



Zaytouna Primary School

Play Policy

March 2026

1. Commitment

Zaytouna Primary School will refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Zaytouna Primary 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

Zaytouna Primary School believes 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.

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."*

The OPAL Primary Programme fits perfectly with our school values as we aim to instil the following key attributes in all our children:

- Peace
- Unity
- Equality

As well as our school expectations:

- Be ready
- Be respectful
- Be safe

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.

As part of our commitment to the whole child, play has been identified as a key priority within our School Development Plan ([School Development Plan | Zaytouna Primary School](#)). We have made a strategic decision to place play as a priority in the day-to-day life of every child. We recognise that rich play experiences contribute significantly to pupil's personal development, engagement and readiness to learn. By embedding play into our improvement planning, we ensure it is valued, resources and continually developed across the school. Our implementation of OPAL reflects this commitment. We are working to create an inclusive, stimulating and child-led play environment that enables every pupil to access high-quality outdoor play experiences every day.

4. Aims

In relation to play, Zaytouna Primary 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.
- To respect and care for each other and to flourish in our diverse society, making happy memories to cherish forever along the way.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings, the play resources available to them and respect for 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.
- Encourage children to develop as enthusiastic, confident learners with the necessary skills to succeed in life, now and in the future

5. Rights

Zaytouna Primary 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.

As our school values aim to encourage children to develop into responsible, respected citizens of the future, OPAL will ensure that children are provided with opportunities to exercise their own rights in a supportive, age-appropriate forum.

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 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*'.

In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments, Zaytouna Primary School will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Zaytouna Primary School is committed to providing all children with opportunities to experience risk and challenge in a supportive environment as we look to develop children as responsible and confident citizens of the future. Furthermore, this is in line with our whole school vision of becoming a school of excellence through all that we do.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for the full HSE Managing Risk Statement for more information.

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school are appropriately supervised. While there are no prescribed adult-child ratios for primary school playtimes, it is expected that one or more adults are present outdoors during the school day to ensure children's safety and wellbeing. At Zaytouna Primary School, we recognise the three models of supervision identified by OPAL:

- **Direct supervision** – adults closely oversee specific children or activities.
- **Remote supervision** – adults maintain oversight from a distance while remaining accessible.
- **Ranging supervision** – adults actively move around the site to observe play and emerging risks.

Except for children who are new to Reception, whose confidence, skills and familiarity with the school environment require careful assessment, the school recognises that constant direct supervision is neither practical nor beneficial to children's independence and development. Supervisors will therefore use a combination of ranging and remote supervision. This approach ensures that:

- Children can quickly locate an adult when needed.
- Adults can effectively patrol large outdoor areas.
- Staff maintain awareness of the nature of the nature of play taking place.
- Emerging risks can be identified and managed proportionately.

All main areas of the outdoor environment will be supervised by at least one adult at all times. These arrangements will be reviewed and amended as our play provision continues to develop.

8. The adult's role in play

Zaytouna Primary 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. The following video exemplifies the OPAL Programme in practice that we aspire to replicate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm7IfAEsjql>

Please refer to Appendix 2 for further guidance on the Playwork Principles

9. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs, Zaytouna Primary School will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school. Please refer to our 'Equality Policy' for more information.

Zaytouna Primary School recognise that some pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) may require a more personalised and graduated approach to play. We adopt a risk-benefit approach in line with the principles of OPAL, recognising that exposure to managed risk is an essential part of learning, resilience and independence. For some children, a phased pathway into outdoor play may be appropriate, beginning with higher levels of adult support and guided opportunities to build confidence, social understanding and risk awareness. Supervision and support may therefore look different for these pupils and will be informed by individual need, professional judgement and dynamic risk-benefit assessments rather than risk avoidance. Our intention is not to remove challenge, but to enable every child to access meaningful play experiences safely, developing autonomy, competence and enjoyment over time.

10. Environment

Zaytouna Primary School 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.

Zaytouna Primary School 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

Zaytouna Primary School is committed to ensuring our environment is continually improved to meet the needs of the children by being proactive in searching for external funding. We

will work towards the ultimate goal of ensuring our rich play setting supports safeguarding, helps children develop confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights, increases children's social and emotional capabilities and helps develop a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

At Zaytouna Primary School, we are passionate about making play a cornerstone of every child's school experience. Through our commitment to OPAL, we are creating vibrant, engaging and inclusive outdoor spaces where children can explore risks, collaborate and grow. We believe that play is not just recreation, it is a powerful tool for building confidence, resilience, creativity and joy. By investing in meaningful play every day, we aim to nurture happier, healthier and more fulfilled pupils, ready to thrive both in school and beyond.

At Zaytouna, we don't just play – we play to grow!



CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

1. Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.
2. The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.
3. 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 danger.
4. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.
5. This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks¹ and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: 'Play is great for children's well-being 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'.

6. 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.
7. Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it

The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

8. Striking 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

9. 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

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.

10. Play providers² should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

²Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday schemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.
15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

September 2012



Zatouna Primary School Our Play Charter



The children at Zaytouna Primary School have the **right to play** and **enjoy OPAL!**

We have the responsibility to make sure everyone enjoys lunchtime by making sure:

- ☺ We get to **CHOOSE** whatever we would like to play with
- ☺ We **SHARE** and **TAKE TURNS**
- ☺ We have to **LOOK AFTER** all of the equipment
- ☺ We **TIDY UP** and put everything back where it belongs at the end of lunchtime
- ☺ We tell a grown up if something is **BROKEN**
- ☺ We ask a grown up if we need more **HELP**
- ☺ We are **CAREFUL** and **SAFE** when playing
- ☺ We need to use **KIND HANDS, FEET AND WORDS** when playing with others
- ☺ We all help to **LOOK AFTER EVERYONE** and **EVERYTHING**
- ☺ We all have **FUN** and make people **LAUGH**