the OPAL programme is to ensure pupils have the opportunity to engage in the 16 types of play. Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life.

Recent research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

- ✓ increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- ✓ improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- ✓ give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- ✓ allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- ✓ promote their imagination, independence and creativity



- ✓ offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- ✓ provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- ✓ build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- ✓ provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community

Through our playtime provision and offer, our Timothy Hackworth School Vision is supported.



This reflects our school ethos, 'Respectful and resilient; being the best that we can be' and our School Statement of Intent, which embraces RRS.

As Rights Holders, our school believes that all children need and deserve a number of opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. Play is an essential part of a child's life and we believe that playtimes 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.

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

### 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 is 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.' (Play England, DCMS, 2024)

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 encourages the development of resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem- solving, and dealing with new and novel situations.
- Play is enjoyable and as Duty Bearers, planning these outdoor opportunities ensures children have their right to play and rest.

These benefits align with our school aims, vision and ethos and the importance of an inclusive environment that develops the whole child to ensure all Rights Holders are provided with a wealth of opportunities and are supported through curriculum developments and the wider enrichment offer.

OPAL provision is a focus within our School Development Plan (Personal Development and Wellbeing) as we aim to provide children with a greater range of play opportunities at breaktimes and lunchtimes and become an OPAL accredited school.



Feedback responses from surveys, questionnaires and conversations with Duty Bearers and Rights Holders evidence that a change in the development of our outdoor provision is very much needed and welcome.

Following the recent election of new OPAL Ambassadors (Pupil Voice Group) we are now revising our Play Charter.

## **NEW PLAY CHARTER PHOTO (once complete)**

### **4. Aims**

In relation to play, our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Ensure play settings capture children's interests through feedback from pupil voice and through observation on the playgrounds.
- 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. We encourage children to develop and sustain new friendships across the primary age range.
- 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. We encourage creativity.
- 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.

We would like our school, which reflects British Values, to be at the heart of the community, sharing, supporting and learning together with everyone as equals. We aim to develop the whole child- The Timothy Hackworth Child.

Aims linked to play:

- is an independent learner and decision maker
- is morally, spiritually and culturally aware
- has high expectations of themselves by endeavouring to be the best they can be
- co-operates and works as part of a team
- knows how to be physically and mentally healthy
- has a sense of wellbeing and can lead a safe fulfilling life

- demonstrates kindness, integrity, generosity and honesty
- knows how to develop and value positive relationships
- is tolerant, respectful and treats everyone equally
- is prepared for life in modern Britain and is able to contribute
- is adventurous, resilient and has a positive growth mindset
- knows and respect their rights and the rights of others
- demonstrates kindness, integrity, generosity and honesty

## 5. Rights

Children, staff and governors are very proud that our school has been reaccredited with the Gold Level Rights Respecting School Award. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child continues to be central to everything we do at Timothy Hackworth Primary School and our RRS aims, ethos and values underpin the life of our school.

As Rights Holders, all children have the right to play, relax, recreation and leisure (CRC Article 31) and the right to be listened to on matters important to them (Article 12). We acknowledge that, as Duty Bearers, all adults have a duty take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play. We encourage all children to have high expectations of themselves by endeavoring to be the best they can be. Children and young people know that their views are taken seriously and through high-quality learning experiences, take action to claim their rights and promote the rights of others, locally and globally. Pupil voice is used to drive and support improvements across school, including OPAL provision.

## 6. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer which meets 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. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child. Reasonable adaptations will be made to ensure play provision is accessible to all.

*Please also see our Equalities Policy Statement and Equalities Information and Objectives for further information.*

## 7. 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)*

Timothy Hackworth Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach' (September 2012) 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.'

We apply the R.A.P.I.D approach to risk.

We believe it is important for children to begin to identify risks so they can balance benefit and risk to develop their independence.

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.

*Please also see the HSE Managing Risk Statement- appendix 1.*

## **8. 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.

All stakeholders 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.

To manage the levels of risk, we will work to 'strike the right balance.'

We will follow the following guidelines:

- Recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals. We will weigh up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities. We will promote a balanced and proportional approach and manage risks with sensible judgements to supporting decision-making.

- Allow 'free flow' movement across the school site.
- All staff should self-assess and manage risk, e.g. red tape should be used to section off play areas or equipment which are deemed to be 'high risk.'
- Focusing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user.
- Ensure risks are identified and made as apparent as possible to staff and children through regular communication. We recognise that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity.
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed.
- Understand that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed.
- Provide staff with training to supervise the play settings.
- All staff are assigned a zone to supervise. It is expected the staff member will move around within the zone, engaging with children and supporting play.
- Ensure that the benefits of play are experienced to the full.

## **9. Duty Bearers: The adult's role in play**

The school will help children maximize 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 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 OPAL Lead and SLT support this commitment to play by providing CPD opportunities for staff and ensuring they have release time for careful planning of this provision.

*Playwork Principles apply to this. See Appendix 2.*

## **10. Communication between adults across the setting**

Identified staff will use walkie talkie devices to communicate during play provision times. These devices will be used to support effective movement at key points, e.g. transition to and from the lunch hall.

## **11. 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.

A rich play setting supports 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.

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.

<http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf>

- Our site manager completes a daily visual check of the school environment.
- Our OPAL working party and other members of staff will complete further checks for risks/dangers when outside with the children.
- Children will be made aware of possible risks and help to manage those by alerting staff to them.
- The outdoor area will be split into 'zones' to support management of the environment and supervision.

## **11. First Aid**

All first aid trained staff will carry a first aid bag, which contains basic First Aid equipment so first aid can be completed outside, where possible. Ice packs will be kept in the fridge.

Any head bumps must be reported to parents via a phone call home.

All first aid incidents should be recorded in the accident books kept within the first aid bags and the child given a slip to take home.

## **12. Clothing**

We advise that all staff and pupils come to school prepared for outdoor/all-weather play. During the colder and wet weather, wellies or walking boots may be worn by staff and children when walking on the school field. Children should also wear coats during cold weather.

Children need to be responsible for managing their outdoor clothing. This includes being prepared before they go outside to play.

In the summer months, children will need named sun cream and hats to protect themselves.

Part of outdoor play means children may get muddy. We will endeavour to reduce this as much as possible but free play means allowing children to explore the areas they like. A uniform is designed to give children a sense of belonging but also a way to protect their 'good' clothes they wear at home.

We will continue to communicate these changes to parents and carers.

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### CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks<sup>1</sup> and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

#### Recognising the benefits of play

*Key message: '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.'*

6. HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

<sup>1</sup> The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])



about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance *does not* mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

### **What parents and society should expect from play providers**

*Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.*

10. Play providers<sup>2</sup> should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

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<sup>2</sup> Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

### **If things go wrong**

*Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'*

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

**September 2012**



## Appendix 2: The Playwork Principles

