

Staffordshire University Academies Trust		Trust Policy Document			
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Audience:	Trustees R Public R	Staff R	Local Academy Council R	Parents R	General



Staffordshire University Academies Trust Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

Commitment

Charnwood Primary Academy undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions which 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.

Rationale

Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school during playtime. This time is valuable and needs careful planning. Changes in culture and society have led to 'play poverty' in childhood which has numerous negative impacts. Better play means happier children. Happier children means fewer unexpected behaviours, a more positive attitude to school, core skills development, fewer accidents and happier staff.

We believe that play has a vital role in children's happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to self-assess risks.

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.

We believe that better play fits in with all of Charnwood's key values:

Respect – Play encourages children to respect themselves, others, and their environment. Through play, children learn to cooperate, share, and appreciate diversity in their peers' ideas and actions. Outdoor play also fosters respect for nature, as children engage with their surroundings in meaningful ways.

Independence – We promote child-led play, where children make their own choices and solve problems independently. By giving them freedom in their play, OPAL helps them develop confidence, resilience, and the ability to navigate challenges without constant adult intervention.

Dedication – Play requires commitment and perseverance, whether mastering a new skill, building a structure, or creating imaginative games. We support children in staying engaged with their play, encouraging them to see tasks through, develop resilience, and take pride in their achievements.

Integrity – Through play, children learn honesty, fairness, and responsibility. OPAL provides opportunities for children to develop moral reasoning, understand rules, and experience natural consequences in a safe and supportive environment, reinforcing ethical behaviour and trustworthiness.

Links to learning

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.

Definition

Play England's Charter for Children's Play describes play as: 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.'

Good play provision can:

- Increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- Improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- Give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- Allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- Promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- Offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- Provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- Build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- Provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

At Charnwood, 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

Aims

In relation to play our 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.
- 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 which will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments which 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

Charnwood 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 take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

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 environment. Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm. Exposure to some degree of risk gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequences in a controlled environment.

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. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments.

All Weather Play

In order to allow for access to the whole grounds throughout the year; both pupils and staff are expected to have suitable warm and waterproof clothing in school at all times, including boots. In extreme weather, however, such as torrential rain, icy conditions or intense sun, the decision will be made by the Play Team as to whether to limit or curtail play activities if it is felt that by not doing so the children will be at significant risk.

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 recognizes OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

The Adults' Role in Play

The school will help children maximize 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 which nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment which 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.

Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable/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 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.

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 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

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 Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

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 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

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

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

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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