Play Policy

Hayward's Primary School

Written by:	Based on OPAL model policy and work with Kate Smith (OPAL Mentor) – October 2024	**Signed:**
Approved by Governors:	6th October 2026	
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3.1 TEMPLATE OPAL play policy

1. Commitment

Hayward's School undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Hayward's 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

Hayward's School believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

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."*

At Hayward's we recognise that there are almost seven hours of play scheduled within the school timetable each week and we want to make this experience as rich as possible for the children. We want them to develop and refine important skills while at the same time having the opportunity to 'play' in a manner that they may not experience in any other setting.

3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed 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 enables children to further develop our Hayward's Hero values of Honesty, Focus, Respect, Maturity and Perseverance in a range of situations.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Supporting children to develop the skills within our school values - 'We want our children to be resilient and happy about who they are; understand and appreciate difference while having the confidence to challenge prejudice where it exists; have high aspirations in order to achieve their maximum potential; share a love of learning; and enjoy strong, supportive relationships with others.'

4. Aims

In relation to play Hayward's School aims 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.
- Teach children to dynamically risk assess with increasing confidence and skill
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other and to explore interests with people who may not have been their friends elsewhere.
- 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.
- Reduce cognitive load and support children to return to the classroom more effectively.

5. Rights

Hayward's 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.

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)

The school 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. 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).*

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. 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.

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.

At Hayward's we will be employing the 'Ranging' model of supervision. Members of staff will be responsible for selected zones on the playground and will move dynamically across these zones in order to support children.

8. The adult's role in play

Hayward's 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. 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. Playworkers should not, however, try to interpret the play of a child and summarise what they think is happening within the play. Play is a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.

At Hayward's we recognise and are following the eight 'Playwork Principles':

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker interventions must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

9. Equality and diversity

One of the key aims of Hayward's Primary School is to enable all pupils to take part as fully as possible in every part of school life by developing each child's self-confidence, recognising their strengths and encouraging them to achieve their full potential.

Hayward's Primary School will take steps to advance equality of opportunity, foster good relations and eliminate discrimination or harassment across all the protected characteristics (age, race, gender reassignment, disability, marriage and civil partnership, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, gender, sexual orientation) within the school community.

We expect all children, staff and visitors to actively promote these aims and values.

Through providing a rich play offer which meets the needs of every child 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.

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 will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of Hayward's 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

We believe strongly that a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

APPENDIX ONE
ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES

Curricular lead for play

The curricular lead for play is responsible for driving all play-related initiatives forward within the school. In one form entry schools, they will be in SLT or an experienced teacher. In two form or above, they will be in SLT. This post requires one hour a week during the first year of the OPAL Primary Programme and one hour a fortnight after that.

The curricular lead for play is the person who has responsibility for the school's play action plan and the inclusion of play in the school improvement plan.

The curricular lead for play will report to:

- SLT
- Governors
- PTA

What the role entails:

- Evaluating and monitoring play within the school.
- Being responsible for, supporting and managing the play team and their professional development.
- Managing the play coordinator and their professional development.
- Reviewing and updating the school's play action plan at least three times a year.
- Working closely with the play coordinator to deliver the school's play action plan.
- Carrying out observations of playtimes once every half term.
- Liaising with service support and/or the business manager regarding the maintenance and improvements of the outside area.
- Liaising with the play coordinator and the play team regarding the ordering and replenishing of loose parts and resources for play.
- Work with the play coordinator to ensure regular play team meetings are held to train in playwork practice and improve play at the school.
- Incorporating pupil voice for play into the school's communications plan
- Liaising with the play coordinator to ensure regular play assemblies are conducted using OPAL's CINI format.

Play coordinator

Purpose
The play coordinator will support and facilitate meaningful and productive child-initiated play during the school day in accordance with the play policy.

Line management:
The post holder is responsible to the headteacher and outdoor learning leader for fulfilling the duties set out in this job description.

Statutory requirements:
The post holder will have a responsibility to promote and safeguard the safety and welfare of children in accordance with the schools' child protection and behaviour management policy.

Responsibilities
Ensure wellbeing of pupils – alongside other playground assistants

- Supervise pupils in designated areas of the school (including playground or external spaces) during the lunchtime/break times and to ensure their safety, welfare and general conduct through appropriate application of the school's policies and procedures.
- Work with the Headteacher to establish safe and proper behaviour, by appropriate intervention or referral to senior staff.
- Complete any relevant documentation required by the school in relation to incidents occurring during the lunchtime break period and to participate in review/medical meetings, as required.
- Be aware of any special medical conditions
- Take any immediate action to attend to sickness or accidents by carrying out minor first aid and summoning relevant assistance.
- Report any accidents or bumped heads in line with the school's first aid policy.

Ensure a diverse range of playable resources is provided for, and is accessible to all children

- Ensure resources are stored appropriately.
- Check the quality and condition of resources and repair or remove any resources that are not in a suitable condition for continued use.

Discuss resources with the children (school council) and use their views to create development plans

- Organise and carry out the replenishment of resources through:
  Securing funding from internal or external sources.
  Purchasing resources as required.
  Coordinating appeals within school and local communities for resources.
  Collecting resources from sources such as the scrapstore.

Provide support and training for other school staff or pupils as required

- Support the Headteacher and Curricular Lead for play in building playworker expertise and practice within the play team.
- Alongside the PE Lead, facilitate peer-led play opportunities.
- Provide suggestions for playmaker activities and games.

Ensure enriching play events or opportunities are created

- Discuss and plan with pupils/staff and school council alongside the Headteacher.
- Implement planned activities.
- Review activities to promote self-evaluation and play development.

Create opportunities for play to support the social and behavioural development of pupils

- Ensure a rich and varied set of play opportunities is available for all children to engage in.
- Provide engaging playwork interventions where pupils who find positive behaviour choices challenging.

Parent Play Champion Role

The parent play champions will:

- Observe and assess playtime within the school at least once a year.
- Sit on the OPAL working party and attend development meetings.
- Support other parents to understand the school's approach to play.
- Advocate OPAL's approach and for children's play within the PTA and school community.
- Share contributions and ideas from parents and the wider community.
- Support the ongoing resourcing of loose parts from parents and the wider community.

Governor Play Champion

Governor responsible for play at the school will be required to:

- Observe play within the school and collect feedback from pupils and staff regarding the impact of the approach.
- Help to make improvements to play in the school as part of the OPAL team.
- Attend play team meetings once a term.
- Report to and share with governors what has been observed and how play has been developed within the school.
- Share contributions and ideas from the wider community.
- TO ensure that the school's strategic priorities relating to play are being fulfilled.

APPENDIX TWO

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

[1] 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 Chargot (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 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

[2] Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holida playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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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