Play Policy

DATE: **February 2023**

School Vision: Our real life learners are challenged and inspired in our safe, supportive and respectful school.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF, INSPIRE OTHERS

Introduction

Ongar Primary believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, experience and affect their environment. Play needs to be welcoming and accessible to all. We strive to provide and maintain a quality play provision for ALL our children. At Ongar Primary we believe that more active, creative play results in healthier, happier children. This in turn has a positive impact on readiness and behaviours for learning and social and communication skills.

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 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.

Benefits and Risk

Risk taking is an essential feature of our play provision. We provide children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating and challenging. We will strive to balance the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children. We will encourage them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. Providing them with skills for future life.

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 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 Playwork Principles. (Understanding needs and processes, support and advocate play, create space, have a positive impact on children's play) 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 adult'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. They are also available to participate in the play if invited. All adults will be first aid trained.

Equality and Diversity

The school will consider its obligations under the public sector diversity duties with our play provision. We will aim to provide opportunities for the different types of play.

Monitoring and review

Staff will regularly review this policy and provide feedback to the play coordinator or the play curricular lead.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if necessary.

Appendix (i)

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

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

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.

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