

St Marie's Catholic Primary School

Outdoor Play and Learning Policy (OPAL)



'The Love of Christ, nurture, guide and inspire us.'

Approving Body	Full Governors Committee Head/Leadership team	Review Term: 1yr/2yr/3yr Autumn Spring Summer
Signature:	Chair of the relevant body	March 24
Review Date:		Version: (applicable if changed within the review period, if no changes this would remain as version 1)

Mission Statement

The love of Christ, nurture, guide and inspire us

To do this we will:

- Be a Christian community that lives the Gospel values; 'Love of Christ' (Christ centred)
- Provide opportunities for all to grow and achieve by igniting a desire for learning; 'Guide and inspire' (Education)
- Be a haven of peace and love that enables all to thrive; 'Nurture' (Community)

Objectives: Christ Centred

- Provide high quality collective worship and enriching liturgical celebrations
- Enable our children to acquire an excellent religious education and develop their relationship with God
- Share faith, love and hope in the likeness of Mary, Mother of God
- Provide a safe harbour where all can succeed

Objectives: Education

- Have high expectations of ourselves and others in all that we do
- Value our pupils and staff, appreciating their uniqueness and individual talents, enabling them to achieve well
- Provide a curriculum that opens the world, in all its awe and wonder, to our pupils

Objectives: Community

- Create a peaceful, happy school where all feel welcomed and valued
- Nurture and grow our pupils and community in the Gospel values
- Celebrate each person as a beautiful work of art, created on God's image

St Marie's Key Objectives and Priorities 2023-24

Key Objectives and Priorities	Success Criteria
<p><i>Christ at the Centre</i></p> <p>1. Priority: Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Ensure that staff and pupils are clear on whole school expectations, routines and behaviours ✚ Pedagogy, policies and procedures are shared and implemented with fidelity ✚ Relationships across the school community become strong ✚ Staff seek every opportunity to promote learning within and beyond the school day ✚ Pupils and staff have the tools needed to ensure resilience in their learning and wider lives
<p>2. Priority: Aspiration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ School has unapologetically high aspiration for our children through a fully understood, common pedagogy ✚ All children can access a low floor-high ceiling, fully resourced, holistic curriculum that meets our high aspirations which staff are equipped to deliver ✚ Percentage of children at greater depth standards is rapidly closing the gap with national
<p>3. Priority: Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ The staff structure, skills and knowledge meet the needs of the school ✚ 'The curriculum' is fully resourced and meets the needs of our children with effective schemes of work, curriculum knowledge and skills progression maps ✚ All staff receive high quality assured CPD that improves learning for all pupils
<p>4. Priority: Community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Parents are well equipped to support children learning in school and at home ✚ Families are well supported to meet our aspirations for our children, i.e. through uniform and attendance ✚ Our community is well involved in school life, e.g. Parent Council, FAF group etc
<p>5. Priority: Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ The school building and grounds are a safe place to work and play ✚ The buildings and classrooms promote our high aspirations

Rationale

St Marie's Catholic Primary School recognises 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 firmly believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development.

Commitment

St Marie's Catholic Primary School is committed to using this Play Policy as a key document in all decisions it makes which have an impact on children's play. At St Marie's, we are committed to helping children become **safe, reliable, successful and independent problem-solving** citizens whom reflect our school's vision and values. We believe play has a vital role in children's happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. We want to ensure every child is making appropriate progress in line with school achievement aims. We aim to give our children confidence and a desire to achieve their full potential.

We aim to:

- Implement the changes set out in this policy on a gradual and systematic basis.
- Be informed by the children and work with the children to create a space that is exciting, engaging and enthuses children, where they feel safe to take risks and explore their world.
- Work in partnership with parents and the community making use of local expertise
- Build projects collaboratively, respecting existing boundaries.

Background

Research suggests that children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play. This time is invaluable and requires clear structure. 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.

Better play leads to happier children and in turn less behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, skills development, fewer accidents and more effective learning in the classroom as less staff time is spent resolving issues.

Play England drew up The Charter for Children's Play which sets out a vision for play and states that:

- Children need time and space to play at school
- Adults should let children play
- Children value and benefit from staffed play provision
- Children's play is enriched by skilled play-workers
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

St Marie's Catholic Primary School fully recognises its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime while they are at our school.

Links to 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. 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.

Research also suggests that "the learning outcomes from play are enhanced when play is 'properly directed' by adults."

The other area of focus for the impact of play and playwork on education and learning is the role of play at school break periods and the impact on children's behaviour and learning in class. One of the current concerns voiced is that children's opportunities for imaginative play and its educational benefits are being limited because of the demands of the school curriculum threatening to make school playtimes shorter.

As a result of implementing this policy we believe that children will:

- be happier
- increase self-awareness and self-esteem
- improve language and communication skills
- improve concentration
- improve their imagination, independence and creativity
- improve social skills
- be resilient, confident, good problem solver
- be ready for anything as a result of negotiation and independence of thought
- be better at problem solving
- develop life skills such as confidence and resilience.
- improve their physical development, co-ordination and overall level of fitness.

What is 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 recognised as any activity that a child enters into that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated and that actively engages the child.

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).

At St Marie's Catholic Primary School, we recognise that **great** play involves:

- Children being creative and cooperative
- The adult being responsive to children's invitations and requests
- It may be solitary or social
- It invites investigation
- It makes children happy and happy children are better learners

Rights, Equality and Access

Article 31 of the United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' states that children *have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities*. St Marie's Catholic Primary School acknowledges that every child has the right to choose the kind of play that is suitable for them whatever their age, gender or background.

Health, Safety, Benefit and Risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. Therefore, play provision should aim to successfully manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm.

Research shows that the uncertainty and challenge of much of children's play is a very large part of its appeal to them, and that it also enhances the development of their brains and bodies, making them more adaptable and resilient as they grow. 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.

Children should 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.

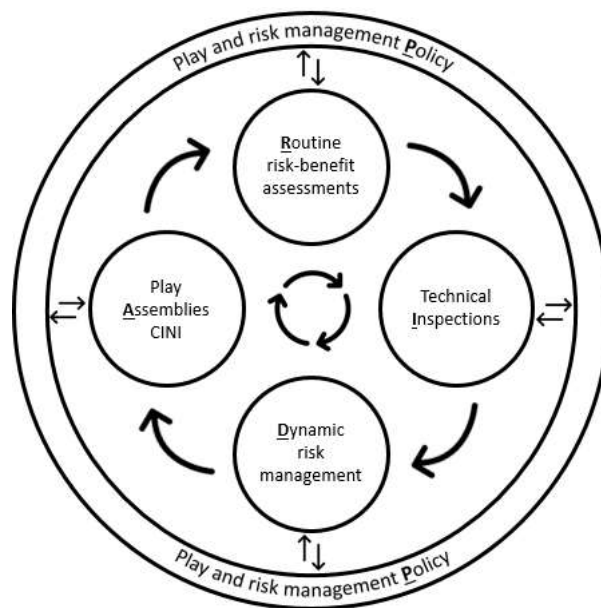
Managing Risk in Play Provision

'Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to

manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury'

An essential element of exploration within the medium 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, undermining their capacity to deal with the wider unsupervised world.'



The Adults' Role in Play

We believe that it is the job of a Play Worker (or Teaching Assistant assuming the role of a Play Worker) is 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. Play-workers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. At St Marie's Catholic Primary School we will use the nationally recognised Play-work Principles as key guidance in the development of play staffing.

Environment

At St Marie's Catholic Primary School, we will:

- Utilise the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing
- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- Ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve, use their imagination and creativity;
- Encourage the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things; and

- Give children the opportunity to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors.
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value

St Marie's Catholic Primary School has entered into an agreement with OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision.

We will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation and recreation of the play space by the children. Our ultimate aim is to have an integrated playground from reception to Year 6. In order to do this we may have to landscape the playground but will provide plenty of open ended materials for play opportunities.

Loose Parts

Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The vital ingredients for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves.

Monitoring

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

Health and Safety

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis. These checks will be kept on file in the office.

Risk-benefit assessments for areas, equipment and activities will be held on file in the office for inspection.

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 Teaching/Mid-Day assistants alongside the site manager 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 play-workers/Teaching Assistants.

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 the OPAL Lead member on duty to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Senior Staff member as soon as possible.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Next review: September, 2024

APPENDIX

Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide play-workers, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

- 1 **Symbolic Play** – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth eg using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.
- 2 **Rough and Tumble Play** – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.
- 3 **Socio-dramatic Play** – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.
- 4 **Social Play** – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended eg any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols ie games, conversations, making something together.
- 5 **Creative Play** – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell eg enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self expression through any medium, making things, changing things.
- 6 **Communication Play** – play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles / emails/ internet, skipping games, group and ball games.
- 7 **Dramatic Play** – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator eg presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.
- 8 **Locomotor Play** – movement in any or every direction for its own sake eg chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.
- 9 **Deep Play** – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear eg light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies. Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc eg leaping

onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.

- 10 **Exploratory Play** – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects eg engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.
- 11 **Fantasy Play** – This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur eg playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be where ever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be the list is endless as is a child's imagination.
- 12 **Imaginative Play** – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply eg imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.
- 13 **Mastery Play** – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments eg digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.
- 14 **Object Play** – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements eg examination and novel use of any object eg cloth, paintbrush, cup.
- 15 **Role Play** – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.
- 16 **Recapitulative Play** – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.