



**Stoneferry Primary**

**OPAL Policy**

## Summary

Stoneferry Primary School recognises that play especially outdoor play is at the heart of healthy, full development for children. We recognise that in order to learn children must push the boundaries of what is already known and already easily accomplished and this requires children to experience risk and challenge. In our desire to do our best for all children in our care we are dedicated to providing a rich play setting where 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 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.

**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.'**

**'Health and Safety Executive (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)**

*'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 (2012)

### 1. Commitment

Stoneferry Primary school Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide consistently high quality, play provision for all of our children. Sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child.

### 2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play, making this element of school extremely important and essential towards children's learning and development, therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Stoneferry believes 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 and has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

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.”*

### **3. Definition and value of 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 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); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

#### **At Stoneferry we believe play has many benefits, including:**

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and 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, fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

### **4. Aims**

#### **In relation to play Stoneferry aims to:**

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment for all children.
- 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.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.
- Promote communication and language amongst the children.

## 5. Rights

As a school we recognise 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.

Article 31 of the Unicef Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. From this, PlayEngland created The Charter for Children's Play which clearly states that:

- Children should have spaces to spend adequate time playing at school.
- Adults should always let children play, this is a non-negotiable.
- Children greatly value and benefit from staffed play provision.
- Children's play is augmented by expert play workers.
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play, this should always be provided
- when needed.

## 6. 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)

**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 risk-benefit approach as detailed in *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. 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. Risk and challenge is 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.

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'*..

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. All staff are aware of the risk-benefit assessment and have access to this. Please see **appendix 1** for further information.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to 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 and will practice dynamic risk management (**Appendix 2**) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs. This approach will encourage the children to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

## **7. Supervision**

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. Stoneferry recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, Stoneferry does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

The school facilitates the use of OPAL equipment during the hours of 9am-2:45pm Monday to Friday. We do not allow children to use the equipment outside of school hours.

## **8. The adult's role in play**

We, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies, School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.

The 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 OPAL ([www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Sacred Heart. In addition to this, the Stoneferry Play Team (**Appendix 3**) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, the governing body and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy.

The school will help children maximize 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 (**Appendix 4**). Staff will refer to and use these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and 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. Adults should participate in play, only if invited or needed; they should know how and when to intervene.

## **9. Equality and diversity**

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.

## **10. Environment**

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure 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. The benefits of a

rich play setting also supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play.

**At stoneferry we will:**

- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play.
- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors.
  - Ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks, explore and use their imagination and creativity.
  - Expect 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 the variety of play types (**Appendix 5**) and increase play value.
  - Ensure that the play space is an integrated area where all children from reception to Year 6 can play safely.
  - Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
  - Promote children's love, pride and enjoyment of the outdoors, a key foundation for caring for the environment.
  - Help children develop confidence in team building and advocating their own rights.

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](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf) **Appendix 6**

## Appendices

1. Risk Assessment HSE Guidance
2. Benefit risk assessment record sheet
3. OPAL Team
4. Playwork Principles
5. Types of Play
6. Best Play – What Play Provision Should Do for Children



## 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 risks<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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])



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 bench marks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising 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 providers<sup>2</sup> 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 focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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.

**September 2012**

Appendix 2 – Benefit – Risk Assessment record sheet

**Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet**

Risk Assessment Date.....

Assessed by.....

	<b>Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.</b>	<b>Benefit or Utility Or Related Policy</b>	<b>Description of risk management and maintenance agreed</b>	<b>Nominated person</b>	<b>Action Date</b>

### Appendix 3 – The OPAL Team

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at Stoneferry.

Head Of School – Mrs Havercroft

Curricular lead for play – Mr Good

Play Co-ordinator – Mrs Talbot

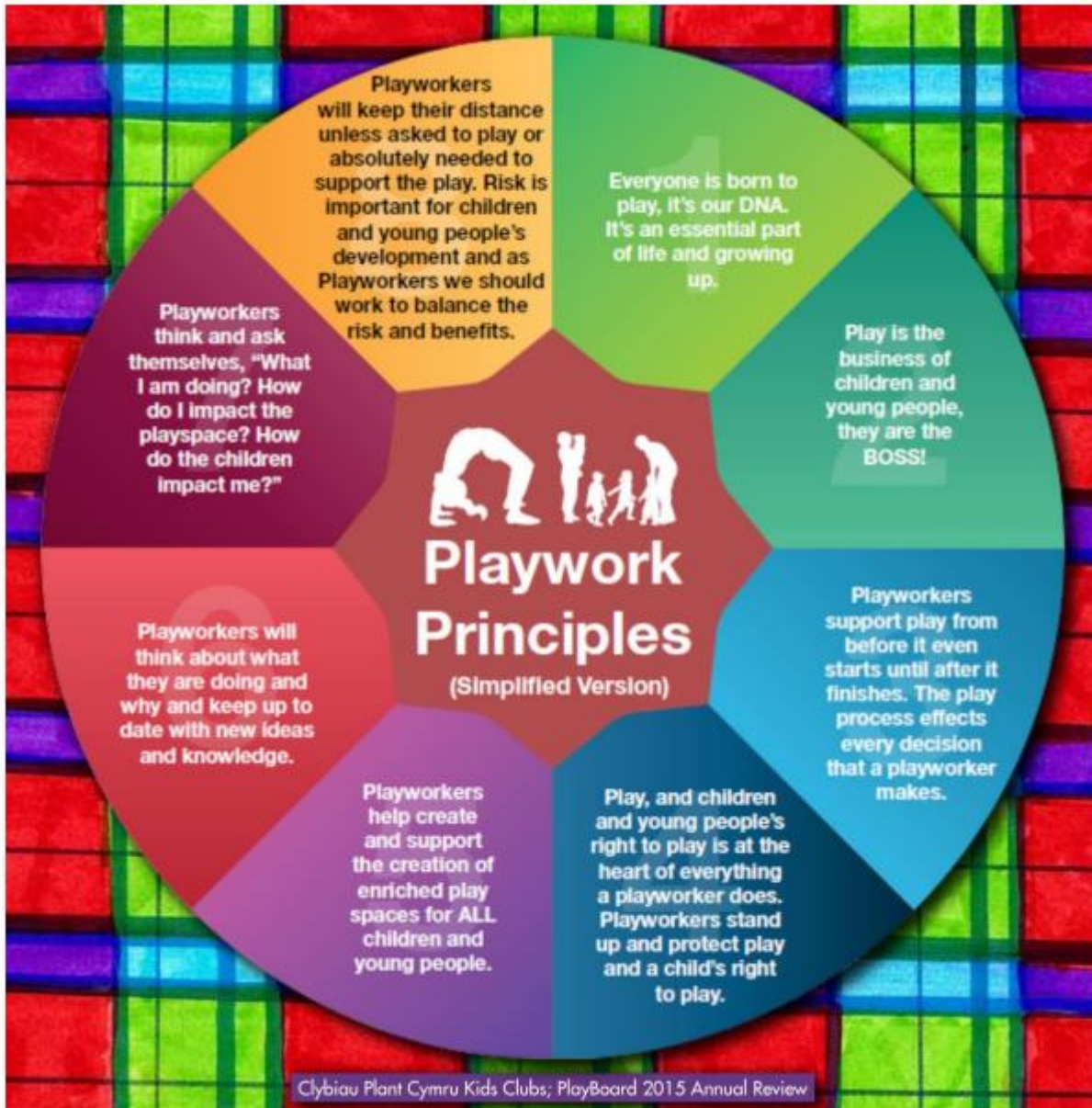
Play Leader – Mrs Harrision

Play champion' parent role – Kelly

Governor – Mrs Uney

Site Service Officer – Mr Clappison

## Appendix 4 - Playwork Principles



Appendix 5 – Types of Play



Symbolic Play



Locomotor Play



Recapitulative Play



Creative Play



Exploratory Play



Communication Play



Socio-dramatic Play



Role Play



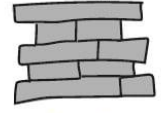
Fantasy Play



Object Play



Mastery Play



Deep Play



Rough and Tumble Play



Dramatic Play



Social Play



Imaginative Play

Appendix 6 - Best Play – What Play Provision Should Do for Children

[www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)