



**BEACON PRIMARY
ACADEMY**

Opal Play Policy 2025/2026

Play Policy for Beacon Academy





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1. Commitment and Rationale

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 Beacon Academy our goal is to create an environment that values and celebrates play as an integral part of our outside provision. We believe 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 additional barriers to playing outdoors and an increase in the use of technology has meant that many of our children are spending little or no time playing outside. At Beacon Academy we believe that play will improve their social and emotional interactions, their development of language and personal skills of resilience, independence, confidence and knowledge of the world around them. These core skills will have a positive impact on their education and the rest of their life.

As an OPAL play school, we share their vision:

“That every child in every school has an amazing hour of high-quality play every day – with no exceptions”.

We are committed to providing strategic and operational leadership through our play team as this is needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all our children. Our academy undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children’s play.

Our school recognises the legal obligation to implement 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.

2. What is 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.

Play activity is essential for a child's development: physical, intellectual, educational, and social. At Beacon Academy School, 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 and problem solving.
- It makes children happy and happy children are better learners.
- It creates life-long memories.
- It can allow for a level of risk taking and learning through mistakes.

3. The benefits of play

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning. 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.





Research provides considerable evidence that play supports the development of the cognitive abilities needed for formal learning. It also aids the development of concentration and attention. Playing outdoors has been shown to be particularly helpful for this.

As a result of implementing this policy we believe that children will:

- Increase self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Improve language and communication skills.
- Improve concentration.
- Improve their imagination, independence, and creativity.
- Improve social skills.
- Be happier.
- Be resilient, confident, a good problem solver.
- Be able to communicate and collaborate effectively.
- Be better at problem solving.
- Develop life skills.
- Improve their physical development, co-ordination, and fitness.

4. 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)

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’*.

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. In addition to standard benefit-risk assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children. They will be encouraged to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them and learn to identify and manage appropriate risk themselves.

Children will be introduced to new resources and ways of play through regular whole school assemblies. This will give them the opportunity to learn and participate in identifying benefits and potential risks.

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily basis by the Play Team.

It is the responsibility of all staff to work within agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments.

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 benefit-risk approach as detailed in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012).





5. The adult's role in play

At Beacon Academy we have 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.

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. Beacon Academy we will use ranging supervision (direct supervision may also be used depending on the situation). This allows adults to patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. We believe that adults are there to provide appropriate modelling and expand play through demonstrating different possible play opportunities. Our playworkers are not there in a 'policing' role.

The play team will also provide first aid (if trained) in situations where necessary. These may not always result in a first aid letter home but will be recorded at school. Examples of first aid which will result in a first aid slip are where there are cuts or wounds to the skin, injuries above shoulders. Minor bumps and knocks will not result in a first aid slip but will be recorded at school.

6. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting ensures 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 are working towards transforming our grounds to create an outside environment that will allow children to naturally explore, investigate, problem solve and use creativity. The grounds will develop a range of social and different sensory experiences for example loose parts, mud kitchen, sand pit, water play.

In order for children to play in the natural outdoor environment appropriate clothing and footwear will be needed, a waterproof coat and wellingtons. Welly racks will be provided to encourage children to keep items on site for use when needed.

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

7. Equality and diversity

At Beacon Academy, we aim to ensure that no pupil experiences harassment, less favorable treatment, or discrimination within the learning environment because of their age; any disability they may have; their ethnicity, colour or national origin; their gender; their religion or 4 beliefs. We value the diversity of individuals within our school and do not discriminate against children because of 'differences'. We believe that all our children matter, and we value their families too. We give our children every opportunity to achieve their best by taking account of our children's range of life experiences when planning for their learning. The planning and organizing of teaching strategies for each subject is consistently reviewed to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged.

Appendix 1.



The Playwork Principles

These principles establish the professional and ethical framework for Playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and Playwork and provide the Playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

- 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 wellbeing of individuals and communities.
- 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.
- 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.
- For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
- The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
- 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.
- Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
- Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

Appendix 2.

The 16 Play Types



Appendix 3.

HSE 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 benchmarks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance does mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focusing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user.
- Recognizing 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 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 focus 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.

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.

Notes

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])
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.

