

Blofield Primary School

Play Policy

Reviewed by: Sarah Culley-Barber & Teresa Doggett

Approved by Governors: 24th March 2025

Review: Spring 2027

Commitment

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'



Blofield Primary believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. At Blofield we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. These skills link in to our school values of kindness, resilience and aspirational which are interwoven into everything we do, including how we play. We acknowledge the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31 that 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.

Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, the use of screens and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all are children. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

We surveyed the children in July 2022 for their views on play time, they highlight the need for improvement. Many were positive about the playground, but some children's comments included; *'there is not enough to do'*, *'we need more things to play with'*, *'the playground needs an extra things'*.

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

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:
'encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live'.

This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- being critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- enabling children to explore the physical and social environment, different concepts and different ideas.
- enhancing 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.
- requiring ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- 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.
- encouraging self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- maintaining children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

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.
- promote independence and teamwork within children.

- build emotional and physical resilience.

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 (2012)

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

‘Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children’s development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world’.
(DCFS)

At Blofield we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that:

‘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 dangers’. (HSE, 2013)

Blofield will use the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure ([Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/childrensplay/)) (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments (**Appendix 2**) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

Adult’s role in play

Adult’s role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school has worked with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Blofield. We were awarded with OPAL Gold status in November 2023. Teaching assistants, learning support assistants and dedicated midday

supervisors, take on the role of the Play Team. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. The Play Team ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. 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. Staff will follow the Behaviour and relationships Policy with respect of purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour in order to maintain a ‘whole school approach’.

Children’s Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (Play Charter) (Appendix 4). In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences
- Respect and look after each other their environment, equipment, toys and storage
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children’s policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and with School Council.

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

Environment

At Blofield we believe a rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in teambuilding 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.

We will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things
- give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value
- Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.

- Promote children's pride for the outdoor space that belongs to them.

Appendix 1

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

See PDF attached

Appendix 2

Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Risk Assessment Date.....

Assessed by.....

Description of activity/play resource (loose parts)	Foreseeable risk	Present actions to mitigate risk	Any further Action to mitigate risk	Nominated person	Action Date

Other related polices – Health and Safety

Appendix 3

Structure of adult roles in practice

OPAL Team

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at Blofield. It consists of:

Play Co-ordinator (Leads and manages strategy) – the Headteacher: Teresa Doggett & from 1st September 2025, Vicky Buxton

Play Leader (Leads and manages playtimes) – Sarah Culley-Barber

Caretaker – Nick Woodards

Parent Play Champion – Kirsty Hamlet

Governor – Paul Culley-Barber

Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy.

Appendix 4

Blofield Children's Play Charter

(School Council January 2023)

We have the right to have fun at playtimes.

We have the responsibility to make sure that our play does not stop other people from having fun.

We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do.

We have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect ourselves or others in a negative way.

We have the right to choose who we play with.

We have the responsibility to make sure that no one is forced to do something they don't want to.

We have the right play with lots of different things (play resources) and have a well looked after environment.

We have the responsibility to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and things.

We have the right to explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks.

We have the responsibility to think about what we are doing and talk to the Play Team about the risks we are taking if they ask us to.