

Bank View School



Believe Value Succeed

Primary Department Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

Approved by: Full Governing Body	<i>(Chair signature)</i>	Date: 4 th Nov 2022
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Outdoor Play and Learning

The OPAL Primary Programme...

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is a mentor-supported school improvement programme. The OPAL Primary Programme is the only programme of its kind that has been independently proven to sustainably improve the quality of play in British primary schools.

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.*”

Bank View School's Rationale

Our rationale for choosing OPAL was simple - we recognised how our children's SEN needs may impact their ability to access play opportunities in the same way as their mainstream peers. On top of this children have had reduced opportunities to socialise due to the pandemic, national lockdowns and partial school closures.

Children spend up to 20% (1.4) years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and risk aversion have led to a significant reduction in children's opportunities for play. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital. Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities comes a more positive attitude to school, improved skills development and learning and there are fewer behaviour problems.

Our ethos of developing the whole child puts social interaction at the heart of what we do. We viewed the OPAL project as a way of redressing the balance and providing children with richer, more meaningful ways of interacting with their peers and catching up for the lost time. The development of social skills is crucial in providing children with a positive school experience and we are confident that our children - who now have a more purposeful, enjoyable and rewarding lunchtime experience - are fulfilled throughout every part of the day, which enables them to be more receptive to learning inside and outside the classroom. **This, ultimately, fits our long-held belief that happy children learn best.**

‘At Bank View, we recognise that in play children may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe that the role of adults is to support the play process. We aim for children to have the opportunity for ‘free range’ play within the school grounds.’

Aims

We aim to/for:

- Ensure we 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.

- Provide a range of environments which will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide children with the opportunity to use a range of equipment in play whilst taking care not to hurt others.
- Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment
- Adults should respect these rights by providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, using restorative justice to resolve conflicts and supporting children with additional needs at playtime.
- Adults are to dynamically risk assess and encourage children to assess risk and to support the children in taking out and tidying away equipment.
- Adults support the children to develop new play opportunities, listening to their ideas about play and supporting all children to access play.
- Enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.

What is play?

Play is any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It may be serious or light-hearted. It may produce something or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children to be creative, make decisions, and assess and manage risks.

Benefits

An essential element of exploration within the play is the opportunity for children to experience freely chosen activities where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities.

We believe that:

- Play is critical to children's health and well-being, 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 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, and fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problems solve and be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Our Play is inclusive for all pupils as each pupil can push their boundaries from their starting point

Playing has unique behavioural characteristics that make it different to other forms of behaviour and such a powerful force in children's lives, these include:

- Personal control –the increased degree of personal or collective control in play, compared to other aspects of children's lives requires real active engagement.

- Intrinsic motivation – children are motivated to play by the pleasure and satisfaction they gain from playing. In play, there is a greater focus on the process of playing rather than any products that may be produced from it.
- Flexibility and variability – in play children can try out highly variable and diverse combinations of behaviour, where the narratives are often flexible if not completely unpredictable.
- Pretence – in play children will take an ‘as if’ approach enabling them to be ‘other’ in important but nonserious ways. This is made possible by the psychological ‘frame of safety’, created in play, a virtual reality in which the constraints of the real world are suspended
- Creation of uncertainty – children seek out ‘scary fun’ the physical and emotional pleasure that comes from playing with risk/uncertainty.

Risk

Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to judge risks independently and to learn new skills. All children need and want to take risks to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capabilities. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs and ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving the risk of injury.

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’.

‘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’ Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (2012)

‘Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children’s development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world’. (DCFS)

Supervision

While being outside is a chance to let the children have some freedom, it is always still important for staff to maintain proper supervision. We may not be able to see every child all of the time, especially when the children are playing amongst the trees but as our site is relatively small and we can provide enough supervision to ensure risks can be managed appropriately during playtimes.

The three models of supervision used varies depending on circumstance and these range from:

- Direct supervision, staff directly observing and supporting particular children in their play
- Remote supervision, staff overseeing play without direct involvement
- Ranging supervision, where staff are expected to move around throughout playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Staff can then ‘check in’ on the children’s play throughout playtime.

Our main approach to supervision is a ‘ranging’ model. Staff modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk. All staff follow the school’s behaviour policy over lunchtimes and playtimes. For further details, please see the school’s Behaviour Policy.

The Adult's Role in Play

We aim to maximize the benefits children gain from play by training all staff who supervise playtime in 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.

We believe that an adult's role in the play is to:

- allow the children the freedom to explore, take risks and try new things
- enable children to solve problems and build resilience through explicit teaching and modelling of behaviours
- be responsive to children's invitations and requests
- carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness
- observe and intervene where necessary to develop play opportunities and skills through modelling or playing alongside children

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.

To manage risks

- Our caretaker performs regular Health & Safety checks of the play areas
- The Opal working party and all playtime supervision staff will check for dangers/ risks when outside with the children
- The children will be made aware of possible risks and helped to manage those via staff alerting them, for example, slippery or wet surfaces
- Separate the play area into zones to maintain a risk/benefit management system creating quiet areas as well as areas for physical play.

Clothing

We would advise as staff that all children come prepared for outdoor/all-weather play. During the colder and wet weather, wellies (or walking boots) should be worn by children in the field areas. We suggest that outdoor clothing, such as waterproof trousers and coats should be worn during these months to protect their school uniform. Wellies are to be kept and stored on welly stands at school. Additionally, leaving a change of clothing in school may also be beneficial.

Equality and Access

We aim to ensure that all children have equal access to and equal participation in play regardless of their needs, ability, gender, age or experience.

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