



**Goffs Oak Primary School**

**OPAL Play Policy**  
**March 2025**



## 1. Commitment, Culture and Rationale

At Goffs Oak Primary School, our goal is to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment that embraces all children from our local community. We believe that all members of our school community should work together to maintain a safe and stimulating environment both within school and within our local and global community. At Goffs Oak we acknowledge the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and support the child's right to play. We recognise the importance of the need for high quality sustainable play for children, regardless of their needs and abilities, and that inclusive play is achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play opportunities.

As an OPAL Play school, we share their vision:

*“better, more active and creative playtimes can mean happier and healthier children”.*

We firmly believe that play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development. We undertake to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all our children.

## 2. Background

Children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play. This time is invaluable and needs clear planning. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, less areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play poverty' for today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better play leads to happier children and in turn less behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, skills development, fewer accidents and more effective learning in the classroom as less staff time is spent resolving issues.

Play England drew up The Charter for Children's Play which sets out a vision for play and states that:

- Children need time and space to play at school
- Adults should let children play
- Children value and benefit from staffed play provision
- Children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

Goffs Oak Primary School fully recognises its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime while they are at our school.

## 3. What is Play?

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:

*‘encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live’.*

Play activity meets the four components of a child's development:



- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness)
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination)
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes)
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

At Goffs Oak Primary 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
- It makes children happy and happy children are better learners

#### **4. The Benefits of Play**

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. 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. As a result of implementing this policy we believe that children will:

- be happier
- increase self-awareness and self-esteem
- improve language and communication skills
- improve concentration
- improve their imagination, independence and creativity
- improve social skills
- be resilient, confident, good problem solver
- be ready for anything as a result of negotiation and independence of thought
- be better at problem solving
- develop life skills
- improve their physical development, co-ordination and fitness.

#### **5. Risk Benefit and Health and Safety**

*'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)

An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely-chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to independently judge risks and learn new skills. Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk



children's development is inhibited, which reduces their ability to deal with the wider unsupervised world.

*'Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury'* - Play Safety Forum

Research shows that the uncertainty and challenge of much of children's play is a very large part of its appeal to them, and that it also enhances the development of their brains and bodies, making them more adaptable and resilient as they grow. Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure. 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 risk-benefit assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them. 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'**.

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

- All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily basis by the Play Team. The site manager will ensure annual checks are carried out on engineered and fixed equipment. These checks will be kept on file in the office.
- Risk-benefit assessments will be carried out for activities involving risks presented by environment, materials or practices deemed to have the potential for unacceptable risk of serious injury or harm. All risk-benefits will be carried out by the OPAL Curriculum Lead and OPAL Play Coordinator and held on file in the office for inspection.
- The Play Team, guided by the Play Coordinator will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led 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.
- It is the responsibility of the members of the Play Team to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Play Coordinator as soon as possible.

## **6. The Adult's Role in Play**

Goffs Oak Primary 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.



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. At Goffs Oak Primary School the Play Team, guided by the Play Coordinator, will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, will observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. They will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

## **7. OPAL – Outdoor Play and Learning**

Goffs Oak Primary School has entered into an agreement with OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision.

We will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation and recreation of the play space by the children.

### **7.1 Loose Parts**

Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The vital ingredients for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves. These will be stored in allocated areas both outside and in the OPAL storage sheds.

### **7.2 Monitoring**

The school will use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor the implementation of its play policy, strategy and action plan.

### **7.3 Physical Environment**

We recognise that our outdoor environment can be used as a natural resource for learning and playing. With careful planning that involves the children we can ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve and use their imagination and creativity. Our children will be given the opportunity and responsibility to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors. By empowering our children in this way, they will learn to develop, value and respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.

## **8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Through providing a rich play offer meeting 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.

Curricular Lead for Play: Claire Barclay



Date agreed:

Review Date: