

IVY LANE SCHOOL



Outdoor play and learning POLICY

Review date	Date agreed	Next review
September 2024	November 2024	September 2026



1. Commitment

Ivy Lane is committed to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. Rationale

We passionately 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.

Ivy Lane's ethos is based around four key values (yourself, others, learning and environment). We believe that a rich and varied attitude towards play will significantly impact our core values and ultimately provide our children with tools and strategies that can impact their success in the classroom.

We believe that better, more active and creative playtimes means happier and healthier children, and having happier, healthier, more active children 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.

3. Definition and value of play

Play is defined as a process that 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 people.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- 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.

- 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.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

At our school, we believe that play is a vital component of "learning for life." Through play, children actively engage in experiences that foster self-expression, creativity, and problem-solving, aligning with our value of *valuing yourself*. Play also nurtures social skills, cooperation, and empathy, reinforcing the importance of *valuing others*. It is a dynamic way for children to explore, question, and discover, deepening their passion for *valuing learning*. Furthermore, play encourages curiosity and interaction with the world around them, promoting a sense of responsibility in *valuing the environment*. By embracing play, we create a well-rounded foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims 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.

5. Rights

Our school recognises 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). We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

Our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child aligns with our belief in "Learning for Life." By honouring children's rights to play (Article 31) and to have their voices heard (Article 12), we recognize that play is not only essential for immediate joy and development but also critical in building the skills and resilience needed for success beyond primary years. Play fosters creativity, problem-solving, communication, and social skills, all of which contribute building a lifelong love of learning by the time they leave year 6. By listening to children's perspectives on play and integrating it meaningfully into their education, we are helping to shape individuals who are prepared for future challenges and who value learning as a lifelong pursuit.

6. 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)

The school will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

Risk-taking is an essential and natural feature of play, providing children with opportunities to encounter manageable risks in a stimulating and challenging environment.

We also embrace the messiness of play, encouraging children to engage with the outdoors fully, including getting muddy or wet. These experiences foster creativity, connection with the environment, and sensory exploration. We ask families to support this approach by celebrating the joy and learning that comes from messy play, rather than discouraging children when they return home dirty.

To achieve this, Ivy Lane uses a risk-benefit approach alongside dynamic risk management practices. Children will be encouraged to assess and manage risks themselves, supported by vigilant adults who provide guidance as needed. By prioritising enriching play experiences while maintaining a focus on safety, we aim to nurture every child's growth in line with our core values of valuing yourself, others, learning, and the environment.

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 encounter acceptable risks as part of a 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'*.

At Ivy Lane, we believe that minor injuries, such as bumps, scrapes, and falls, are a normal and valuable part of play, helping children develop resilience, risk awareness, and problem-solving skills. Our approach to risk management focuses on avoiding serious harm wherever possible while allowing children the freedom to explore, experiment, and learn from their experiences.

Our intention is to provide enriching opportunities for play as they are essential to fostering growth in line with our core values of *valuing yourself, others, learning, and the environment*.

We understand that children need to develop the ability to manage risks themselves in an environment that is safe, but not entirely free from risk, as learning how to navigate challenges is a key part of their development. In assessing risks, we will balance the benefits of play against potential hazards. If the benefits outweigh the risks, we will encourage and support children in participating. By adopting a risk-benefit approach and using dynamic risk assessments, we aim to protect and nurture every child's needs, ensuring that play remains a vital part of their learning journey and personal growth.

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 adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors 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.



At Ivy Lane, our *Play Team* will consist of both teaching assistants and lunchtime staff, who will work collaboratively to support and supervise play. Their responsibilities will extend beyond addressing first aid and behaviour incidents; they will also actively encourage and facilitate enriching play experiences for all children. By promoting positive interactions and offering guidance, the Play Team will ensure that play is both safe and meaningful, aligned with our school's commitment to holistic development.

8. The adult's role in play

The school will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function 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 playworker 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. 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 the play if invited.

At lunchtime, the play team may engage children in a variety of activities that promote creativity, teamwork, and physical development. Examples include:

- **Organising team games** like football, tag, or relay races to encourage physical activity and cooperation.
- **Facilitating creative play** with materials like chalk for drawing, or natural elements for building small structures, fostering imagination and problem-solving skills.
- **Supporting imaginative role-play**, such as setting up a pretend shop, adventure scenario, or storytelling circle, to inspire collaboration and creativity.
- **Providing quiet, reflective activities** such as reading areas, nature exploration, or simple crafts for children who prefer calm, individual play.
- **Setting up obstacle courses or movement challenges** to help children practice balance, coordination, and resilience.

The play worker's role is to observe children's interests and guide activities that align with their needs while ensuring that play remains enjoyable and inclusive for all.



In addition to structured games and imaginative activities, play workers will also facilitate **messier and sensory play** as well as activities incorporating **music** to enhance creativity and self-expression. Examples include:

- **Messy play** activities like water play, mud kitchens, or creating with sand and clay, allowing children to explore textures and develop fine motor skills.
- **Art-based messy play**, such as large-scale painting, using natural objects like leaves and sticks for print-making, or chalk murals, encouraging creativity and sensory exploration.
- **Music and movement** sessions where children can create rhythms with percussion instruments, participate in musical games like freeze dance, or engage in group singing, which supports both coordination and social bonding.
- **Nature-based messy play**, where children can explore building structures with sticks, leaves, and stones or engage in gardening activities, fostering a connection with the environment.

By incorporating messier play and music, play workers can support children in developing not only physical and cognitive skills but also their creativity, confidence, and emotional well-being.

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

10. 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.

At Ivy Lane, we embrace the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) framework as a vital element of our educational philosophy, intricately linked to our core value of learning for life. By providing a rich play environment, we foster safeguarding practices that ensure children feel secure and supported.

This dynamic setting cultivates confidence in team building, empowering children to advocate for their own rights while developing essential social and emotional skills. As they engage in outdoor play, children not only strengthen their relationships with peers but also cultivate a deep appreciation for the natural world.



This connection instills a lifelong love of the outdoors, laying a crucial foundation for environmental stewardship and responsible citizenship. Through OPAL, we are committed to nurturing well-rounded individuals who value themselves, others, and the environment, reinforcing our mission to prepare them for a thriving future

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.

www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf