



Hatch Warren Junior School Play Policy 2026-2028

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OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) is an award-winning, mentor-supported school improvement programme that helps schools strategically and sustainably enhance the quality of children's playtimes.

1. Commitment

Hatch Warren Junior School undertakes to refer 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. This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if deemed necessary.

2. Rationale

Our 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.*"

This aligns with our school values:

Inspire - Active and creative playtimes inspire children to explore, imagine and try new things.

Believe - Feeling happy and healthy helps children believe in themselves and their abilities.

Persevere - Play that encourages teamwork and problem-solving helps children persevere when things are tricky.

Achieve - When children return to class calm and positive, they learn more effectively and achieve their best.

3. Definition and value of play

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:

- 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.

4. Aims

In relation to play, our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Allow children to take managed 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.

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 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 in 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 practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Please see Appendix 3 (attached pdf) for the HSE Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach.

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. 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. All adults will wear hi-vis jackets so that they can be easily identified by all children using the site.

All staff on duty during playtimes and our wraparound provision are part of the Play Team and are primarily responsible for facilitating play and managing risk dynamically. They will:

- Apply the R.A.P.I.D. approach in real-time, intervening only in cases of imminent and serious harm, and encouraging children to assess and manage risks themselves. **(See Appendix 1 for more information about the R.A.P.I.D. approach).**
- Adopt a 'remote and ranging' supervision style, intervening to support and enhance play rather than to control it, in line with the Playwork Principles **(see Appendix 2 for more information about the Playwork Principles).**
- Undertake daily visual checks of their assigned play zone and its resources, removing any 'unreasonable/bad hazards' before play begins.
- Ensure loose parts are returned to designated storage areas safely and promptly at the end of the session.
- Record and report all significant incidents, near-misses, and maintenance needs to the Working Group.

Play time at Hatch Warren Junior School will see the site split into ranges. Playworkers will be given a range to oversee and ensure the children are playing safely and have meaningful play every day. It is the essential role of the playworkers to ensure they are scouting their range and moving around within their designated area to ensure pupils can access their playworker if they are needed. Playworkers will work to create a stimulating outdoor environment providing social, active and creative play whilst also being an ambassador for play.

Playworkers will also monitor behaviour in line with the school's Positive Relationships and Behaviour for Learning Policy. Rewards and sanctions will operate in line with the policy and playworkers will intervene where necessary whilst also supporting children to resolve conflicts in line with the play work principles.

8. The adult's role in play

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 Playwork Principles **(see Appendix 2)**. 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.

During play time at Hatch Warren Juniors, the playworkers' main and most important role will be to range the area of the site given as their responsibility. Playworkers will prepare the range so that there is a play offer for all children. Playworkers will be available to help the children with their play if the child wishes and will be vigilant in making sure they are available and visible to the children in their range.

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer that meets 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.

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 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. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

11. Behaviour

Play takes place within the confines of the school's behaviour policy. Children's behaviour during play will be managed in line with the behaviour policy.

12. Links to other policies

Other policies this links to:

- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety
- Positive Relationships and Behaviour for Learning

13. Monitoring and Review

The quality of play and the implementation of the OPAL programme and Play Policy will be monitored by the play team and by the Play Curriculum Lead.

The policy will be reviewed in March 2027, during the first year of implementation of OPAL, or earlier if required.

Appendix 1 – The R.A.P.I.D. Approach

OPAL's (Outdoor Play and Learning) **RAPID approach** is a structured, five-part framework designed for schools to manage risk while providing challenging and engaging play opportunities. It is an essential component of the OPAL Primary Programme, ensuring that schools move away from a "risk-averse" culture to a "risk-benefit" approach, complying with health and safety best practices.

The R.A.P.I.D. acronym stands for:

- **R - Risk-benefit assessment (RBA):** Rather than just identifying hazards to eliminate them, RBAs assess the potential benefits of an activity (e.g., building dens, climbing trees) alongside the risks to find a balance that allows for exciting play.
- **A - Assemblies focused on playtime:** Regular meetings with children to discuss, negotiate, and inform them about risks, rules and responsible play.
- **P - Policy for play:** A written policy, ratified by school governors and leadership, that formally adopts the risk-benefit approach.
- **I - Inspections carried out regularly:** Regular, recorded checks of the play environment and equipment to ensure they are safe for use.
- **D - Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff:** Staff are trained in "relaxed vigilance," monitoring changing play scenarios in real-time and intervening only when necessary, empowering children to manage their own risks.

The main goal of the RAPID approach is to create a safe, stimulating and inclusive play environment where children can learn, develop skills and have fun.

Appendix 2 – The Playwork Principles

The playwork principles

1. Understand Need

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.

2. Understand Process

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. 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. Support Process

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. Advocate for Play

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

5. Create Spaces

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. Learn and Reflect

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

7. Understand Impact

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

8. Choose Intervention Styles

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.

Appendix 3 - HSE Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach

See attached HSE pdf.