

Earls Hall Play Policy

1. Commitment

Beyond just teaching academics, Earls Hall Primary School are passionate about our children developing in their relationships, identity, emotional skills, and overall well-being. We want our children to learn skills they need to have a happy life and positive relationships such as: confidence, self-esteem, resilience, social skills, independence, curiosity and coping with challenging situations. We recognise that play is essential for a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Through play, children learn about the world and themselves. As a school, we will provide a variety of unstructured, high quality play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play will be achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. We understand how beneficial play is for child development and have already embedded it into parts of our classroom curriculum with a free flow play environment throughout the day in Foundation Stage and part of the day in Year One. At Earls Hall we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing even more 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 closely to some of Earls Hall's qualities: team player, responsible, unique, respectful, reflective, creative, and growth mindset which were developed to encourage and teach essential life skills across the whole school day.

2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at playtimes. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for to make it valuable. 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 essential. 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.

Earls Hall recognises that play makes an important contribution to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving, social interaction and language development; the latter is particularly important for EAL learners, which Earls Hall have a large number of, and those children with deprived speech and language. In

the classroom we encourage children of all ages to lead and take ownership of their learning by posing questions, following their curiosities, and suggesting ideas. Play helps children to develop these skills, therefore having more valuable play opportunities will enrich the Earls Hall classroom experience for every child.

As a school, supporting our children's emotional well-being is a priority. We have put in place many things to support this across the school day such as: animal therapy with the school dog, goats, chickens, ducks and tortoise on site, all staff trained to teach in a nurturing way and lots of outdoor learning using the extensive natural areas on our grounds. When looking at how we could make more improvements to well-being in our school, we noticed that a lot of children found lunchtimes and break times challenging and these issues would often persist in classroom time afterwards, making it difficult for effective learning to take place. We recognise that our lunchtimes and playtimes need to be more accessible and engaging for all pupils so that they are enjoyable, beneficial and lead to happy children returning to class afterwards.

We surveyed the children in June 2022 for their views on play time, they highlighted the need for improvement. Many were positive about their lunchtime experiences, but some children's comments included:

- At playtimes all the adults say different things about what we can and can't do.
- There are lots of places on the playground where we want to play but aren't allowed.
- We want to build things but there's nothing around to use.
- Some adults stop us from playing what we want.
- Some children only enjoy some of their playtimes.
- KS2 children said the school doesn't value their play.

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, 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).

At Earls Hall the children and staff think that:

- Play develops independence, imagination, resilience, communication skills, relationships, risk taking and problem solving skills.
- Adults' roles in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests, and to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.
- Play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better.
- Children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources and as long as it is safe regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background.
- Play should be child led, uninterrupted and fun!

4. Rights and Access

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'. We will carefully design our setting to provide opportunities for children to choose from a variety of different play activities so that every child can find something they enjoy and engage with, regardless of their abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures. The grounds will be divided into multiple zones containing different types of play equipment and toys so most children can find something to get engrossed in straight away. Children who require support deciding what to do or asking to join in play with other children are supported by skilled, encouraging adults on the playground so that every child can access and enjoy the playtime.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'Every child has the right to express their views on matters that affect them, and for these views to be taken into consideration'. Giving children a voice promotes self-esteem and self-worth. By giving children a voice through choice, opinion, feelings and emotions, children can develop and learn that they are important and valued. Feeling valued plays a large role in how a child learns. In order for them to play and explore, actively learn and critically think the need to feel confident in their environment and have the knowledge that their voice and way of explorations will be noted. We will ensure that our children's voices are heard through listening to their ideas and opinions about play in our regular OPAL assemblies. We will also create a Play Council who will collect ideas and opinions from their classes and share them with the play leader and play co-ordinator in regular meetings. We will also give the play council the opportunity to look for excellent play they have seen so we can celebrate it in the play assemblies.

5. Risk and Benefit

Children need to learn how to keep themselves safe in a variety of different situations and it is important that we work closely with them to enable them to manage their own risk. If children aren't taught these skills from an early age they will not be self-reliant when they are older. Research studies have found vast social, physical and mental benefits to teaching children to manage risks. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. We will provide opportunities for children 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.

At Earls Hall 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)

Earls Hall will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) 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 1) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

6. Adults' Role in Play

Our staff will facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Earls Hall. In addition to this the Earls Hall Play Team (Appendix 2) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants and MDAs as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Teaching assistants and MDAs will take on the role of Play Makers. 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. Play Makers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Our staff 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, Play Council meetings and surveys.

7. Children's Role in Play

We have created a 'Children's Play Policy' which will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and with School Council (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 their environment, equipment and toys.
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

8. Supervision

Supervisors are competent adults who provide the supervision during breaktimes and lunchtimes and can be a play team member, teacher, teaching assistant or MDA. In each case they will have been assessed as competent to provide the supervision necessary and been trained in what is acceptable practice, what to do if unacceptable risks occur and what to do in case of accidents. At Earls Hall we have three types of supervision:

Direct – this is where the supervisor(s) will be able to see all areas of play, and be close at hand, around a maximum of 20 metres away. Some play features in these areas such as playhouses, planting or seeing the animals may offer valuable learning opportunities.

Remote – this is where a supervisor or supervisors are located at a relatively static location some distance from an activity, e.g. supervisor on the playground and activity 20 metres or more away. This style is widely used in other countries and its purpose is for an adult to be present to respond rapidly to an accident or serious behaviour incident.

Ranging – this is where the supervisor moves around the play area, usually on a set course/schedule. The distance from pupils therefore differs but can be 20 metres or

more away. On a large site supervisors should have zones so that they know which parts of the site they are covering, and they should modify their attention based on the kinds of play and their judgement about areas of highest risk.

9. Environment

At Earls Hall 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 Reception to Year 6 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

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 2

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 Earls Hall. It consists of:

The Head Teacher – Mr Badcock

The Deputy Head Teacher – Mrs Critoph

Curriculum Leader – Mrs Dixon

Play Co-ordinator – Miss Nicholls

Sit Managers – Mr Gheorge & Mr Scotchford

Parent Representative/ Associate Governor – Mrs Anderson

Earls Hall 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

(Leads and manages strategy)

Play Leader

(Leads and manages playtimes)

Play Makers

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

Appendix 4

Children's 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 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.