



## Abbey Primary School – Play Policy (OPAL-Aligned)

**Approval date:** January 2026

**Review schedule:** Annual (January 2027) – Abbey Local Governing Board

**Policy owner:** Aaron Tanner Premises Manager

**OPAL Lead:** Rebecca Walker

**OPAL Play coordinator:** Amy Delgado

**Linked policies:** Safeguarding and Child Protection, Behaviour, Health & Safety, SEND/Inclusion, Equality, Anti-bullying, Risk Management, PE & Sport Premium, Curriculum, Early Years Policy.

### Commitment

Abbey Primary School undertakes to refer to this Play Policy in all decisions that affect children's play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership required to provide and maintain high-quality play provision for all children, every day.

## 1. Vision & Rationale

At Abbey Primary School, we believe play is a fundamental right and a vital part of children's healthy development, wellbeing, learning, creativity, and social competence. We will provide high-quality, inclusive, and enriched play opportunities every day, in line with OPAL principles, to ensure every child can Play, Belong, and Thrive.

Transform playtimes into integral learning experiences that build resilience, independence, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Create diverse, safe, and engaging outdoor environments using loose parts, natural features, and zoned spaces.

Promote a risk–benefit approach to play, balancing children's need for challenge with proportionate safety measures.

Ensure play is inclusive, accessible, and enjoyable for every child.

## 2. Scope

Morning drop-off play, break times, lunch times, after-school clubs, and other supervised outdoor sessions.

EYFS continuous provision outdoors.

Seasonal/extended play projects (e.g., OPAL Playdays, special events).

## 3. Definitions

**Play:** Self-directed, intrinsically motivated activity pursued for enjoyment and fulfillment.

**Loose parts:** Movable materials that children can use creatively (e.g., crates, tarps, tyres, planks, ropes, fabric, chalk, water).

**Risk–benefit assessment (RBA):** A process that evaluates both the benefits of a play opportunity and the risks, ensuring proportionate controls without unnecessarily limiting play.

**Enriched play environment:** Varied spaces offering physical, social, imaginative, and exploratory play (e.g., quiet zones, construction, role play, nature, challenge/skill areas).

### 3a. Definition and value of play

Play is intrinsically motivated, self-directed and freely chosen by the child. It has its own inherent value and purpose and may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We believe play:

- is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development;
- enables exploration of environments, concepts and ideas;

- enhances self-esteem and understanding of others across ages, abilities and cultures;
- builds communication and negotiation skills, balancing freedom with responsibility;
- exposes children to a wide range of emotions and strengthens coping;
- encourages choice-making, creativity and problem-solving;
- maintains openness to learning and stretches the boundaries of achievement.

#### **4. Guiding Principles (OPAL-aligned)**

- Play is essential for healthy child development and wellbeing.
- Children need challenge—managed risk is developmentally appropriate and beneficial.
- All children are included and can participate meaningfully.
- Outdoor play happens in all weathers, with appropriate clothing and reasonable adjustments.
- Staff enable, not control, play—adults are supportive, observant, and responsive.
- Environment matters—we will enrich and diversify spaces and resources over time.
- Community collaboration strengthens play (pupils, staff, families, governors).

##### **4a. Aims**

We aim to: provide varied, challenging and stimulating play environments; enable common-sense risk-taking through risk–benefit practice; nurture relationships and respect; support whole-child development; offer environments for imaginative exploration and curriculum-linked discovery; promote independence, teamwork, and build emotional and physical resilience.

##### **4b. Children’s rights (UNCRC)**

We recognise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to play, recreation and leisure (Article 31) and the right to be heard on matters important to them (Article 12). We listen to children’s views on play through pupil voice mechanisms (Play Champions, suggestion boxes, termly feedback assemblies).

#### **5. Alignment with Existing Policies & Legal Duties**

- Safeguarding and Child Protection: KCSIE compliance; DSLs lead safeguarding; all staff report concerns immediately.
- Health & Safety: The school’s H&S policy governs equipment checks, site safety, supervision, RBAs, and incident reporting.
- Equality & Inclusion: Equality Act 2010; reasonable adjustments for SEND and medical needs; anti-bullying practices.

- Behaviour: Consistent expectations; restorative approaches; positive relationships.
- Curriculum & EYFS: Links to physical development, communication, creativity, science, and PSHE/RSE.

## 6. Roles & Responsibilities

- Governing Body: Approves policy; monitors impact through reports/visits; ensures resource support.
- Headteacher: Strategic oversight; ensures compliance; allocates staffing, training, budget.
- OPAL Lead / Play Coordinator: Drives implementation, audits, RBAs, environment planning, staff development, monitoring, and reporting.
- Premises Manager: Daily/weekly site checks; maintenance; safe storage; repairs; waste and hygiene management.
- Staff & Lunchtime Supervisors: Enable inclusive play; observe, support, and manage safety proportionately; record incidents; uphold behaviour expectations.
- Pupils: Respect people, spaces, and resources; share, collaborate, and include others.
- Parents/Carers: Provide suitable clothing/footwear for weather; support play ethos at home; raise concerns appropriately.

## 7. Supervision & Adult Role

Approach: Adults provide supervision by facilitating and observing play, stepping in to promote safety, inclusion, and overall welfare.

Ratios: Adequate adult coverage per zone (see Annex D), adjusted for weather, cohort needs, and activities.

Training: Staff trained in OPAL principles, RBAs, conflict resolution, inclusion, and first aid.

Communication: Radios or agreed signals; clear line-of-sight or roaming; staff briefed on zones, boundaries, and routines.

In line with OPAL, we use Remote and Ranging supervision during primary playtimes (with Direct supervision for new children in Reception until familiarisation/skills are assessed), ensuring children can quickly find an adult while adults patrol to understand emerging play and risk levels across a large site.

Staff practice is guided by the Playwork Principles: adults enable, not control, play; enrich the environment; observe sensitively; and intervene only when safety, inclusion or welfare requires it.

## 8. Risk–Benefit Approach (RBAs)

We value the educational benefits of challenge, creativity, and managed risk. Controls will be proportionate, not excessive.

- Identify activity/environment and benefits (skills, social, wellbeing).
- Identify hazards and likely severity.
- Implement reasonable controls (training, layout, maintenance, PPE).
- Review after incidents or termly.

Examples: Balance beams built from planks and crates; tree climbing with agreed height limits; den-building; water play; wheeled toys.

Non-negotiables: No head-first sliding; no strangulation hazards with ropes; safe lifting; gloves where required; hygiene protocols.

We follow the Health and Safety Executive’s Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach and adopt the Play Safety Forum’s risk–benefit approach. The goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh risks against benefits and focus on controlling real risks proportionately; fear of litigation and excessive paperwork should not create sterile play environments.

## 9. Environment & Resources

- Site-specific Zones: KS1 playground, KS2 playground, Quad, Eco-garden, EYFS playground, and field.
- Quiet/Wellbeing Zone: Reading, drawing, small-world play.
- Construction & Loose Parts: Crates, planks, tyres, tarps, ropes, clips.
- Imaginative/Role Play: Fabrics, props, dressing-up.
- Movement/Challenge: Skipping, wheeled toys (if space permits), low climbing, obstacle course.
- Nature/Exploration: Planters, mud kitchen, water and sand (seasonal), wildlife observation.
- Ball Games: Designated area with rules and equipment suited to ages.
- Loose Parts Management – Sourcing: Donations, grants, ethical procurement; regular quality checks.
- Storage: Safe, accessible, labelled; daily set-up and pack-down routines.
- Maintenance: Termly inventory and condition review; remove/repair unsafe items.

We use Best Play (Free Play Network) as a guide to what a quality play environment should contain and continue to enhance our grounds accordingly.

## **10. Inclusion, SEND & Equity**

- Universal Design: Multiple ways to play (sensory, social, physical, imaginative).
- Adjustments: Accessible routes, seating, adapted tools, visual schedules, zones with reduced stimuli.
- Support: Named staff for specific pupils; social stories; targeted coaching to build confidence.
- Equity: Ensure fair access to popular resources and zones; proactive encouragement for quieter or less confident pupils.

## **11. Clothing, Weather & Seasons**

- All-weather play: We go out in most conditions (exceptions: severe storms, dangerous ice).
- Expectations: Pupils to have coat, footwear, layers; school provides spares where possible.
- Hot weather: Hats, water, shade, sunscreen (parent-provided and policy-compliant).
- Cold/Wet: Gloves, waterproofs, rota adjustments; drying/clean-up stations.

## **12. Behaviour & Conflict Resolution**

- Values: Ready, Respectful and Safe.
- Approach: Restorative conversations; coaching in sharing, turn-taking, solving problems; minimal punitive measures; consistent application of school behaviour policy.
- Bullying: Zero tolerance; follow anti-bullying procedures; involve DSL if safeguarding concerns.

## **13. Health, Hygiene & First Aid**

- First Aid: Trained staff; kits in accessible locations; clear reporting and parent communication.
- Hygiene: Handwashing routines post-mud/water; safe handling and storage of materials; termly deep clean of reusable items.
- Medical Plans: Individual healthcare plans followed; risk-adjusted participation; emergency procedures known to staff.

## **14. Daily Operations**

- Opening checks: Site walk (surfaces, boundaries, hazards, bins, animal waste).
- Equipment check: Integrity of loose parts; remove/repair unsafe items.
- Zones set-up: Signage and resources distributed.

- During play: Staff stationed/roaming per plan; positive engagement; ongoing dynamic risk assessment.
- Close-down: Tidy and store; brief note of issues; quick radio debrief.
- Weekly/Termly: Inventory update; maintenance and RBA reviews; pupil voice feedback; environment improvement plan.

## **15. Communication & Community**

- Parents/Carers: Intro letter; FAQs; donations of loose parts; guidance on clothing.
- Pupil Voice: Play champions; suggestion boxes; termly feedback assemblies.
- Staff: Briefings, micro-PD, shared play ethos; celebrate successes.
- Governors: Termly report on impact, incidents, environment upgrades.

## **16. Monitoring, Evaluation & Impact**

- Data: Attendance at play, incident types/frequency, pupil wellbeing surveys, staff observations.
- Qualitative: Pupil voice, parent feedback, staff reflections, governor visits.
- Indicators of success: Increased engagement, reduced negative incidents, improved relationships, enhanced physical activity, positive wellbeing measures, improved readiness to learn post-play.
- Review: OPAL audit annually; policy reviewed and updated with stakeholder input.

## **17. Incident & Escalation**

Recording: Use Workrite AMS with a “Playtime” tag to log incidents/accidents. Escalate to SLT/DSL/H&S lead per severity and notify parents as appropriate. After-action reviews will inform updates to RBAs, environment, and supervision.

## **18. Resources & Budget**

- Initial investment: Starter kit for loose parts, storage, PPE, signage, radios.
- Ongoing: Replacement of worn items, seasonal additions, training, maintenance.
- Funding: School budget, PTA, grants (e.g., small community funds), local business donations.

## **19. Policy Review & Approval**

Owner: Aaron Tanner, Premises Manager

Next review: January 2027 (annual) – Abbey Local Governing Board

Approved by: Abbey Local Governing Board

## Annex A – Risk–Benefit Assessment (RBA) Template

Risk-benefit assessment date: .....

Assessed by: .....

Description of activity, principle or object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or utility or related policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action date

## Annex B – Suggested Loose Parts Starter Inventory

- Construction: Crates, tyres (cleaned), planks (rounded edges), cable reels, bamboo canes.
- Coverings & Connectors: Tarps, fabric, pegs/clips, bungees (short), ropes (with knot guidance), Velcro straps.
- Role Play/Imagination: Dressing-up items, pots/pans, reels, cardboard tubes, puppets.
- Movement: Skipping ropes, hoops, beanbags, soft balls; wheeled toys (if space allows, with zone rules).
- Nature/Sensory: Sand/water trays, buckets, sieves, mud kitchen utensils, chalk, magnifiers.
- Quiet/Focus: Clipboards, pencils, small-world figures, books.
- Storage & Safety: Labeled crates, lockable sheds, gloves, cleaning supplies.

## Annex C – Daily Play Environment Checklist

- Date:
- Checked by:
- Time:
- Gates/fences secure:
- Surfaces clear (glass, debris, animal waste):

- Weather-appropriate set-up (shade/waterproofs):
- Equipment integrity (no splits, sharp edges, loose fixings):
- Loose parts distributed safely:
- Zones signed and resourced:
- First aid and radios available:
- Handwashing accessible:

#### **Annex D – Supervision Map & Ratios**

- KS1 Playground – 4 adults roaming with line-of-sight coverage.
- KS2 Playground –4 adults
- Quad (when open) – 1 adult seated/observing (quiet/wellbeing zone).
- Eco-garden (when open) – 1 adult seated).
- EYFS Playground – 2 adults with continuous provision knowledge.
- Field (when open) – 2 adults, boundary monitoring and radio contact.
- Communication: Radios ch. [#2].
- Wet/Cold plan: Reduce zone footprint; relocate quiet activities under shelter; offer spares.

#### **Annex E – Parent Communication (Sample Text)**

Introducing OPAL Play at Abbey Primary

From January 2026, your child will experience more varied, creative outdoor play—every day and in all weathers. Play strengthens wellbeing, friendships, resilience, and learning. Please ensure your child comes with weather-appropriate clothing (coat, footwear, hat/gloves in winter; hat and water in summer). We may invite donations of safe “loose parts” (e.g., crates, fabrics, pots, cable reels). Thank you for supporting our play-rich school!

#### **Appendix X – HSE High-Level Statement on Play and Risk**

Children’s Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach (HSE/Play Safety Forum)

- Play is important 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;
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork;

- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.

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#### **Appendix Y – References**

- Health and Safety Executive & Play Safety Forum (2012). Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach.
- Play Safety Forum (2012). Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide (2nd ed.).
- Free Play Network (2000). Best Play: What play provision should do for children.
- The National Archives (OGL v3.0). Open Government Licence terms for re-use of Crown copyright material.