



Opal Play Policy

Date	Review Date	Coordinator	Governor
September 2025	September 2026	Elise Liggins	Pat Gardner

Date Approved by Governors	Review Date	Policy Status	Signed by Chair of Governors
November 2025	September 2026		

Date Approved by LAC	Review Date	Policy Status	Signed by Chair of Directors
	September 2026		

Commitment

St Patrick's undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. St Patrick's is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children. Our school recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school we aim to provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. St Patrick's believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing, as well as creating children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks as they occur.

Rationale

St Patrick's believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe that these opportunities for play form an intrinsic part of our vision: creating broad and rich learning experience that enables children to develop a sense of curiosity and imagination, resulting in a lifetime love for learning. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

Children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play, therefore this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, improved technology, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children.

We believe that better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school



and improved skills development and learning. 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 of our children.

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."*

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.

We surveyed the children and parents in January 2024 for their views on play time, they highlight the activities they like but also the need for improvement. Many were positive about their play times, but many comments included 'More things to play with, like dolls or toys', 'A sandpit or some slides' and 'Areas with specific activities set up in them.'

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'.*

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.

Aims

In relation to play St Patricks aims to meet 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).

At St Patrick's staff are committed 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.

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.

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)



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. Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

As outlined in the play sector publication *'Play matters'*, 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'*.

'Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children's development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world'. (DCFS)

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 Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that: *'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 dangers'*. (HSE, 2013) St Patrick's will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding document in making decisions relating to risk and play. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and will practice dynamic risk management (Appendix 2) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs. This approach will encourage the children to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

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 adult's 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. As ever, adults will wear yellow, to be clearly visible during play and lunch times.



The adult's role in play

We as a staff are committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. 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 Play work Principles. 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.

We will have a continuous dialogue with children about the play provision and new equipment outside through regular play assemblies, school and sports council work, surveys and pupil voice. The adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at St Patrick's.

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.

The Children's role in play

The children will all have an input and access to their own version of the play policy/Child charter (Appendix) that they will have ownership over. In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to:

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences.
- Respect and look after each other, their environment and equipment.
- To take responsibility of their actions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour.
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody.

The children's charter will be shared and explained to all the children regularly as part of ongoing play assemblies, discussions and through the sports and school council.

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.



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 continue to improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play.

At St Patrick's we will:

- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors.
- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value nature.
- Expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.
- Promote children's love, pride and enjoyment of the outdoors, a key foundation for caring for the environment.
- Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure that they take an active part in doing this.
- Ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks, explore and use their imagination and creativity.
- Give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom offered by the outdoors.
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximise the variety of play types and increase play value.
- Help children develop confidence in team building and advocating their own rates. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what quality play environment should contain.
- Ensure that the place space is an integrated area where all children from Nursery to Year 6 can play safely.



Appendices

Appendix 1 – Health and Safety' Executive's Guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure.

Children's play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach:

[Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/childrensplay/)

Appendix 2 -Benefit Risk Assessment Record Sheet.

Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Risk Assessment Date.....

Assessed by.....

	Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or Utility Or Related Policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action Date

Appendix 3 -Structure of Adult Roles

OPAL Team

Head of School – Danielle Kingham

Play Co-ordinator – Elise Liggins

Play Leader – Jade Connelly

Governor – Pat Gardner

Parent – Amy Taylor

Facilities Site Officer – Taylor Moranis

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes all staff should act as Play Makers.

However, more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

Play Co-ordinator (Leads and manages strategy)

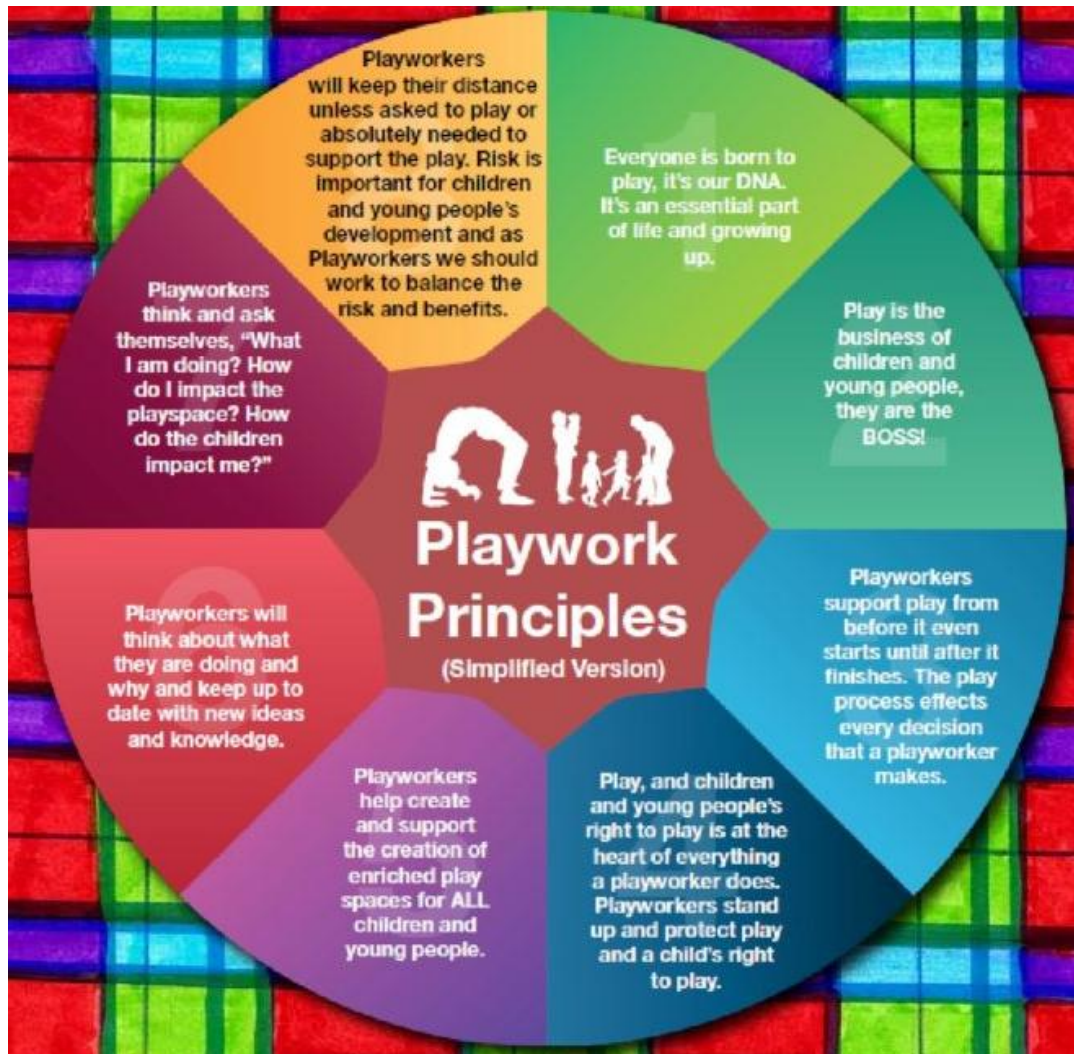
Play Leader (Leads and manages playtimes)

Assistant Play Leader (Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)

Play Makers (Support children's play as described in adult's role in play)



Appendix 4 -Play work Principles



Appendix 5 -St Patrick's Children's play charter.



St Patrick's Catholic Primary School

With Jesus we love, grow and succeed



Our Play Charter

The UN convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31 makes it a legal obligation for state parties to enact the UN convention. All children and young people have the right to play and need to play; free to choose what they do – lively or relaxed, noisy or quiet – with the chance to stretch and challenge themselves, take risks and enjoy freedom. The right to play is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A charter is our promise to you about how we will meet our legal and moral obligations to respect your rights.

***We have the right to play.
We choose OPAL.***

We have the responsibility to make sure everyone enjoys playtime by making sure:

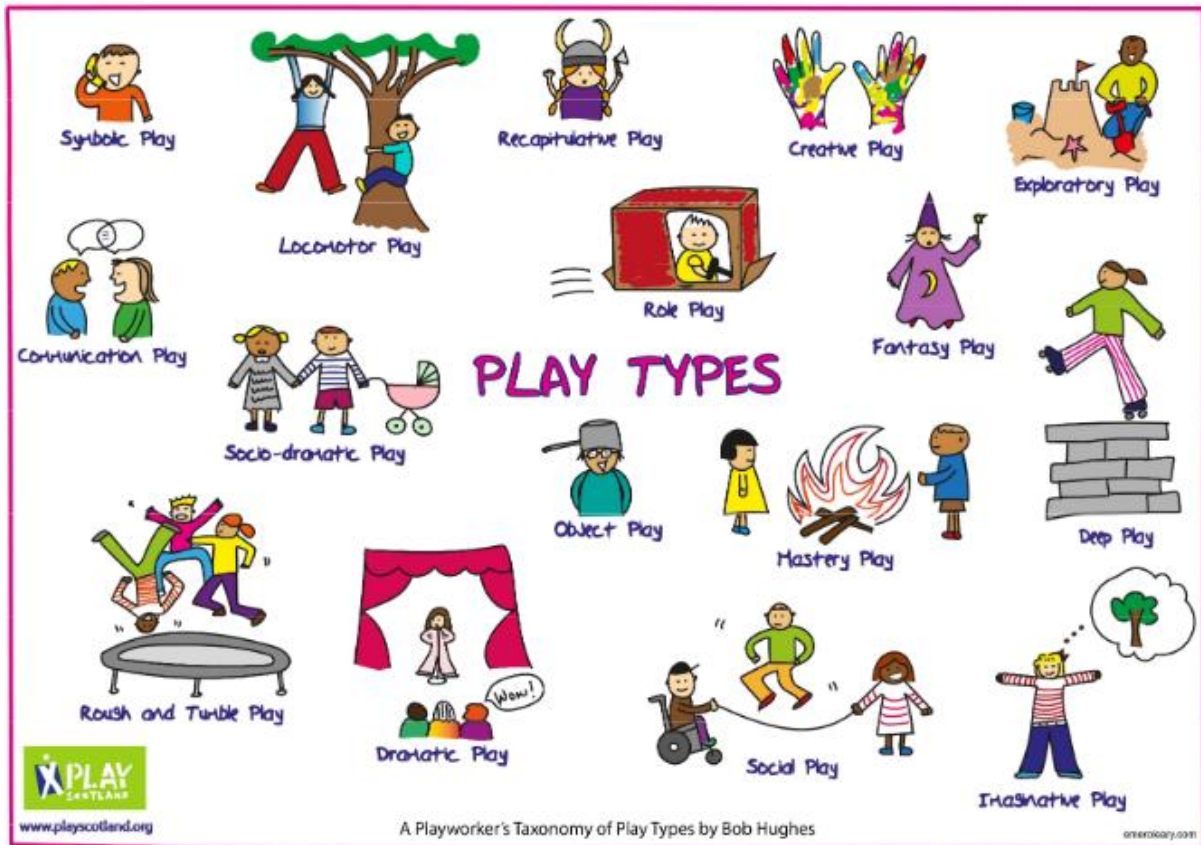
- Everyone has a choice in play
- We share equipment fairly and kindly
 - We take care of our equipment
 - We learn through our play
 - We keep everybody safe
- We ask grown ups OPAL questions
 - We help others if they need us
 - We build friendships and dens
- We ask grownups if we need help to sort out our problems
 - We listen to one and another
 - We manage our own risk

***At St Patrick's we are Ready, Respectful and Safe.
In OPAL we are Ready, Respectful and Safe Enough.***





Appendix 6 -Play Types



Appendix 7 -Best Play – What play provision should do for children.

[BEST PLAY BOOK \(freeplaynetwork.org.uk\)](http://freeplaynetwork.org.uk)