Play Policy

Sussex Road Primary School

Approved by:	**HT**	**Date:**	**September 2026**
Next review due:	**September 2027**		

Commitment

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

Sussex Road Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. Our play opportunities are in line with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Playwork Principles and the Play Safety Forum's publication: 'Managing Risk in a Play Provision.'

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As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. Play opportunities are evident throughout our curriculum, both in and out of the classroom, promoting our school vision of QUESTION-CHALLENGE-EXPLORE. These inclusive learning opportunities in play are achieved by offering a carefully considered environment for learning in which children demonstrate that they are ready, responsible and respectful. Sussex Road provides a range of spaces, equipment and resources throughout our school day that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child, promoting every child's natural curiosity to learn, question, challenge and explore.

Rationale

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At Sussex Road, children have the opportunity to play and explore through our taught curriculum time in class, but this only accounts for 80% of children's time at school. Children spend up to 20%, or 1.4 years, of their time in school at morning break and lunchtime. It is important that this 20% of time must be coherent and planned for in a way in which promotes and provides opportunities for children to continue to learn and develop effectively as confident, well-rounded individuals. Children will apply their taught personal, social, emotional and communication skills in context through independent play opportunities.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all are children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment. From July 2021, Sussex Road has been supported by the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Primary Programme to support the development of our play provision at morning break and lunchtime (Appendix A).

Definition and Value of Play

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as: *"Encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live."*

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This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

Sussex Road recognises that there are many different types of play (Appendix B) of which we will endeavour to provide as many opportunities as possible. A broad range of play opportunities is important so every child can develop a variety of skills and receive the maximum benefit from the play provided. Benefits of play may include:

- 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, 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.

Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL)

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."

Aims

In relation to play, Sussex Road aims to:

- Provide children with a play setting which is both stimulating and challenging.
- Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving.
- Encourage children to develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others.
- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Develop skills in self-assessing and managing risk.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide children with a range of environments which will support their learning across the curriculum and about the world around them.
- Promote self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

Inclusion

All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure adequate provision is provided.

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Clothing

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.

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Children will be responsible for managing their own outdoor clothing, this includes being prepared before they go outside to play. Children will be frequently reminded to ready themselves for outdoor play and they will have access to any outdoor clothing they have brought from home.

The Adults' Role in Play

We believe that it is the job of a Playleader to ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. For the purposes of this policy the term Playleaders refers to all members of staff undertaking playground supervision, including Teaching Assistants, and Teaching Staff. Playleaders ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. At Sussex Road School we will use the nationally recognised Playwork Principles as key guidance in the development of play staffing. (Appendix C)

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Benefit and Risk Management

'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)

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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'*.

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Sussex Road will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. They will be encouraged and supported to encounter and manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be rather than completely devoid of risk.

'All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury.'
Play England

Sussex Road will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach'* (September 2012 (Appendix D)) as the principle value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, Sussex Road will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *'Managing Risk in Play Provision': An Implementation Guide.* We will also follow OPAL's five-part R.A.P.I.D response to risk management (Appendix E).

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk-benefit assessments of play provision within the school should be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change or development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances takes place.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the guidelines below:

- Recognise the need for professional judgment in setting the balance between safety and goals.
- Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children.
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed.
- Provide staff with training to supervise play settings.
- All staff are responsible for ensuring that adults are in place before the children are allowed outside.

Remote Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During breaks in 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, 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. We therefore may not be able to see every child all of the time.

First Aid

There is an indoor first aid station, which contains basic First Aid equipment and all of the Playleaders have at least Emergency First Aid training. Any head bumps must be reported to parents via a First Aid slip which must be handed to the class teacher. All First Aid is recorded and followed up in accordance with the School's First Aid Policy.

All new activities which involve potential significant risk will be subject to individual or generic assessment as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate. The Playleaders will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led by the Playleaders. It is the responsibility of all staff to work within agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments. It is the responsibility of all staff to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are made safe, and reported, in line with the school's Health and Safety Policy, as soon as possible.

Appendix A


16 Play Types
Symbolic Play
Using objects, or actions to represent other objects, actions, or ideas, e.g. using a cardboard tube like a telescope.
Rough and Tumble Play
Discovering physical flexibility, generally friendly and positive.
Socio-Dramatic Play
When children act out experiences, e.g. playing house
Creative Play
Allows children to explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination.
Social Play
Any social situation where it's expected that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game
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
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.
Exploratory Play
using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them
Fantasy Play
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.
Deep Play
Play which allows the child to encounter risky experiences and conquer fear like heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies
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 intense nature, like brushing with a broom, dialing with a telephone..
Recapitulative Play
play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness.
Infographic created by www.encourageplay.com
Play Type information from Hughes, B. (2002) A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types, 2nd edition, London

Appendix B

1. UNDERSTAND NEED

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.

2. UNDERSTAND PROCESS

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. SUPPORT PROCESS

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. ADVOCATE FOR PLAY

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

5. CREATE SPACES

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. LEARN AND REFLECT

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

7. UNDERSTAND ADULT IMPACT

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

8. CHOOSE INTERVENTION STYLES

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 C

HSE

Health and Safety Executive

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[1] 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

[1] 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 Chargot (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[2] 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

[2] 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 D - R.A.P.I.D Response to Risk Management (OPAL)

We will also follow OPAL's five-part R.A.P.I.D response to risk management.

- Risk-benefit assessments – we will carry out risk-benefit assessments on all aspects of our play environment deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of death or serious injury.
- Assemblies – we will regularly discuss risks that arise during play with children and negotiate appropriate control measures with them. A brief written log will kept noting risks discussed and how they will be managed.
- Policy – this policy forms the basis for all staff understanding and decision making about managing risk in our play provision.
- Inspection – fixed play equipment and the condition of trees should have an annual inspection by a certified inspector. Ongoing visual inspections of the play environment will be carried out by members of staff and a record kept of any actions required and carried out.
- Dynamic risk management – supervising staff will be supported to use dynamic risk-benefit assessments, assessing risks as they emerge in play and using their professional judgement to make decisions.