



## Play and Risk Benefit Policy

Policy written by Alison Rostron in consultation with the Play Working Party and all school staff in **January 2022**.

**Reviewed: Jan 2023**

### **Purpose**

This policy reflects our school values and philosophy in relation to playtimes at Thelwall Infant School and Nursery. It sets out a framework within which all staff can operate and gives guidance on creating and facilitating opportunities for play and managing the risks and benefits associated with them.

This document is intended for:

- The Play Team
- All teaching staff
- All staff with classroom responsibilities
- School governors
- Parents
- Inspection teams

### **Commitment**

**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.'***

Thelwall Infant School and Nursery recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we aim to provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. We offer a rich choice of easily accessible play experiences for every child by providing a diverse range of opportunities, materials, and equipment, and enabling access to carefully considered outdoor spaces. At Thelwall Infant School and Nursery, we are committed to using our school vision and 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 health, happiness, and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social, and able to assess risks. These skills link closely to those of Thelwall Infant School and Nursery core values: friendship, co-operation, happiness, respect, honesty, thoughtfulness and perseverance, which were developed to encourage and teach essential life skills across the whole school day.

### **Rationale**

Play is central to the physical and social development of all children. Through play children learn how to negotiate, take risks and overcome obstacles. Most importantly, it is through play that children develop

friendships and a sense of belonging to a peer group.

Children spend up to 20% or 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. As the quality of opportunities for play improves children have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and playtime incidents, and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and are ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to children's enjoyment of life and to their growth and development; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Play is essential to the health and well-being of children and promotes the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive, and emotional strength and skills. Play can enhance problem solving, encourages a 'can do' approach and through its opportunities for social interaction supports language development, which is vital for all our children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with delayed speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is generated 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 in a supportive and well managed environment.

We surveyed the children in November 2021 for their views on play time, they highlight the need for improvements. Many were positive about the playground, but some children's comments included:

*'We need more things to play with.'*

*'We want to be able to write and draw.'*

*'We want more places to sit.'*

We will continue to gather information from the children through questionnaires and work with the school council to inform our plans for play development.

### **Definition of Play**

***'Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child.'* (National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and Playlink 2000).**

UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) General Comment 17:

Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled, and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental, or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility, and non-productivity.

Play 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 non-serious 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.

Taken together these characteristics enable children to express and refine skills and competencies associated with their holistic development, mental health, well-being and resilience, including, physical activity, emotion regulation, motivation and reward, responsiveness to stress, attachments to people and place, creativity and learning.

#### **At Thelwall Infant School and Nursery the children and staff think that:**

- play is exploring, having fun and exercising your imagination
- play helps develop new relationships and enables you to try new things
- play promotes independence and provides opportunities to develop problem solving skills, conflict resolution and resilience
- play allows you to be creative
- play develops co-operation and communication skills
- play may be solitary or social
- play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better
- children have a right to play with any of the playground resources regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- play is something you choose to do and that is fun and gives you freedom to express yourself
- play enables children to process their experiences of the world
- play should provide opportunities for challenge and risk but be free from unnecessary dangers and hazards
- an adult's role in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests, and to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.

#### **Risk and Benefit**

Research studies have found that the social, physical, emotional, and intellectual benefits to children of engaging with risk and uncertainty in play are substantial. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences and importantly less fearful of experiences that are new to them. Risky play or playing with uncertainty enables children to place themselves in situations that have a sense of jeopardy and risk without actually over-exposing themselves to the serious likelihood of harm (*Gordon & Esbjorn-Hargens, 2007; Pellis, 2013*).

When creating risky scenarios, like den building and climbing, in their play, children might more accurately be described as being in control of generating the feeling of being out of control. Ellen Sandseter (2010) found that these forms of play (children called, 'scary fun') were very important to children. Children develop this scary fun in their play because it's exhilarating and thrilling, gives them a sense of pride and achievement when mastering a new challenge, and influences their self-esteem, self-confidence, and peer relationships. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures.

Risk and challenge are not limited to physical risk but also include 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. Risk is an ever-present factor of life and therefore risk management skills are an essential life skill, the development of which is best supported through direct experience in a supportive environment.

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

At Thelwall Infant School and Nursery we are committed to developing a rich play environment and the support children need to develop these sorts of experiences in a carefully managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play and we adopt their stance:

***'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.'*** ([HSE, 2012](#))

***'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)

Thelwall Infant School and Nursery will use the Play Safety Forums guidance on [Managing Risk in Play Provision](#) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate enriching opportunities for children. 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 adopt the [OPAL R.A.P.I.D response to risk management](#) which includes, Risk-Benefit Assessments, Assemblies, this Play and Risk Management Policy, Inspections and Dynamic risk benefit assessments to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's rights and needs.

### **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 for staff) should be worn by children on the field areas. We suggest that outdoor clothing, such as waterproof trousers and coats should be worn during these months to protect school uniform. Children need to be responsible for managing their outdoor clothing. Wellies are to be kept and stored on welly stands at school.

## **Supervision**

As our site is relatively small and we are able to provide enough supervision to ensure risks can be managed appropriately during playtimes. Our approach to supervision is a 'ranging' model. This is where the supervisor moves around the play area, usually on a set course/schedule. The distance from pupils therefore differs but can be 20 metres or more away. They 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.

Our Play Co-ordinator has the role of overseeing the supervision at lunchtimes and may direct the other play team members to take on specific supervising roles if appropriate/necessary.

## **The adults role in play**

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

- allow the children 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

## **Play Environment**

We aim to provide an effective play spaces that:

- are bespoke
- are well located
- make use of natural elements
- provide a wide range of play experiences
- are accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children
- allow children of different ages to play together
- build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge
- are sustainable and appropriately maintained
- allow for change and evolution.

## **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.

This policy will be reviewed every year or more often if felt necessary.

**Agreed at a meeting of the Governing Body in February 2023**

**Signed..... Chair of Governors**

**Signed ..... Head Teacher**