

St. Teresa's Catholic Academy Trust

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Learning and loving on our journey with Jesus.



To the greater glory of God

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Play Policy

Date policy reviewed: _____

Signed by:

_____ Headteacher Date: _____

_____ Chair of governors Date: _____

Statement

of

intent

"Play is the work of children. Through it, they discover the world, develop their talents, and experience the joy of life." - Pope John Paul II

In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, Article 31 recognises the right of children to play and engage in recreational activities. It states that: *"Parties recognise the right of the child 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."*

Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis have both referenced this article, emphasising that play is essential for a child's well-being, learning, and social development. We honour this at St. Mary's by providing children with the opportunity to express themselves fully through play, particularly during lunch break. We believe that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. 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.

Children spend 20% of their time in school at play. This time is invaluable and requires clear planning. To further enhance play at St. Mary's, we have introduced the Outdoor Play and Learning Programme (OPAL). The OPAL Primary 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."* This rationale supports our mission statement 'learning and loving on our journey with Jesus'.

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1. 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'.*

Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. At St. Mary's, we believe play contributes to a child's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cognitive growth and is critical to their health and wellbeing.

Physical Benefits:

- Improves fine and gross motor skills, coordination and balance
- Strengthens muscles and bones
- Encourages an active lifestyle

Cognitive Benefits:

- Enhances creativity, imagination, resilience and openness to learning by developing their capabilities and allowing them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Develops problem solving and decision-making skills by enabling children to explore different concepts and ideas
- Improves focus, memory and academic performance

Emotional and Psychological Benefits:

- Reduces stress, anxiety and emotional tension
- 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.
- Enhances children's self-esteem and confidence by supporting 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.

Social benefits:

- Teaches cooperation, sharing and teamwork by enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Develops empathy, communication and negotiation skills
- Encourages friendships and emotional bonding

Spiritual Benefits:

- Reflects God's joy and creativity in the world
- Strengthens community and relationships
- Encourages gratitude and appreciation of life's simple joys

2. Aims

In relation to play, St. Mary's aims to:

- Ensure we provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment, to include areas for both physical play and areas for quieter activities
- 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 and resources 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

To achieve our aims we will:

- Refer to this policy in all decisions that affect children's play
- Commit to providing the strategic and operational leadership required to provide and maintain quality play provision for the children at St. Mary's irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

3. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the following:

- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equality Act 2010
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1992

This policy has due regard to statutory and good practice guidance, including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2014) 'The Equality Act and schools'
- DfE (2018) 'Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children'
- DfE (2018) 'Gender separation in mixed schools'
- DfE (2018) 'Equality Act 2010: advice for schools'
- DfE (2018) 'Mental health and wellbeing provision in schools'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

- Relationships and Sex Education Policy
- School Uniform Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy: Pupils
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Complaints Procedures Policy

4. Roles and responsibilities

The governing board will:

- Be responsible for ensuring the school complies with the appropriate equality legislation and health and safety regulations
- Take all reasonable steps to ensure pupils and potential pupils will not be discriminated against, harassed or victimised in relation to the way the school provides play opportunities for pupils
- Ensure all policies are developed and implemented with appropriate equality and risk impact assessments informing future plans in collaboration with the headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- Implement and champion this policy, ensuring that all staff and pupils apply its guidelines fairly in all situations
- Support regular play assemblies to ensure all members of staff and children are aware of their responsibilities
- Review and amend this policy, taking into account new legislation and government guidance, and previously reported incidents, in order to improve procedures
- Provide staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles

Staff will:

- Use Playwork Principles and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed
- Facilitate an environment that will stimulate and nurture children's self-directed play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences
- Carry out their statutory duties relating to equal opportunities and inclusivity and pertaining to their specific roles
- Have due regard to the sensitivities of all pupils and not provide material that may cause offence
- Be available to participate in the play if invited
- The Play Team, guided by the Play Coordinator, will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children.
- Enrich children's play experience both in terms of the design and resources available and in terms of the attitudes and culture
- Act as a stimulus to enable children to explore and learn
- 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.

- Ensure the play space is inclusive and support all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

5. 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 (Play Safety Forum, 2012)

Risk-taking is an essential element of play provision. At St. Mary's, our play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to independently judge risks and learn new skills. Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk children's development is inhibited, which reduces their ability to deal with the wider unsupervised world. 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'*.

Research shows 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 given opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience success and failure. Risk and challenge are 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.

St. Mary's will be led by the Health and Safety Executive guidance document ['Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach'](#) (September 2012) to inform our approach to managing risk in play. 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'* OPAL and use dynamic risk assessments to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

6. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

A rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop team building skills and teaches them to advocate for their own rights. Play increases children's social and emotional capabilities and develops a love of the outdoors, which is key for caring about the environment. Challenging, risky play supports children to learn about themselves and work out what their own individual limits are. Children learn to manage risk through play and these skills can be used in other situations throughout their lives. When we try to limit these experiences, we take away valuable learning opportunities which may actually result in them being less safe. Children may and will have minor

cuts and bruises when taking part in some of these activities, but we as adults need to recognise their desire to test boundaries and consider the life-long benefits of those experiences.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. [Best Play](#)

At St. Mary's we will:

- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing
- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors through whole school assemblies
- Ensure that the outdoor space offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore, alongside using their imagination and creativity
- Expect children to respect and value the outdoor environment, including caring for living things
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximize the variety of play types and increase play value
- Ensure that the playground is an integrated space where all children from Reception to Year 6 can play together safely
- Teach 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

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision, but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adult present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Lunchtime staff will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. So they are easy to spot, lunchtime staff will wear yellow Hi-Viz with allocated 1:1 staff wearing orange Hi-Viz.

The core function of lunchtime staff is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced adult is 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 attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Lunchtime staff can act as a stimulus to children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited.

At St. Mary's the lunchtime staff will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children. They will 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.

8. OPAL

The school is working with OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) [OPAL](#) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at St. Mary's and support the development of our playtime provision. We are working on plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation and recreation of the play space by the children. We began by having an integrated playground from Reception to Year 6, with all children having access to the Play Pod resources every day and will continue by adding more components as and when appropriate.

- **Loose Parts:**
Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The vital ingredients for these experiences are loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves. These will be stored in allocated areas both outside and in the Play Pod and the Lego Shed.
- **Monitoring:**
The school will use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor the implementation of its play policy, strategy and action plan.
- **Physical Environment:**
We recognise that our outdoor environment can be used as a natural resource for learning and playing. With careful planning in conjunction with the children, we can ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve and use their imagination and creativity. Our children will be given the opportunity and responsibility to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors. By empowering our children in this way, they will learn to develop, value and respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.

9. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed by the headteacher and governing board annually and updated where appropriate – any amendments will be duly communicated to staff.

This policy will be reviewed in June 2028 (review every three years)