



St Patrick's Play Policy

1. Commitment

At St Patrick's, we believe that **play is fundamental to children's wellbeing, learning, and healthy development**. We recognise that high-quality play supports emotional regulation, resilience, confidence, social connection, and a sense of belonging.

This policy reflects our whole-school commitment to a **psychologically responsive environment** where children feel safe, valued, and supported through strong, positive relationships.

We will use this policy to guide decision-making about play, ensure consistent practice across the school, and provide the leadership needed to continually develop and sustain excellent play opportunities.

2. Rationale

We acknowledge that childhood has changed, with many children experiencing reduced freedom to play, fewer community play spaces, and increased screen use. We also recognise that some children have experienced **trauma, loss, or disruptions in attachment**, and require emotionally informed play opportunities that allow them to explore, heal, connect and self-regulate.

We are committed to ensuring all children experience **rich, freely chosen play**, because it:

- supports cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development
- strengthens relationships and builds trust
- promotes resilience and problem-solving
- allows children to process experiences, including traumatic ones
- fosters joy, belonging, creativity, and curiosity

Play is therefore a core element of our curriculum, ethos, and care for children.

3. Definition of Play

Drawing on the voices of our children, staff and community, we define play as:

A self-directed, intrinsically motivated and freely chosen activity, undertaken for enjoyment, exploration, connection or challenge.

Play may be loud or quiet, energetic or still, social or solitary, imaginative or physical. For many children, especially those with trauma histories, play is also a powerful way to express feelings, seek comfort, repair relationships, and feel safe.

We recognise play as something **children lead and adults sensitively support**, not something adults control.

4. Rights of the Child

We uphold 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 of children to express their views in matters affecting them.

We actively listen to children, value their perspectives, and involve them in shaping the play environment.

5. Equality and Access

We are committed to providing **equitable and barrier-free access** to play for all children, regardless of age, ability, background, experience of trauma, emotional needs, or any protected characteristic.

We ensure that:

- all children have access to a variety of play types and environments
- play provision reflects diverse needs, including sensory, relational, and therapeutic needs
- resources are inclusive and adaptable
- adults understand how trauma, attachment, and neurodiversity may influence play behaviour

This policy aligns with our Equality Policy and SEND Policy to ensure consistency across the school.

6. Benefit and Risk

We acknowledge the significant developmental benefits of play and our responsibility to balance these with appropriate risk management. We recognise that **challenge and risk are essential components of high-quality play**, and help children learn to navigate uncertainty, make informed choices, and build resilience.

In line with the OPAL guidance and statutory advice

3.2 GUIDANCE Play Policy

- we follow the Health and Safety Executive's *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach*
- we use *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide*
- we use both **written** and **dynamic** risk assessment
- we support children to **identify, assess, and manage risk themselves**

We understand that risk-taking in play also supports children recovering from trauma, as it builds confidence, trust, and autonomy.

7. Supervision Styles

We adopt a **relationship-rich, emotionally attuned, and developmentally appropriate style of supervision**, informed by OPAL's recommended approaches

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Adults:

- supervise **with awareness**, not micromanagement
- maintain safety while allowing freedom and independence
- use relational connection rather than control to support children
- recognise play as children's time, with adults as responsive supporters
- use attunement, warmth, and curiosity to help children who struggle with play due to trauma, emotional needs, or limited social experience

Our supervision approach balances children's need for **freedom, trust, and exploration** with consistent adult availability and emotional safety.

8. The Adults' Role in Play

Adults in our school play a crucial role in fostering a psychologically safe play environment. Guided by the Playwork Principles and our trauma-informed ethos, adults will:

- build strong, positive, predictable relationships
- offer emotional co-regulation when children need it
- observe sensitively and step in only when needed
- support inclusion and encourage social connection
- model empathy, problem-solving and restorative interactions
- help children reflect on feelings and experiences through play
- ensure the play environment remains rich, supportive and enabling

Senior leaders commit to providing ongoing training, reflection opportunities, and resources to ensure staff can fulfil this role confidently.

9. Environment

We believe that a **rich, dynamic, and varied play environment** supports curiosity, imagination, learning and emotional wellbeing. It is particularly important for children who have experienced trauma, as it allows safe exploration, creativity, and sensory regulation.

Our environment will include:

- natural and loose-parts materials
- opportunities for physical challenge and movement
- quiet, nurturing and cosy spaces for regulation
- areas for creativity, building, imaginative worlds and role play
- sensory experiences (e.g., water, sand, textures, nature)
- spaces for social, solitary, energetic and calm play

We draw on the *Best Play* criteria for a rich play environment to guide continual development.

10. Implementation through Strategy and Action Planning

In line with OPAL recommendations and tools

3.2 GUIDANCE Play Policy

we will:

- create a **play strategy** outlining our long-term vision for excellent play across all areas
- develop a **SMART play action plan** reviewed annually
- commit to continual improvement over a **three- to five-year period**
- ensure leadership responsibility through a **Play Champion Governor**
- regularly consult with children, staff and families

This ensures play remains a central, evolving part of our school culture.

11. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if needed, with input from:

- children
- parents and carers
- staff
- senior leaders
- governors

Success will be measured through observations, surveys, feedback and the OPAL audit tools.