



Lakes Primary School

Policy for

OPAL Policy

Revised: September 2026

Review: September 2027

OPAL Play Policy

Lakes Primary School is committed to ensuring that this Play Policy informs all decisions that affect children's opportunities for play. We recognise the importance of play in supporting children's wellbeing, learning and development and are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership necessary to maintain high-quality play provision for all children.

Rationale

At Lakes Primary School, we believe that all children need opportunities to play that enable them to explore, investigate, create, experiment and interact with their environment. We are committed to providing a play environment that is welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all children, regardless of gender, disability, social or economic circumstances, ethnicity, culture, religion or background.

The OPAL Primary Programme demonstrates that:

“Better, more active and creative playtimes can mean happier and healthier children. Having happier, healthier, more active children usually results in a more positive attitude to learning, more effective classroom lessons, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioural issues, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life.”

We believe that our OPAL approach actively promotes and develops the skills, values and attitudes embodied in our SHINE Vision, supporting children to become resilient, confident, respectful and responsible learners.

Definition and Value of Play

Play is a process that is:

- Intrinsically motivated.
- Freely chosen by the child.
- Directed and controlled by the child.



Play has value in itself and provides opportunities for children to develop physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually and intellectually.

At Lakes Primary School, we believe in play:

- Is essential for children's health, wellbeing and overall development.
- Enables children to explore their physical and social environments.

- Enhances self-esteem and develops understanding of others through social interaction.
- Maintains children's enthusiasm for learning and encourages curiosity and creativity.
- Provides opportunities to build and strengthen relationships.
- Develops communication, cooperation and negotiation skills.
- Supports children in learning to balance personal freedoms with responsibilities to others.
- Allows children to experience and manage a wide range of emotions, including success, challenge, frustration and achievement.
- Encourages self-confidence, independence, problem solving and decision making.
- Helps children become more aware of their surroundings and develop their ability to assess and manage risk.
- Builds resilience and perseverance, supporting our school value of never give up.

Staff have identified improved emotional wellbeing, increased resilience and stronger risk-assessment skills as some of the most significant benefits of high-quality play provision.

Aims

Through our OPAL Play Programme, Lakes Primary School aims to:

- Provide a varied, stimulating and challenging play environment.
- Encourage children to develop resilience, determination and a willingness to take on new challenges.
- Support children in taking appropriate risks through a balanced and common-sense approach to risk management.
- Promote confidence, self-belief and problem-solving skills.
- Enable children to develop respect for themselves, others and the environment.
- Ensure play opportunities are inclusive and accessible for all children.
- Support children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide environments that inspire imaginative, creative and exploratory play.

- Create opportunities for learning across the curriculum through play.
- Promote independence, cooperation and teamwork.
- Build both emotional and physical resilience.
- Foster the values and behaviours identified within our SHINE Vision.

Children's Rights

Lakes Primary School recognises the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including:

- **Article 31:** The right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities.
- **Article 12:** The right to express views and be heard on matters affecting them.

We are committed to respecting these rights and ensuring children's views are actively sought when developing and improving play provision.

Risk and Benefit

We recognise that:

"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)

Lakes Primary School adopts the Health and Safety Executive guidance Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach and follows a risk-benefit approach to managing play opportunities.

We acknowledge that risk-taking is an essential feature of children's play and development. Our aim is to provide a stimulating environment where children can encounter and manage acceptable levels of risk while remaining protected from serious harm.

In addition to formal risk-benefit assessments, children are encouraged to engage in dynamic risk management, helping them identify hazards, assess risks and make informed decisions within a supportive environment.

Through these experiences, children develop:

- Resilience.

- Self-belief.
- Creativity.
- Independence.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Innovation and adaptability.

These attributes closely support our SHINE values and commitment to developing confident and capable learners.

Supervision

Lakes Primary School recognises that effective play provision requires appropriate supervision that balances safety with children's need for independence.

The school adopts OPAL's three recognised supervision models:

- Direct Supervision
- Remote Supervision
- Ranging Supervision

With the exception of children who are new to Reception and are still becoming familiar with the environment, we believe that constant direct supervision is neither practical nor beneficial for children's development.

Adults will:

- Be visible and easily identifiable through the use of high-visibility clothing where appropriate.
- Remain accessible to children at all times.
- Patrol designated areas to monitor play and emerging risks.
- Support children in managing risk independently whenever possible.

Our Play Leaders have received OPAL training and play a significant role in developing and supporting play opportunities across the school. The School Council also contributes to evaluating and developing play provision, ensuring children's voices remain central to decision making.

The Adult's Role in Play

Lakes Primary School is committed to supporting children's play through trained staff who understand and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles.

Adults will seek to:

- Create and maintain an environment that stimulates rich and varied play experiences.
- Facilitate rather than direct children's play.
- Support children in making their own choices and decisions.
- Provide access to a wide range of materials, resources and opportunities.
- Intervene only when necessary to ensure safety, inclusion and wellbeing.
- Join in play when invited by children.

The primary role of the playworker is to create an environment that maximises children's opportunities for self-directed play while enriching experiences through thoughtful planning, resources and positive relationships.

A skilled playworker enables children to explore, discover, create and learn through play while fostering a culture of respect, curiosity, confidence and enjoyment.