



Play Policy

St Edmund's Catholic Primary School

To be reviewed in:

May 2026

Federation Mission Statement:

Learning Together in God's Love by
encouraging and supporting one another

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:

- 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

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

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 risks¹ 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

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 providers² 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

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.

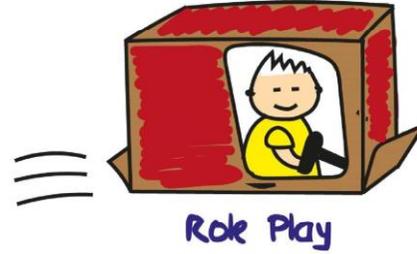
If things go wrong

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



PLAY TYPES

