



OPAL PLAY POLICY

2025-2026

Pear Tree Mead Academy

Part of the Passmores Co-operative Learning Community



OPAL play policy

1. Commitment

Our school undertakes 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 our children.

2. Rationale

Our 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.*”

At Pear Tree Mead we support all pupils to grow and reach the branches of their future, these include: respect, self-belief, inquisitive, aspiration, togetherness and resilience.

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 PTM, we believe playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to keep active, stay well and be happy. Freely chosen play helps children and young people's healthy development. To have good physical and mental health and to learn life skills, they need various unstructured play opportunities from birth up.

We strive to use play to support all areas of SEMH, and believe it underpins all our further strategies of Essex therapeutic thinking approach, TPP (trauma perceptive practice) and attachment aware (more information on these can be found in our behaviour policy).

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.
- Further develop children's understanding of our school expectations of being safe, kind and ready.

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.

At PTM, we have 3 clear expectations for our pupils whilst at school, these are to be safe, be ready and be kind, as we believe that all our children have the right to feel safe, ready to learn and participate in shared kindness. We use a restorative behavioural system at PTM which aims to acknowledge and listen to the voice of the child whilst reflecting on what has occurred.

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 the 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.

At PTM, we want our children to experience appropriate levels of risk and challenge, engaging problem-solving skills and knowledge of the world around them. We feel that our pupils benefit greatly from engaging with the outdoor environment, supporting all areas of SEMH.

Please see appendix: Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (HSE)

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.

We allow for the pupils to have access to all of the outdoor space including the two playgrounds and field areas between. There are coloured zones indicating particular areas and activities that can be found in that zone. This also aids supervision, where adults are assigned to a zone. YR to Y6

are able to play alongside one another, with the freedom to choose which activities they would like to engage with each day. Older pupils do support younger pupils, where we have assigned playleaders and playleader mentors (mentors have linked children). These children look to further facilitate play for all, and ensure levels of engagement whilst supporting younger peers. These pupils are identifiable by a high vis jacket, so others know when they are on duty and can help support.

*Please see our behaviour policy for more information regarding supervision.

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 Play work 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.

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.

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

At PTM we believe a 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.

We aim to get the children outdoors as much as possible, in all weathers, where puddle suits/wellies/gloves/scarfs/hats are required in the colder months, sunhats and cream in the warmer months. To ensure inclusivity, we do allow for the children in KS2 to make choices



regarding where they would like to eat their packed lunch – this can be done inside the school hall or in the outdoor classroom/gazebo area. As everyone is different, we have found that this strategy allows pupils their independence to choose, supporting all children to have a successful lunchtime experience from eating to playing. If the weather conditions are non-conducive to playtime outside, the school will initiate the ‘wet lunch/play’ protocol, where all children have their breaks/lunch in their classrooms.

