



## South Gosforth First School

*'Roots to grow and wings to fly'*

### Play Policy ('OPAL')

	<b>Staff</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read it</li><li>• Chance for feedback</li></ul>	<b>FGB Approval</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approved</li></ul>	<b>Accessible</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website link saved</li></ul>
<b>Review Date:</b>	<b>March 2025</b>	<b>March 2025</b>	<b>March 2025</b>
<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<b>March 2026</b>		

#### 1. Commitment




Our school refers 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

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31 (*the right to play, recreation and leisure*) and Article 12 (*the right of children to be listened to on matters important to them*), and supports the child's right to play. 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. This aligns with our 'No Outsiders' ethos of 'All different, all welcome' and our South Gosforth Core Values, which are embedded into our policies and practice.



*The South Gosforth Core Values are:*

 <b>Kindness</b>	We are friendly, caring and helpful to everyone – 'We rise and grow by lifting others' <i>We are caring, gentle and helpful in our play.</i>
 <b>Empathy</b>	We try our best to understand how other people might be feeling <i>We try to understand how our friends would like to play.</i>
 <b>Respect</b>	We value and appreciate everyone, even if they are different to us. <i>We respect each other's differences when we play.</i>
 <b>Responsibility</b>	We take responsibility for our own actions and we take pride in doing things for ourselves <i>We take responsibility for our play and take pride in looking after our equipment.</i>
 <b>Perseverance</b>	We always try our best and keep going, even when things become difficult. <i>We show resilience in our play even when things don't go the way we intended or expected.</i>

The OPAL 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**

At South Gosforth First School we define play as activities which enable children to have fun, explore the world around them, develop their individuality and a sense of self and community. Play can be individual, social, active, restorative, organised, spontaneous but ultimately enriching for all involved.

We believe:

- 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, different concepts and different ideas.
- Play can enhance 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.



- Purposeful social 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 can enable 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 can instil a sense self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play can maintain children's openness to learning and allow them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Play can help to develop a love for the outdoors and a respect for the natural environment that we live in.

#### 4. Aims

At South Gosforth First School our play aims are based around our 4 key curriculum drivers:



Character – What type of people we are?

We believe that we can develop our sense of who we are through different types of play and build our emotional and physical resilience.



Culture – How we learn about the world and all of the people who live in it.

We believe that play can provide a range of environments which will support children's learning about people and the world around them.



Creativity – How we use our imagination

We believe that play can provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.



Challenge – How we make ourselves better everyday.

We believe that play settings should provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment to allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.



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

At South Gosforth First School we gather the voices of our pupils in a range of ways. This includes pupil questionnaires, meeting regularly with our school council as well as involving all of our children in decisions around play as part of our Opal journey.

## 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 (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 principle 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*.

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. In the words of 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 play leaders will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

At SGFS we have recognised that our children would benefit from more opportunities to develop their independence, self-management skills and problem solving to enable them to become resourceful and resilient young people when they continue their school journey to middle school.

South Gosforth First School will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.



## 7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. The school recognizes OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. At South Gosforth we will utilise all 3 types of supervision depending the zones available to the children at that time. At all playtimes, children will be able to quickly find an adult and play leaders will continually assess the kinds of play and the levels of associated risks that are emerging.

- Direct – this is where our play leaders will be able to see all areas of play, and be close at hand.
- Remote – this is where our play leaders are located at a relatively static location some distance from an activity.
- Ranging – this is where our play leaders move around the play area. Our play leaders have allocated zones so that they know which parts of the site they are covering, and they should modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk.

There will be sufficient numbers of adults in different areas so that they can respond rapidly to an accident or serious behaviour incident.

## 8. The adult's role in play

At South Gosforth First School we facilitate opportunities for play which are in line with the eight Playwork Principles (see appendix 2). Our play leaders will be skilled in enabling effective and purposeful environments that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. Whilst we recognise and acknowledge the importance of children leading their own play, play leaders ensure that this is done safely in line with our risk and benefits assessments.

In order to keep play opportunities diverse and stimulating, play leaders will regularly review and adapt play zones, informed through observations and feedback from our pupils.

## 9. Child's role in play

The children at South Gosforth have the rights and responsibilities of:

- Having ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences
- Respecting and looking after each other their environment, equipment and toys.
- Being aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensuring that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and with School Council.



## 10. Equality and diversity

**At South Gosforth First School the protected groups are:**

- Children with disabilities and specific health problems or medical issues.
- Children with special educational needs.
- Children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Children with different religious beliefs or faiths.
- Differences between boys and girls.
- Children who are eligible for Pupil Premium or have previously received free school meals.
- Looked after children or previously-looked after children.
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.
- Families from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Any vulnerable groups (the term vulnerable groups is used to refer to all children who are at risk of underachieving).

In line with our equality information objectives and accessibility policy we ensure all groups of children have equitable access to play opportunities in an inclusive environment.

## 11. Environment

At South Gosforth First School we will:

- provide a safe play environment as referenced in our Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play
- take into consideration pupil voice when planning play zones
- ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things
- give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors
- ensure that the playground be an integrated area where all children from reception to Year 4 can play safely.
- teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
- We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/best-play/>

## APPENDIX 1

**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<sup>1</sup> 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*

---

<sup>1</sup> 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])



*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
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<sup>2</sup> 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

*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.

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.



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**