

# *St Edmund's Catholic Primary School*

## PLAY POLICY

**Policy Adopted: Spring 2024**

**Reviewed:**

**Review Date: Spring 2025**



### **1. Commitment**

Our school undertakes to refer 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.

## 2. Rationale

At St Edmunds Catholic Primary School, our goal is to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment for all our pupils. We are committed to providing high quality learning experiences for all pupils and this includes our play provision.

As a Catholic school, we recognise and value every individual as special and unique in the image and likeness of God. We feel it is important that our play opportunities prepare children for their future and builds on our key values of love, justice, hope, respect and forgiveness.

Children deal with conflict through play, build better relations and learn to be empathetic to others. They learn to forgive and be respectful through play. Play is also an opportunity for us to celebrate diversity and value all God's children with love, respect and dignity.

We believe that all children need the opportunity and access to play that allows them to explore, manipulate and experience their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child. We recognise the importance of the need for high quality sustainable play for children, regardless of their needs and abilities, and that inclusive play is achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play opportunities.

We follow the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme to ensure we can offer high quality play to all the pupils at our school. As an OPAL Play school, we share their vision: 'that every child in every school has an amazing hour of high-quality play every day.'

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."*

## 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.'

Play 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)
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

Children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play. This time is invaluable and needs clear planning. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, less areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play poverty' for today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

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

Our play takes place each day at lunchtimes and during this time all children have the opportunity to interact and play with peers of all ages. This encourages solid relations to be built with different aged children and allow them to socially connect with those they may not have previously. Our play opportunities are intrinsically child-led, which allow our children to have ownership of their play, not only can they be totally imaginative and creative in free flow play, but they also learn key skills of instigation and facilitation of play with others. Our play opportunities provide them with a stimulating but safe environment, where transferable skills such as taking risks, building resilience and making autonomous choices are acquired

- Ensure our 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.

At St Edmunds we worked in collaboration with the pupils, staff and community to create what we believe are the 10 characteristics of an effective learner. We believe that the 10 characteristics which are included within the handprint underpin everything that we do in our school and everything that we want our pupils to be.

Through play, these 10 characteristics can be organically learnt, observed, and practised regularly in a self-motivated way:

- Ambitious- taking risks, challenging yourself.
- Collaborative- working together, turn taking.
- Inquisitive- exploring, finding, discovering.
- Resilient- learning from mistakes, retrying, adapting.
- Respectful- listening to others, working together, sharing ideas, respecting others and the environment.
- Motivated- child led play, self motivation, focus.
- Independent- playing alone, independent challenge, time for quiet reflections and thoughts, peacefulness.
- Confident- being proud, trying again, challenging yourself.
- Resourceful- using different materials, objects and resources to create and adapt.



- Faithful- respecting others and the environment, doing what we feel is right and just.

## 5. Rights

The ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*** (UNCRC) is based on what children need to thrive. The Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. It also explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights.

Our accreditation as a Gold Rights Respecting School demonstrates the importance we place on supporting our children to understand the rights and responsibilities that they have as a member of our school community and as a global citizen in the wider world.

We are fully committed to these Rights and they are at the heart of everything that we do. This 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)

At St Edmunds, we 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 (See Appendix 1). In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

Our play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment.

An essential element of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely-chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to independently judge risks and learn new skills. Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk children's development is inhibited, which reduces their ability to deal with the wider unsupervised world.

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.

The school will offer regular whole school 'Play Assemblies'. During these assemblies we will discuss new or existing play opportunities/equipment on offer. Staff and pupils will have the opportunity to share ideas, pre-empt possible risks and risk assess together in a collaborative approach.

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily basis by the Play Team.

## 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. 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.

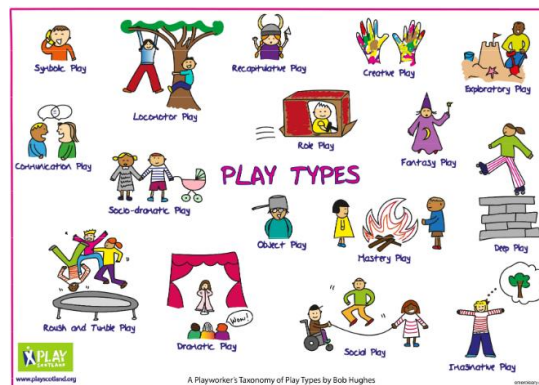
## 8. The adult's role in play

At St Edmunds we 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 (See Appendix 2). 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.

Our Play Team will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and make any changes to the play space if needed. They will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Through the observance of play and reflective practice, our Play Team will support, offer opportunities and facilitate the 16 Play types created by Bob Hughes (See Appendix 3).



## 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 believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child.

Article 31 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. At St Edmunds we acknowledge that every child has the right to choose the kind of play that is suitable for them whatever their age, gender or background.

We believe that equality at our school should permeate all aspects of school life and is the responsibility of every member of the school and wider community. Every member of the school community should feel safe, secure, valued and of equal worth..

## **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 recognise that our outdoor environment can be used as a natural resource for learning and playing. With careful planning, that involves the children, we can ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve and use their imagination and creativity. The natural world is a wellspring of inspiration for children's creativity and imagination. Whether it's building a fort with sticks and leaves or pretending to be explorers on a jungle expedition, outdoor play encourages unstructured, imaginative play. This imaginative freedom not only nurtures creativity, but it also enhances problem-solving skills as children find innovative ways to navigate challenges they encounter in their play scenarios.

Our children will be given the opportunity and responsibility to manage, play in and use the outdoor space we have on offer at St Edmunds. By empowering our children in this way they will learn to develop, value and respect the outdoor environment and care for living things as well as develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment. Spending time outdoors instils a deep appreciation for nature and promotes environmental stewardship. When children connect with the natural world, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility for the environment. This early awareness can lead to a lifelong commitment to sustainability and conservation.

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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)

## **11. Monitoring**

The school will use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor the implementation of its play policy, strategy and action plan. An annual report should be presented to governors.

This policy will initially be reviewed by the OPAL Curriculum Lead every year.

***Appendix 1- H&SE Managing Risk Statement***

***Appendix 2- copy of the Playwork Principles***

***Appendix 3- Play Types Poster -Bob Hughes***