



# Hylton Castle OPAL Play Policy



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## 1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

## 2. Rationale

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. 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.

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."*

At Hylton Castle our school vision is that every child will 'dream, believe, achieve.'

Our Core Values are 'Ambition, Consideration, Creativity, Determination and Responsibility' values that underpin positive play experiences.

## 3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. 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, different concepts and different 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.

We believe, *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*, resulting in reduced levels and frequency of disruption in lessons. We believe attendance will improve and engagement levels will rise. We believe personal development will thrive along with our school core values of ambition, responsibility, consideration, determination, and creativity which are important for their learning and future success.

#### **4. Aims**

In relation to play our school aims to:

- ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- 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 which 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.

#### **5. 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). We acknowledge that we have a duty take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

#### **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.'*

**The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document ‘*Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach*’ (September 2012) as the principle 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*’.

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. In the words of 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.

At Hylton Castle we want children to ‘dream, believe, achieve,’ experience risk and challenge and building determination and resilience. We believe these skills will build children’s personal characteristics and above all, develop the whole child who can take their place as active citizens in society.

Please see appendix 1 H&SE Managing Risk Statement.

## **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. The school recognizes OPAL’s three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision will take remote and ranging 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.

## **8. The adult’s role in play**

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. 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. Please see Appendix 2 – Playwork Principles.

## **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.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. A rich play setting 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, a key foundation for caring for the environment.

We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/best-play/>



## **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*

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<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])

*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 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 benchmarks 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
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.

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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.

## – an overview

The Playwork Principles establish a professional and ethical framework for playwork and must be seen as a whole. The Playwork Principles underpin every aspect of playworkers' work. They define the playwork approach and provide a shared understanding of what playworkers do.

The Playwork Principles describe what is special and unique about play (Principles 1 and 2). They provide a working definition of play and why it is different to other behaviours. They also describe the playwork approach and point of view when working with children and young people

(Principles 3 to 8).

The Playwork Principles are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

It is vital that playworkers share a common understanding so they are all able to recognise and describe play behaviour and decide how to respond. This common approach or viewpoint helps to say what the playwork profession is and does.

### Are principles just rules?

Although there are some similarities, principles are not rules. Principles are sometimes described as a philosophy or ethos, and in this case they cover the beliefs and working practices that make playwork different from other professions.

### History

Before the Playwork Principles there were the Playwork Assumptions and Values, which were developed during drafting of the Playwork National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the early 1990s. During the 2002 review of the National Occupational Standards for Playwork at level 2, playworkers who were consulted saw the need to revise them.

In the meantime, in Wales we realised that what was said in *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment* (Hughes 2001) did not match with the Assumptions and Values for Playwork. In late 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government gave Play Wales money to lead a UK review and consultation on the Playwork Assumptions and Values. Leading play and playwork organisations across the UK agreed to contribute to the process.

There were three phases of consultation with playworkers and others who had an interest. A scrutiny group of experienced playworkers and playwork trainers from across the UK was recruited to act as an honest broker

overseeing the consultations through which the Principles were developed.

The group evaluated the consultation responses and revised the successive drafts of the proposed Principles to best represent the majority view. The Playwork Principles were signed off as fit for purpose and subsequently endorsed by SkillsActive (the Sectors Skills Council for Playwork) in 2005.

### **Ownership**

The Playwork Principles are not fixed in stone and they do not belong to a particular organisation or person – they belong to all playworkers; the profession as a whole. The Playwork Principles are held in trust for the UK playwork profession by the Scrutiny Group.

They represent the beliefs of people in the playwork field and can be changed (through consultation) if enough of us feel they are out of date or don't meet our needs.

### **Issues**

One issue that has raised concerns equal opportunities and the fact that no explicit mention is made of disabled children.

This does not mean disabled children were not considered during the writing of the Principles or that they are covered by a different set of Principles. On the contrary much time was devoted to considering issues of discrimination.

Where the Playwork Principles refer to children and young people, they mean all children and young people whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need.

All the Principles apply to all children and to all playworkers. We cannot pick and choose – they exist as a body of beliefs that are applied together.

For more information about the inclusion debate in relation to the Playwork Principles visit:

## **The Playwork Principles**

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.



## Ethics and playwork

The term ethic has come to mean ‘a rule of conduct, a moral code, moral values, principles or standards.’ Ethics refer to morality; the sense of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. In playwork terms, principles are a moral guide to the relationship between the playworker and others. The Playwork Principles are, the ethics or moral guide of the playwork profession, but of course they are not the only ethics that might influence what we do in our lives.

Examples of the three main types of ethics:

- **Personal ethics**  
‘I do this as I believe it is the right (true) thing to do.’
- **Professional ethics**  
‘I do this because I believe it is my duty.’
- **Global ethics**  
‘I do this because I believe it will result in a better world.’

‘From a playworker perspective the Playwork Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork’.

This means that they describe the approach and frame how to think about working with children as professional playworkers. However, we should recognise that we might have a different set of ethics that we use in our personal life.

Our culture, home experience and social upbringing all influence our own set of ethics. It’s important to look at what informs our personal ethical standpoint as there is a possibility it might conflict with the professional ethical standpoint we are being asked to agree to at work.

Also, in a world where there are many competing agendas that have an impact on children, the nature of playwork and its growing professional status mean it has become more important than ever that there is an agreed code of practice for playworkers to protect children and young people using play services as well as to define the duty of the professional.

For more information about the Playwork Principles visit: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples)

## Reference

Bob Hughes (2001) *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment*. Cardiff: Play Wales.



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