Summercroft Primary School – An Academy School
Achieving through care, challenge and creativity
Play Policy
Non-Statutory Policy

Play Policy

Non-Statutory

Date of Approval: October 2026
This policy will be reviewed by the FA&R Committee annually
Date for Review: October 2028
Signature Date October 2026 Head Teacher
Signature Date October 2026 Co- Chair of Governors

1. Commitment

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

2. Rationale

Summercroft Primary 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. The OPAL Primary 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."

3. 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. It may be serious or light-hearted. It may produce something or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children an opportunity to be creative, to make decisions and to assess and manage risks. At Summercroft Primary 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 that the role of the adults is to support the play process.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

● Enabling children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as enabling different concepts and ideas.

● Being critical to children's health and wellbeing and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.

● Working to enhance 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.

● Enabling 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.

● Requiring ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.

● Encouraging self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.

● Maintaining children's openness to learning, developing their capabilities and allowing them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

4. Aims

In relation to play, Summercroft Primary 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 creatively.

● Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learn about the world around them - ensuring children are always compassionate and resilient.

● Promote independence and teamwork within children - ensuring that children maintain their positive attitudes of self-belief and resilience.

● Build emotional and physical resilience.

● Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment

● Ensure adults respect these rights, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative justice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime.

5. Rights

Summercroft Primary 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 to 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.'

Managing Risk in Play Provision:

An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012) Summercroft Primary School will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach

(September 2012) as the principal 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 (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

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'.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision; however, for primary school playtimes, there are no stated ratios. During the school day, there should be one or more adult's present outdoors. Summercroft Primary School has generous ratios of adults to children for playtimes and lunchtimes. We recognise OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging.

Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can move around the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

8. The Adult's Role in Play

Summercroft Primary School 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 can enrich 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.

9. Equality and Diversity

Through providing a rich play offer, meeting every child's needs, Summercroft Primary School 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

Summercroft Primary School believes 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, as we know that a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children to 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, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

Appendix A

HSE 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 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 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 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 considering 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.