

Chalk Ridge Primary School



Last reviewed November 2025. Next review November 2026.

Headteacher: Miss Sue Jackson

This is a school policy supported by OPAL College.

Play and Risk Management Policy

Introduction

At Chalk Ridge Primary School, we recognise that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. We are committed to upholding the children's right to play, as enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989).

We aim to provide high-quality, enjoyable play experiences for all children across the school. We will refer to this policy in all decisions that affect our children's play and it will provide the strategic and operational leadership guidance needed to maintain quality play provision.

To support the development of high-quality playtimes, the school has invested in the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme. We will follow the principles and practices recommended by OPAL to ensure every child has an amazing playtime every day.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to balance the risks and benefits of play, understanding that play is essential for children's well-being and development.

- We acknowledge that contemporary life often restricts children's opportunities for self-directed play outside of school, making school playtimes even more essential.
- Overly controlled and restrictive environments, driven by a risk-averse culture and fear of litigation, can limit challenge and prevent children from expanding their learning and capabilities.
- The long-term risks associated with a lack of freedom to play (such as increased sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and mental ill-health) far outweigh the minor physical risks children encounter in play.
- Following the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statement, Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach, our aim is not to eliminate risk but to strike the right balance.

At Chalk Ridge Primary School, we adopt a balanced approach to risk management that loosens adult control while maintaining a 'safe enough' environment for play. We aim to provide spaces that offer:

- Freedom for children to engage with uncertainty.
- A relaxed atmosphere where adults support play rather than overly manage it.
- Recognition that children's natural risk-taking builds resilience, confidence, and well-being.

Definition of Play

Play is defined as: 'any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves'. It is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation, and undertaken for its own sake. At its

core, play is about joy, freedom, and exploration. Children told us that play is fun, they want more things to play with, and that everybody should be able to play the way they want.

Unique Features of Play

Our play environments and staff practices will focus on nurturing the unique features of play which include:

- **Personal control** (freedom to decide actions).
- **Intrinsic motivation** (driven by joy and curiosity).
- **Social** (pro-social, developing cooperation and empathy).
- **Emotional resonance** (exploring emotions and processing experiences).
- **Flexibility and variability** (adapting to change and being creative).
- **Imagination and pretence** (creating imagined scenarios).
- **Novelty and uncertainty** (developing resilience and risk perception).

Scope

This policy applies to all members of our school community, including pupils, staff, parents, and volunteers. It is relevant during the school day, on school premises, and during school-sponsored events.

Responsibilities

School Leaders

The Senior Leadership Team, including the Headteacher, is responsible for the strategic oversight and cultural embedding of the Play Policy.

- Provide strategic and operational leadership to ensure the policy is upheld in all decisions affecting play. The Curricular Lead for Play is a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- Secure funding and allocate resources (staff, time, training, and materials) necessary to maintain and develop the play environment.
- Ensure all staff, including permanent and temporary Play Team members, receive appropriate induction and ongoing training in the Playwork Principles and dynamic risk management.
- Ensure the annual review and update of this Play Policy and the associated Play Strategy/Action Plan.
- Champion the balanced approach to risk with the governing body, parents, and the wider community.

Staff

All staff on duty during playtimes and our wraparound provision are part of the Play Team and are primarily responsible for facilitating play and managing risk dynamically.

- Apply the R.A.P.I.D. approach in real-time, intervening only in cases of imminent and serious harm, and encouraging children to assess and manage risks themselves.
- Adopt a 'remote and ranging' supervision style, intervening to support and enhance play rather than to control it, in line with the Playwork Principles.
- Undertake daily visual checks of their assigned play zone and its resources, removing any 'unreasonable/bad hazards' before play begins.
- Ensure loose parts are returned to designated storage areas safely and promptly at the end of the session.
- Record and report all significant incidents, near-misses, and maintenance needs to the Working Group.

Pupils

Pupils are central to the policy and are considered co-creators of the play environment.

- Use the play environment and resources freely, safely, and creatively to explore, invent, and discover.
- Learn to assess the risks in their own play and make sensible decisions about safety and challenge.
- Ensure their play behaviours do not prevent others from playing in a way that is valuable to them (upholding the 'right to play').
- Take care of all equipment and loose parts, and collaborate with staff to tidy resources after use.

Governors

Governors are responsible for the statutory and financial compliance of the policy.

- The Governor Play Champion to monitor the effectiveness of the Play Policy and the school's adherence to its commitment to play.
- Ensure the school's Health and Safety Policy aligns with the balanced, risk-benefit approach to children's play.
- Formally endorse this Play Policy and commit to its successful implementation.
- The Governor Play Champion will be a member of the Core Working Group.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians support the policy by understanding and promoting its philosophy.

- Contribute suitable loose parts and resources to the play environment, as requested by the school.
- Ensure children are dressed appropriately for all weather conditions, including wearing waterproof coats and wellies, to allow full access to the outdoor environment.
- Familiarise themselves with this policy and support the school's balanced approach to risk and challenge, understanding that minor bumps and scrapes are a natural part of healthy play.
- The Parent Play Champion will be a member of the Core Working Group.

Providing for Play and Environment

1. Access and Freedom

We want children to have freedom of movement across the whole school grounds. We recognise the value of children of different ages and abilities playing together.

- Children will be allowed to be out of sight for short periods of time to enable activities like building dens and playing hide-and-seek, with adults on hand to offer help or guidance.
- We will apply the principle of 'everyone has a right to play', meaning children have freedom to play in ways of value to them, as long as this does not prevent others from doing the same.
- Children's access to playtimes will only be restricted if their behaviours present an unreasonable risk to themselves or others.
- To enable full site access in all seasons, wellies and coats will be made part of the school uniform, and suitable storage will be provided.

2. Play Environment

We will enhance and extend opportunities by maximising the play value of the school grounds. This includes providing children with easy access to a large amount and wide variety of loose parts (junk materials and natural resources) that they can use creatively.

Risk Management Strategy (R.A.P.I.D.)

Our risk management strategy is an ongoing process informed by **OPAL's R.A.P.I.D. approach**.

Element	Description
Risk-benefit assessments	Written and dynamic assessments.

Element	Description
Assemblies (CINI)	Children's Assemblies (Celebrating, Informing, Negotiating, Innovating)
Policy	This Play and Risk Management Policy.
Inspections	Technical and routine inspections.
Dynamic risk management	Real-time assessment of emerging risks.

1. **Taking a Risk-Benefit Approach**
2. **Written and Dynamic Assessment**
3. **Good and Bad Hazards**
4. **Inspection and Maintenance**

Supervision and The Adults' Role

We will use OPAL's three models of supervision: direct, remote, and ranging.

- While direct supervision may be used for our youngest children, the majority of playtime supervision will be remote and ranging.
- The school grounds will be divided into supervision zones with an adult patrolling each area, plus an additional 'floating' member of staff for an overview of the whole site.
- Adults will communicate via walkie-talkies.

The Play Team's Role

The staff involved in supervising playtimes are called the Play Team. Their role is to facilitate and enhance children's play, enabling all children to play in ways of value to them, and encouraging children to assess the risks and benefits of their own play behaviours.

- The Play Team will be trained to work in accordance with the Playwork Principles.
- The goal is to facilitate an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.
- The Play Team will be provided with regular opportunities to reflect on and develop their practice.

Whole School Communication

We are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences they want and need.

- Play Assemblies are a key aspect of our risk management strategy. These will occur at least once per half term using OPAL's C.I.N.I format (Celebrating, Informing, Negotiating, and Innovating).
- These assemblies routinely include conversations with children around various aspects of risk management.
- The school will maintain an OPAL working group to maintain a whole-school approach.

Conclusion

This Play and Risk Management Policy represents Chalk Ridge Primary School's unwavering commitment to the child's right to play, as defined by Article 31 of the UNCRC. By embracing the OPAL programme, we have moved away from a culture of risk elimination towards a balanced approach to risk where we actively assess the benefits of play against any hazards. We believe that providing a rich, challenging, and loose-parts-led environment is essential for nurturing children who are resilient, creative, confident, and able to manage risk independently.

This document serves as the foundation for our ongoing play development. Its success relies on the collective effort of the Senior Leadership Team, Governors, Play Team, parents, and most importantly, the

pupils themselves. We are committed to a process of continuous improvement, guided by the children's voice and the principles of playwork, to ensure that playtime remains a high-quality and joyful part of every child's day at Chalk Ridge Primary School.

Reference relevant legislation and statutory guidance that underpins this policy:

- International Convention: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)
 - Article 31
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Statement: 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting A Balanced Approach' 2012
- Playwork Principles 2005
- Equality Act 2010

Links to Other Policies

- Health & Safety Policy
- Relationships and Positive Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Complaints Policy