Burbage Primary School

Play Policy

"Building confidence; inspiring achievement."

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Version: 1.1 - November 2026	
Named Lead for Play/OPAL:	Alice Martin
Play Champion Governor:	Pete Swann
Review frequency:	Annually (and after any significant change)
Next review due:	February 2027
Applies to:	All staff, volunteers and visitors on duty during playtimes

1. Commitment

At Burbage Primary School we believe that play is fundamental to children's wellbeing, learning and development. Our vision is for children to be happy, kind, resilient and independent, with empathy for all, and to experience a safe and supportive environment that nurtures individuality and aspiration for every child.

This policy sets the values and principles that will guide all decisions about play at Burbage and reflects our commitment as an OPAL school (from November 2025). It aligns with the Embark Federation values of Family, Integrity, Teamwork and Success.

Leaders will model and champion high-quality play. This policy will inform our strategy, action planning, resourcing and staff development, so that every child can access rich, freely chosen play every day.

2. Rationale

Children in primary schools spend a significant proportion of their time in play; high-quality play has a strong, positive impact on physical health, social development, self-regulation, creativity and readiness to learn.

As an OPAL school, we are adopting a whole-school, values-based approach so play is purposeful, inclusive and well led. We recognise that many children have fewer opportunities for outdoor, self-directed play beyond school and therefore school has a duty to provide rich, varied and challenging play every day. Well-planned playtimes reduce behaviour incidents and increase teaching time, with children returning to class calmer and ready to learn.

3. Definition of Play

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated by the child. In play, children determine the content and intent. Our definition is grounded in staff and pupil voice gathered through OPAL

development activities and everyday practice across phases, including EYFS where play is the principal vehicle for learning.

4. Children's Rights

Pupil voice will be central in shaping, reviewing and improving our play offer.

- UNCRC Article 31: the right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities.
- UNCRC Article 12: the right of the child to be heard on matters that affect them.

5. Equality, Inclusion and Access

We are committed to equitable access to play for all pupils, including those with SEND, medical needs, or other vulnerabilities. Adjustments (environmental, staffing, equipment, routines) will ensure every child can participate in meaningful, appropriately challenging play.

6. Benefits and Risk: A Balanced Approach

We acknowledge the essential benefits of play—confidence, independence, social competence, creativity and physical development—and our duty of care to manage real risks proportionately.

We adopt the Health and Safety Executive's position that the goal is not to eliminate risk but to weigh up risks and benefits and to focus on sensible, proportionate control measures, not paperwork.

We use risk–benefit assessment (RBA) and sector guidance (Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide) to inform decisions.

Dynamic risk management: In addition to written risk assessments the school will use dynamic risk management in order to respond to the fluid nature of risk and challenge in the play environment. The school will also manage risk by building children's skills in identifying and managing appropriate risk themselves.

7. Supervision Styles

We will employ developmentally appropriate, play-enabling supervision. Supervisors will observe, scan and roam, intervening only when necessary—for safeguarding, significant unmanaged conflict, or where there is a serious and foreseeable risk of harm. Adults will resist over-directing play; they will facilitate and extend children's play cues and narratives, enabling choice, collaboration and challenge. Training will reflect OPAL guidance on supervision.

8. The Role of Adults

All adults on the playground are part of our Play Team (midday supervisors, TAs, teachers on duty, and SLT). Their role is to:

- Welcome children into play, resource and gently scaffold where helpful;
- Support inclusion and positive peer interactions;
- Help children learn to self-assess risk and make good choices;
- Model our values and respectful communication;
- Escalate concerns via safeguarding procedures when needed.

9. Our Play Environment

We aim to provide a rich outdoor environment offering variety, choice and challenge (e.g., loose parts, creative/constructive play, den building, small-world/imaginative zones, physical challenge, social/quiet spaces, nature connection). Provision will evolve through the OPAL programme and be reviewed against recognised criteria for a rich play environment. Playtimes are planned within the structure of The School Day, ensuring time and space for play across phases.

10. OPAL and Strategic Improvement

Burbage is an OPAL school. We will use OPAL's framework to move from current practice to excellence across key areas (space, materials, culture, staffing, inclusion, risk, communication).

- Use OPAL's audit and RAG tools to baseline and track improvement;
- Set SMART priorities over a 3–5 year period to embed a culture of steady, continual improvement;
- Review and refresh annually with pupil, parent and staff voice.

11. Health, Safety and Safeguarding

- Safeguarding: Any concern arising at play will be reported in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Our DSL is Mrs Catherine Oliver (Deputy Headteacher); Deputy DSL is Mr Anthony Tierney (Headteacher); Safeguarding Governor is Karen Chetwood. All adults will know how to report concerns and record them promptly.
- Risk management: We will use proportionate Risk–Benefit Assessments for features/activities and dynamic risk management in practice (see Section 6).
- Clothing and weather: We will promote all-weather play; families will be advised about suitable clothing/footwear and the school will hold spare items where feasible. Supervisors will dynamically review weather/ground conditions and adapt provision as required.

12. Behaviour, Relationships and Inclusion

Playtimes are an integral part of our behaviour culture. Adults will use consistent, relational approaches to build positive peer relationships, support conflict resolution and reinforce the school's values. Where additional help is needed (e.g., social communication or sensory regulation), personalised strategies/equipment and adult support will be planned through SEND processes.

13. Communication with Parents/Carers and Community

We will share our play principles and expectations via the website, newsletters and parent briefings, including: the benefits of play; clothing guidance; how we manage risk sensibly; and how families can support (e.g., donations of suitable loose parts/equipment). As a school within Embark Federation, we will also celebrate play as part of "Love Learning, Love Life".

14. Training and Support for Staff

The school will provide initial and ongoing training for the Play Team, including OPAL induction, supervision styles, inclusion, conflict resolution and risk–benefit assessment. We will use staff meetings/briefings to share learning, pupil feedback and incident reflections to continually improve play.

15. Monitoring, Evaluation and Governance

- Ownership: The SLT Play Lead and Play Champion Governor will oversee delivery of this policy, strategy and action plan. Pupil voice (e.g., School Council, class forums) will be used routinely.
- Monitoring: Termly OPAL RAG/self-evaluation; incident data and lunchtime logs; pupil/parent/staff surveys and observations; inclusion/SEND participation checks.
- Reporting: The SLT Play Lead will provide a termly update to governors and an annual impact report.

16. Links to Other Policies/Information

This policy should be read alongside:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy; Behaviour Policy; Equality Information and Objectives; SEND Policy and Information Report; Health & Safety Policy; PE and Curriculum information; The School Day. This policy also incorporates Appendix 1: HSE Guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure.

17. Roles and Responsibilities (summary)

- Local Governing Board (via Play Champion Governor): Approves policy; receives monitoring; holds leaders to account for impact.
- Headteacher/SLT Play Lead: Ensures policy implementation, resourcing, staff training and evaluation; champions OPAL.
- Play Team (all adults on duty): Enables play, supervises proportionately, promotes inclusion and reports concerns.
- DSL/DDSL: Ensures robust safeguarding practice and training; oversees reporting procedures.
- Pupils: Contribute ideas, respect each other, the environment and equipment; learn to self-assess risk.
- Parents/Carers: Support all-weather play (clothing), understand our risk-benefit approach, and contribute to improvement through feedback/donations.

References

- Burbage Primary School website pages: Vision & Values; Welcome/Our School; Safeguarding; OPAL – Outdoor Play & Learning; The School Day.
- Health and Safety Executive and Play Safety Forum: Children's Play and Leisure - Promoting a Balanced Approach (joint high-level statement, 2012; current HSE web guidance).
- Play Safety Forum (2012): Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide.
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Articles 31 and 12.

Appendix 1: HSE Guidance - Managing Risk in Play and Leisure

Status and purpose

This appendix forms part of the school's Play Policy and sets out the rationale that underpins Burbage Primary School's risk-benefit approach. It is based on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Play Safety Forum joint statement, Children's Play and Leisure - Promoting a Balanced Approach, referenced within OPAL College ePACK, Pack 4 RAPID, Document 4.6.

The HSE fully supports the provision of challenging play opportunities for children of all ages and abilities. It recognises that well-managed play environments may include a degree of risk and, at times, potential danger. The purpose of sensible risk management is therefore not to remove every possibility of injury, but to protect children from serious and reasonably foreseeable harm while preserving the developmental benefits of play.

Why risk and challenge are necessary in children's play

- Play is central to children's wellbeing, development and enjoyment. It helps children explore what they can do, test their abilities and make sense of the world.
- Children need opportunities to encounter uncertainty and manageable challenge. Through these experiences they develop judgement, coordination, confidence, resilience, problem-solving skills and awareness of risk.
- A play environment that seeks absolute safety can become sterile and restrictive. Removing all challenge may prevent children from extending their learning, stretching their abilities and becoming increasingly independent.
- Children live in a world in which risk is always present. Appropriate experience of risk, supported by skilled adults, helps prepare them to make safer decisions now and in later life.
- Minor accidents and mistakes can occur even in well-managed play. Their possibility does not, by itself, mean that provision is unsafe or that an activity should be stopped.

The HSE's balanced approach

The school will apply the following principles when planning, reviewing and supervising play:

- The goal is not to eliminate risk. Decisions will weigh the risks against the benefits of the play opportunity.
- Attention will be directed to real risks that could cause serious harm, rather than trivial or fanciful risks.
- Controls will be sensible and proportionate. They will preserve, and where possible increase, the benefits of play.
- Paperwork will support good judgement rather than replace it. Written assessments will be proportionate to the significance and complexity of the risk.
- Adults will recognise that an accident does not automatically indicate a failure in risk management. The key question is whether significant and foreseeable risks were understood and managed appropriately.
- Decisions will consider the needs, abilities and vulnerabilities of individual children, including pupils with SEND or medical needs, without unnecessarily restricting their access to challenge.

How Burbage Primary School manages risk appropriately

- **Risk-Benefit Assessments (RBAs):** Written RBAs will identify the principal benefits of an activity or feature alongside significant hazards, who may be harmed, existing controls and any further proportionate action required. They will be reviewed after significant change, a serious incident or when experience shows that controls need adjustment.
- **Dynamic risk management:** Play Team members will continually observe conditions, children's use of the environment, weather, equipment and emerging behaviours. They will adapt provision or intervene when a serious or foreseeable risk is not adequately controlled.

- **Competent supervision:** Adults will scan, roam, communicate and position themselves effectively. They will intervene when necessary, but will avoid stopping play simply because it is energetic, messy, adventurous or unfamiliar.
- **Developing children's capability:** Adults will help children notice hazards, consider possible consequences, negotiate shared rules and choose ways to reduce harm. Children will be supported to become active participants in managing risk rather than passive recipients of adult control.
- **Inspection and maintenance:** The school will maintain proportionate checks of play areas, loose parts and equipment. Defects presenting a significant risk will be isolated, repaired or removed promptly; normal wear, mud, uneven natural surfaces and manageable challenge will not automatically require withdrawal of provision.
- **Inclusion and reasonable adjustment:** Risk-benefit decisions will take account of individual needs. Adjustments may include equipment choice, communication support, additional familiarisation, alternative access or closer supervision while retaining the child's right to meaningful play.
- **Learning from incidents:** Accidents, near misses, recurring conflicts and pupil feedback will be reviewed to identify patterns. Responses will be proportionate and will seek to improve provision without introducing blanket restrictions unless evidence shows these are necessary.
- **Clear escalation:** Safeguarding concerns, serious defects and circumstances that exceed the competence or authority of the supervising adult will be reported promptly through the school's established procedures.

Decision-making test for play provision

Before restricting, removing or prohibiting a play opportunity, staff and leaders should consider:

1. What are the developmental, social, physical and emotional benefits of this play?
2. What could realistically go wrong, and how serious could the harm be?
3. Is the risk significant and reasonably foreseeable, or is it trivial or remote?
4. Can the risk be reduced through a proportionate control while keeping the play value?
5. Are children able to understand and manage part of the risk with support?
6. Would stopping the activity create other harms, such as reduced physical activity, exclusion, loss of independence or a less stimulating environment?
7. Is the decision consistent with the school's RBAs, safeguarding duties, equality responsibilities and OPAL approach?

Where the benefits are substantial and the significant risks can be controlled to a tolerable level, the school will normally enable the play to continue. Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm, adults will intervene, make the situation safe and review the provision before it resumes.

Key message for staff, families and governors

Burbage Primary School does not seek to make play risk-free. We seek to make it as safe as necessary, not as safe as possible. This means providing varied and challenging play while using competent supervision, risk-benefit assessment, dynamic judgement, maintenance and clear safeguarding procedures to manage significant risks responsibly.

Source

Health and Safety Executive and Play Safety Forum, Children's Play and Leisure - Promoting a Balanced Approach. Available from: https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm (accessed 16 November 2026).