

OPAL Play Policy



Maun Infant and Nursery School

Policy Date: November 2024

Next Review: November 2025



| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Next Review: November 2024 | Approving body FGB |
| Date approved | November 2023 |
| Consultation undertaken | Staff, parents, governors, children |
| Complies with Equality Act | ✓ |
| Supporting Policies | Health and Safety |
| Review date | November 2025 |
| Lead person | Natasha McGaw |
| Signed | |

OPAL Play Policy



Maun, a safe place where we...

Aspire to succeed;

Understand and welcome uniqueness;

Nurture and challenge.

Introduction

At Maun Infant and Nursery School we are committed to providing a '**whole**' education for children both inside and outside the classroom. Our school 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. We recognise the importance of play and understand the positive impact play has on children's development. The benefits of play are broad and encompassing.

- ✓ Health and wellbeing
- ✓ Early childhood development
- ✓ Cognitive development
- ✓ Physical activity and literacy
- ✓ Mental health
- ✓ Emotional and social wellbeing
- ✓ Learning about risk and challenge
- ✓ Play as therapy
- ✓ Resilience and character
- ✓ Supports self-regulation

To ensure that quality play is developed throughout our school, we have made the decision to partner with a play specialist company - OPAL (Outside Play and Learning) to develop '*Amazing play, every day for every child*', this policy outlines our daily commitment to providing the strategic and daily operational leadership needed to provide and maintain, safe, high quality play provision for all our children. The OPAL initiative aligns seamlessly with our school vision, school rules (**Be Ready, Be Respectful and Be Safe**) values, behaviour and anti-bullying policy.

As we strive to do our best for our children, 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 and develop our Maun Values.

- Independence
- Ambition
- Honesty
- Kindness
- Respect
- Cooperation

The OPAL 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."*

Definition and value of play

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

Here at Maun Infant and Nursery School, we recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe the role of the adults is to support the play process. Children will also have the opportunity for 'free range' play within the grounds.

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 and have the ability to self-regulate their own emotions. Through their play the children will experience emotions 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.

Aims

At Maun, in relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment where all children are happy, intrinsically motivated, relaxed and able to meet their potential.
- 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 showing kindness.
- 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.

Rights

Our school recognises 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). Children and young people should be able to take part freely in cultural activities, just like adults. The government should make it easy for them to do so whether or not that have a disability. 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 UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to have fun in the way they want to, by playing sports, watching films, or doing something else entirely. They have the right to rest, too.

Article 12 says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken

seriously. This principle recognises children and young people as actors in their own lives and applies at all times throughout a child's life.

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)

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 risk develops their ability to judge risk independently and learn new skills. All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the guidelines below:

- Recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals.
- All staff should self-assess and manage risk, e.g. areas sectioned off which are deemed to be 'high risk' or unsafe.
- Ensure risks are as clearly visible and understood by staff and children.
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed.
- Provide staff with training to supervise play setting.
- Staff are assigned to a zone on a termly rotation and it is expected that staff will move around throughout the playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing.
- Practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

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. Such decisions are often based on misunderstandings about what the law requires. The HSE has worked with the Play Safety Forum to produce a joint high-level statement that gives clear messages tackling these misunderstandings. HSE fully endorses the principles in this Statement.

This statement makes clear that:

- Play is important 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.

- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.

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'*.

'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 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.

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. The school 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, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Playleaders will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. During the lunchtime period, there will always be a first aider on duty and a minimum of 3 members of staff to supervise the play in the different zones.

The adult's role in play

Staff 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. All staff understand the different types of play and how they intervene in play in the intervention styles.

The playwork principles:

- Understand Need
- Understand Process
- Support Process
- Advocate the Play
- Create Spaces
- Learn and Reflect
- Understand Impact
- Choose intervention styles

Clothing

We would advise as staff that all children come prepared for outdoor/ all weathers play. During the colder and wet weather wellies or walking boots should be worn by staff and children when walking on the school field or in the woods. Children should also wear coats during cold weather. Children need to be responsible for managing their outdoor clothing. This includes being prepared before they go outside to play. Each class will have access to a 'Wellington Boot Station'. In the summer children will need sun cream and hats to protect themselves. Part of outdoor play means children may get muddy. We will endeavour to reduce this as much as possible but free play means allowing children to explore the areas they like. A uniform is designed to give children a sense of belonging but also a way to protect their 'good' clothes they wear at home.

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. OPAL play is aligned with our equality and diversity policy.

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.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. 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
- The OPAL working party, site manager and other staff will check for risks/dangers when they are outside with the children.
- Children will be made aware of possible risks and help to manage those by alerting staff to them.
- Our rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights.
- Our rich play setting increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop their love of the outdoors which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.
- The playground will be divided into zones to help staff supervise children to keep a sensible risk/benefit management system in place i.e. not all 'riskier' items together.

Article 31 <https://cypcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/General-Comment-17.pdf>

Article 12 <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-6C-12.pdf>

HSE <https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>