



Policy for OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning)

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Governor Responsibility:	Learning & Community Committee
Staff Responsibility:	Louisa Koschyk
Review Period:	Annual
Status:	Non-statutory
Reviewed:	Spring 2026
Next Review Date:	Spring 2027



Tetherdown OPAL play policy

1. Commitment

Our school will refer to this play policy in 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 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.

The OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) 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."*

This complements Tetherdown's values of Building Resilience, Igniting Imagination, Nurturing Kindness, Showing Respect, Embracing Inclusion and Firing Ambition. By embracing the OPAL programme, we create play opportunities that not only support the development of happier and healthier children by promoting physical, emotional and social growth, supporting their overall happiness, resilience and readiness to learn but we also allow them to feel the laughter and share the magic of exploration and creativity. These enriching experiences foster a sense of belonging, build meaningful connections, and help every child exceed expectations in their growth and learning journey.

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 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.

4. 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.
- Support children's understanding of sustainability by recycling materials and resources and repurposing them as play equipment.

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.

At Tetherdown, we believe that every child has the right to a safe, enjoyable, and enriching school experience, and we encourage all children to embody our school values in everything they do. By upholding the vision of "Be the best you can be" we aim for every child to experience fulfilling breaks and lunchtimes. Children have the right to feel secure and valued during play, and we recognise the importance of acknowledging their achievements and positive behaviour in these moments. This commitment supports our goal of fostering a school environment where play is celebrated and excellence shines in every aspect of their school day.

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 \(Play Safety Forum, 2012\)](#)

Tetherdown 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, Tetherdown 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, Tetherdown will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. This is in accordance with OPAL's five-part R.A.P.I.D. response to managing risk in school.

1. Risk-Benefit Assessment - the environment and practices are looked at annually and when significant changes take place. A written record of the inspections is kept and covers hazards deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury.



2. Assemblies - OPAL Play Assemblies are held regularly with children to discuss, inform and negotiate risks that arise during play. A brief written log is kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed. Regular assemblies will be delivered when new equipment is introduced into the school environment and to remind the children and staff of the Tetherdown values which relate to play.
3. OPAL Policy – This forms the basis for all staff understanding and decision making about managing risk in play. This includes formal adoption of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance.
4. Inspection - technical reports of engineered fixed play equipment. Fixed equipment has an annual inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections are carried out by a member of staff and a record is kept of any inspections or equipment that is found to be damaged and needs fixing.
5. Dynamic Risk Management - staff are aware of the changing nature of the play taking place. They support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they are also to be vigilant and act if they think that risk of serious level (as outlined in the behaviour policy) likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm whilst preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

See the [HSE Managing Risk Statement](#) for more information.

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. Tetherdown recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging.

- **Direct Supervision**

The supervisor is physically present and actively engaged with the child or group. There is constant visual and auditory monitoring of activities. Used in high-risk or structured settings Immediate intervention is possible if needed.

- **Remote Supervision**

The supervisor is not physically within the immediate play area but is observing from a distance. Periodic checks and verbal communication may be used to ensure safety. Common in low level -risk, enclosed, or familiar settings, Encourages independence while maintaining oversight.

- **Ranging Supervision**

The supervisor moves between different areas where children are playing. Used in larger spaces with multiple activities, like parks, adventure play areas, or schoolyards. Allows children to explore freely while ensuring they remain within safe boundaries.

Except for new children in Reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, Tetherdown believes that direct supervision is not beneficial, because allowing children some independence helps them explore, assess risks, and develop confidence during outdoor play. 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.

This approach recognises that excessive hovering or anxious over-attention can diminish the quality of children's play. The general assumption is that most play is not inherently dangerous and that, with time and practice, children can develop significant competence.

At the same time, staff remain alert and mindful of the types of play taking place, the resources being used, who is involved, and the potential risks. When it comes to intervention, staff should act if they believe serious harm—defined as death, life-long debilitating injury, or hospitalisation—is imminent or highly likely. If the risk of serious harm is possible but not probable, staff should



continue to monitor the situation. If the likelihood of serious harm is very low, attention should shift to enhancing the play experience or addressing other areas of need.

Dynamic risk assessment is an integral part of this process and has been introduced to all staff during training sessions. Weekly meetings with our play team reinforce the effective use of dynamic risk assessments in their daily supervision.

8. The adult's role in play

Tetherdown 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](#).

The Play Principles are:

1. **The Importance of Play:** Play is essential for all children and young people. It is an innate impulse and a biological, psychological and social necessity forming the foundation for healthy development and the wellbeing of individuals and communities.
2. **The Nature of Play:** Play is a freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated process. Children and young people independently determine and shape their play, guided by their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.
3. **Core Focus of Playwork** (facilitating place for children in an unstructured child-led environment): The primary role of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process. This principle should guide the development of play-related policies, strategies, training, and education.
4. **Advocacy for Play:** Playworkers prioritise the play process and advocate for its importance, even when engaging with adult-led agendas.
5. **Creating Play Spaces:** Playworkers are dedicated to supporting all children and young people in creating spaces where they can engage in play.
6. **Knowledge and Practice:** Playworkers' interactions with children and young people are informed by a solid, up-to-date understanding of the play process and a commitment to reflective practice.
7. **Mutual Impact:** Playworkers recognize the influence they have on the play environment and are equally mindful of how children's and young people's play affects them.
8. **Balancing Intervention:** Playworkers choose intervention styles that enhance and extend children's play. All interventions must carefully balance the risks with the developmental benefits and wellbeing of the children and young people.

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 term 'playworkers' below refers to all members of staff who have been trained to supervise play across the school. 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 can enrich 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.

Staff responsible for supervising play will receive regular training on the Playwork Principles, various types of play, and benefit-risk analysis. Online Playwork training can be found on <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>

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.



We aim to foster a community rooted in Tetherdown's values of Building Resilience, Igniting Imagination, Nurturing Kindness, Showing Respect, Embracing Inclusion and Firing Ambition. We are committed to nurturing the emotional, moral and intellectual growth of our children, ensuring they feel supported and encouraged to thrive.

We recognise that play comes in many forms and not all children developed this in a linear manner. Our staff understand that some children need and enjoy having time off from social interactions. Playtime is their "me time", where they recharge their energy to manage their next social interaction (i.e. next lesson).

Our core values of kindness, respect, resilience, and inclusivity guide everything we do. Our emphasis on care and collaboration extends to each other, our local community and the wider world. More information can be found here in our [Equality Information and Objectives.pdf](#) document.

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

We also ensure that careful consideration is made to respect our natural environment. Any decisions that are made regard the play spaces will include an assessment of the impacts on the children's safety, play and natural environment.

11. Outdoor Play in all weathers

We aim to ensure that outdoor play continues in a wide range of weather conditions, as long as this can be done safely and in line with appropriate risk assessments. Staff will carry out dynamic risk assessments before and during outdoor play to ensure that weather conditions do not pose a risk of harm to children.

Outdoor play may be adapted, limited or suspended in circumstances including, but not limited to:

- Icy or extremely cold conditions
- Strong or gusting winds
- Heavy rain, sleet or snow that significantly reduces visibility or makes surfaces unsafe
- Hail that could cause discomfort or injury
- Extreme heat where there is insufficient shade or shelter for the number of children outdoors

As a result, children will need to have and bring in suitable clothing, including waterproof jackets, wellies and spare clothing –we actively encourage all children to bring these items to school.