

Coten End Primary School Play Policy (OPAL)

1. What are you attempting to do and why?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most complete statement of children's rights and remains the most widely-ratified intentional human rights treaty in history. Comprised of 54 articles, the Convention encompasses all areas of a child's life and the rights that apply to every child without discrimination. These articles establish civil, political, economic, social and culture rights, "irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status" (Article 2). It is the responsibility of adults and governments to work together to ensure that all children are able to access and benefit from these rights.

Whilst the convention must be seen as a whole, all of the rights are linked and are no more important than one another. At Coten End, we understand that the right to relax and play (Article 31) and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13) are as important as the right to be safe from violence (Article 19) and the right to education (Article 28).

Children within Britain spend approximately 20% (1.4 years of their entire time in school) playing during breaks and lunch. With each child participating in up to 600 playtimes per year (Ridger et al., 2006), we understand the importance of ensuring that the play offer provided to all children at Coten End is of a high-quality and maximises opportunities for children to develop fundamental skills that can be applied to ensure future success.

As a result, we passionately believe that Coten End promotes and supports children's rights as outlined within the UNCRC and ensures that the value of meaningful play is championed. We believe that all children have a right to access enriching play opportunities that enable them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect the environment around them.

We believe that the stimulating, accessible play opportunities we provide in consultation with our children will enable them all to develop the Coten End values (collaboration, courage, curiosity, determination, kindness and responsibility) whilst maintaining the fundamental rule of 'Be respectful; be safe.' As a school, our aims are underpinned by core values, including:

Learning for everyone, learning from everyone.

To achieve this vision, we aim:

- To enable us all to be receptive, self-motivated and confident in our learning.
- To encourage the development of all our skills in a safe, stimulating and rewarding learning environment.
- To celebrate the achievements of ourselves and others.
- To nurture a caring school environment where there is trust, respect and honesty.
- To encourage and support families' involvement in learning inside and outside of school.
- To develop a positive self-image and pride in ourselves and our school.
- To involve the local, national and global community in our learning.
- To provide an outdoor learning environment that promotes creativity and enjoyment.
- To prepare learners to be responsible members of our diverse society.
- To promote positive social, emotional, spiritual and cultural values.



VALUES



This rationale for play is one shared by the OPAL Primary Programme rationale 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."

In adopting this approach to play, we are able to build the foundations of a successful future for all our children whilst ensuring we respect the UNCRC and its articles including:

- Article 31 (leisure, play and culture): Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
- Article 12 (respect for the views of the child): Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.
- Article 28 (right to education): Every child has the right to an education.

2. What is play and why is it important?

Play is defined as a process, which 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 participants. At Coten End, we believe that play has many benefits that help in the development of the children we serve, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- **Curiosity and courage:** Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- **Kindness and collaboration:** Play enhances 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.
- **Collaboration and responsibility:** Play requires ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Play enables 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
- **Determination:** Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- **Curiosity, determination and courage:** Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

3. What are the school's aims?

At Coten End, we are passionate about play and aim 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.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

4. What rights do children have for play?

At Coten End, we recognise and advocate 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). As professionals, we acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and to listen to children's views on their play and ensuring that play is enriching and engaging.

As a school community, we pride ourselves on ensuring that all aspects of our educational offer are child-centred. Prior to establishing a new play offer, we surveyed the children to establish what their experience of playtime was like in order to make changes that support and improve the 'play offer' we provide to children. The role of OPAL Ambassador and ongoing implementation of Coten End's 'Smart School Council' will ensure that children at Coten End always have a say in their playtimes.

5. How are risks managed?

'Play is great for children's wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weight 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)

'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.'

(Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a balanced approach (Joint HSE/Play Safety Forum High Level Statement)).

In managing the different risks posed by play, we will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document, "Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach" (September, 2021) as the principal value statement informing our approach to managing risk in play. As a result, we will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012) to ensure that children are able to learn about risk and develop skills to manage it appropriately.

The Managing Risk in Play Provision guidance explains that 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.

The guidance continues to identifying aspects for what 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.

We feel passionately that children need to experience risk and challenge. 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 encourage acceptable risks as part of 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.'

As a result, through courage and collaboration, children will be better prepared to identify and overcome challenges as well as manage potential risks safely to achieve a desired outcome. Sometimes, this will require children to have multiple attempts to be successful, which will highlight the importance of determination and growth mindset. Through a risk-benefit approach to play, children will develop responsibility to ensure that all children engaged in play remain safe; that equipment is used appropriately and to consider the needs of others. In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments, we will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

As children will be more actively engaged in play, they will be able to develop their ability to empathise and show kindness to one another. As such, enriching play will enable us to support children to develop and show the core values that we, at Coten End, hope to instil. If the behaviour of children poses a risk or does not follow the core values of "Be Safe, Be Respectful" a natural consequence will be implemented as part of our restorative approach to behaviour.

As a school community, we acknowledge that, at times, children may sustain minor injuries as a result of play, but we recognise that this part of a process in which risk management is developed by the children themselves. At all times, the relevant Health and Safety Guidance will be adhered to. We believe that, whilst children may suffer minor injuries, this is a low risk and that such risks are far outweighed by the benefits the children will receive.

6. How will the children be supervised?

The law requires that children in school have appropriate levels of supervision. However, for primary school playtimes, there are no stated ratios. During the school day, there should be one or more adults present outdoors. We recognise OPAL's three models of supervision:

- Direct
- Remote
- Ranging

Apart from for the first term of our Reception cohort when these children do require support in accessing our outdoor environment, we do not require direct supervision of children during play and nor is it beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult if required. Supervisors will patrol

large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and the levels of risk likely to be emerging. Our risk-benefit approach will always be at the forefront of our decision making when considering appropriate supervision.

In order to provide children with a variety of play, the school grounds have been sectioned into areas, which are then supervised using remote and ranging techniques.

7. How are safeguarding practices continued during play times?

'We recognise our moral and statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils. We endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We are alert to the signs of child-on-child abuse and follow our procedures to ensure that children receive effective support, protection, and justice.'

Child on Child Abuse Policy, Coten End Primary School.

Whilst appropriate supervision levels will be maintained through remote and ranging supervision models, there are times when children may not always be visible (such as playing in forested areas or when going to the toilet). At Coten End, we are firm in our drive to ensure that all children are safeguarded through the implementation of robust procedures (see Safeguarding Policy) and have worked to ensure that our supervision continues to safeguard children (notably child on child abuse) whilst ensuring that quality play is not jeopardised by direct supervision.

8. What is the role of adults' in facilitating and supporting play?

At Coten End, we will support children to maximise the benefits that can be gained from enriching and engaging play through the provision of trained staff, who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles (<https://www.childsplayclub.co.uk/about/playwork-principle/>). Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed and will strive to facilitate an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworkers' core function is to establish an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. Skilled and experienced playworkers are capable of enriching the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitude 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 play if invited by the child.

9. What is the role of parents, guardians and carers in supporting play?

In order for children to access and benefit from an enriching play offer, it is important that they are appropriately prepared to do so. It is the role of parents, guardians and carers to ensure that children attend school with clothing that is appropriate for the weather with consideration given to how this might change throughout the day. We would ask that parents ensure that children attend school with appropriate clothing (coats, hats and sunglasses) and equipment (drinks bottle and sun cream) for the time of year. This is important for enabling children to access play in all weathers at all times of the year – rain or shine. We also ask that parents, guardians and carers support the school in providing children with their right to quality play and that there is an acceptance that risks are managed effectively, but that injuries may still occur.

10. How will the play offer ensure equality and diversity?

This school community believes in the equal value of all people. Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. It is therefore unacceptable within the school ethos for anyone to discriminate against, harass or victimize a person based on the 'protected characteristics' as defined by the Equality Act 2010. We all aim to advance equality and opportunity for all children in line with Department for Education guidance and the development of positive, respectful relationships between all members of the school community.

Through the provision of a rich play offer, which meets every child's needs, we will ensure that all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or special needs, can develop and thrive; building strong, meaningful relationships and enjoy school.

11. What will the play environment look like?

As a school, we believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable and unnecessary risks. As a result, children are offered opportunities to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

We will strive to continually review and improve the quality and diversity of our school grounds to enhance play provision. Through the use of the document 'Best Play', we will be guided on what a quality play environment should contain (www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf)