



# Play Policy

**This policy was reviewed in May 2025.**

**This policy was reviewed by the Governing Body in May 2025**

**This policy will be reviewed in May 2026**

*(unless any changes are necessary prior to this date)*

**BELONGING | BELIEVING | ACHIEVING**

*"You are the light of the world."*

*Matthew 5:14*

## 1. 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.'**

St Matthew's Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. Inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. 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 are key characteristics for our children to live out the school vision, "You are the light of the world"; Belonging, Believing and Achieving.

## 2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play; this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play 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 issues, 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 children. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types, such as 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.

### 3. Definition 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, coordination and fitness)
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination)
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes)
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances)

At St Matthew's, we aim for play to:

- allow children to be creative and co-operative
- develop an understanding that play may be solitary or social
- invite investigation and exploration
- help children to be happy and healthy
- enable children to play with anything they choose from the playground resources (as long as it is safe) regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- enable children to process their experiences of the world

We ensure that adults' role in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests. Adults can help to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.

### 4. Risk and Benefit

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 St Matthew's 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)**

We will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) (**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.

#### 5. **Adults' Role in Play**

**We are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies as part of our Collective Worship, School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.**

Adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. Teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors 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. They will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

#### 6. **Children's Role in Play**

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy. (Appendix 4) 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's environment, equipment and toys.
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that play times 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 the School Council.

## 7. Environment

At St Matthew's 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
- ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- 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
- ensure that the playground be an integrated area where all children from Nursery to Year Six can play safely
- 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**

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

**Appendix 2**

Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet



**Risk Assessment Date.....**

**Assessed by.....**

	Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or Utility Or Related Policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action Date

### 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 St Matthew's. It consists of:~~

~~The Headteacher  
Play Co-ordinator  
Play Leader  
School Council  
Parent Governor~~

##### St Matthew's Play Team

~~All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes staff all should act as Play Makers.~~

~~However more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:~~

##### ~~**Play Co-ordinator – Teacher**~~

~~(Leads and manages strategy)~~

##### ~~**Play Leader – TA**~~

~~(Leads and manages playtimes)~~

##### ~~**Assistant Play Leader**~~

~~(Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)~~

##### ~~**Play Makers**~~

~~(Support children's' play as describe in paragraph 5)~~

### Appendix 4

#### Children's Play Policy

## St Matthew's CE Primary School Play Policy

- We have the **right** to have fun at playtimes. We have the **responsibility** to make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.
- 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 others in a negative way.
- We have the **right** to choose who we play with. We have the **responsibility** that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.
- We have the **right** play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment. We have the **responsibility** to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.
- We have the **right** to explore, be creative and take thoughtful, safe risks. We have the **responsibility** to think about what we are doing and talk to a play maker about the risks we are taking if they ask us too.