



Play Policy

“To promote independence and resilience through outdoor play.”

Article 31 – every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts



Signed By	Date
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Local Governing Committee	01-03-23 (Full LGC Meeting)

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Introduction

St Benet's Catholic Primary School recognises that play is an important part of a happy and healthy childhood and as a school, we should provide high quality, sustainable play opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play experiences.

Commitment

At St Benet's, we are committed to using this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks.

At St Benet's we aim to:

- To enhance children's learning through play
- To develop their resilience
- To promote positive relationships with peers
- To encourage independence through play
- To build on the children's team working skills and problem solving activities

Rationale

Children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as the Covid-19 lockdown, an increase in technology, 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.

In addition to these reasons to prioritise play in school, Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

- Play should be a life-enhancing daily experience all our children can access.
- Play is essential to healthy development from birth to adulthood, contributing to capacity for learning, resilience and the development of physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills.
- Children must have access to play opportunities in a range of different settings which offer variety, adventure and challenge.
- They must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks and make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, ability and preference.

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

- Increase their independence;
- More resilient to tasks and real-life problem solving;
- be happier;
- increase self-awareness and self-esteem;
- improve language and communication skills;
- improve concentration;
- improve their imagination and creativity;
- improve social skills;
- improve physical development, co-ordination and fitness.

Definition

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'.

When the children and parents of St Benet's were asked their opinions about play, most believed that the opportunity to play is very important in the child's day. The majority of families agree that this is fundamental in helping develop skills such as building friendships, communication skills, teamwork, confidence and fitness (mental and physical). Based on our findings in the questionnaire, we are keen to offer all children a wide variety of different play opportunities in our outdoor environment to enhance their learning and development.

Risk and Benefit

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. At St Benet's we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that:

'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 dangers'. (HSE, 2013)

Our role as play providers is to facilitate opportunities for children 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. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach to manage our duty of care to protect and our duty of care to provide for children's needs.

St Benet's will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) and 'The Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision' (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

Adults Role in Play

We are committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground. An adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with an outside agency called OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at St Benet's. In addition to this, the St Benet's Play Committee will work in collaboration with parents, teachers and the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Pupil support assistants will take on the role of Play Workers and they will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, to 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.

Play Workers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Environment

At St Benet's we will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- encourage the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things
- give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value

APPENDIX 1

Play, Challenge and Risk - Statement

Play is an essential part of children's development. Quality active play can not only provide opportunities to develop a wide range of physical skills, but also allow for choice, introduce challenge and self risk assessment, develop problem solving skills, promote co-operation, and increase confidence and independence. Active play provision will vary with age and ability, and the setting in which it is provided, but it is always important to provide opportunities for active play outdoors wherever and whenever possible. Play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. "Freely chosen" means that the children choose when and which play activity to undertake. It is not part of a set programme or curriculum and does not have any steps that need to be completed. "Personally directed" means that the children themselves agree the roles or rules of the activity, they decide what outcomes they desire, if any. "Intrinsically motivated" means that it is done for its own sake and not for any externally provided reward or certificate. In short it is done for fun.

Play and Risk

Children need and want to take risks during active play. Quality play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities, striking a balance between the risks and the benefits. This is done through risk assessment which:

- Ensures the likelihood of serious injury is extremely low
- Makes sure potential hazards are clear
- Uses practical ways to manage reasonable risk

Managing Risk in Play Provision

"Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play is first and foremost for children and if it is not exciting and attractive to them it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents." *Managing Risk in Play Provision, Play Safety Forum, National Children's Bureau, 2002*

"It makes clear that safety must be considered at all stages of play provision but that inevitably there will be risk of injury when children play, as there is risk of injury in life generally. We must not lose sight of the important developmental role of play for children in pursuit of the unachievable goal of absolute safety. The important message is though that there must be freedom from unacceptable risk of life-threatening or permanently disabling injury in play." *Health and Safety Executive, in Managing Risk in Play Provision, 2002*

Health & Safety Executive 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.'