



Dundale Primary School & Nursery

‘Belonging, Achieving, Flourishing’

Play Policy

Policy Review	
Review schedule	Annually
Date of Policy	September 2026
Date of Next Review	September 2027

“All children have a right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of activities” (Article 31).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Commitment

Dundale Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we are committed to providing consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. At Dundale we are committed to using our school vision, this play policy, and **UNCRC Articles 31 and 12** to guide our planning. We ensure children have a right to say what they think should happen when we design play spaces, actively co-authoring risk assessments through our pupil voice channels. 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.

Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play at primary school. Therefore, this time needs to be coherent and planned for. 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 vital.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer incidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all our children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

As a school we believe that through play, our children can further develop key skills as defined in our school values of inclusion, ambition, resilience and reflection.

Dundale Primary School will:

- ☐ Provide children with a play setting which is enjoyable, stimulating and challenging
- ☐ Allow children to take risks
- ☐ Provide children with a range of play opportunities that will support their learning across the curriculum and about the world around them

Every child at Dundale Primary School will have the opportunity to:

- ☐ Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- ☐ Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving
- ☐ Build resilience and self-confidence
- ☐ Think creatively
- ☐ Be independent and take responsibility for themselves and others
- ☐ Flourish through activities that build physical health
- ☐ Thrive emotionally; allowing the balance between acting freely and allowing everyone to have their rights.
- ☐ Grow in confidence, developing the necessary skills to self-assess and manage risk

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'.*

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)
- ☐ Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances)

At Dundale we believe that:

- ☐ Play allows children to be creative and co-operative
- ☐ Adults' roles in high quality play is to support children during play and to be responsive to children's invitations and requests. Furthermore it is important to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.
- ☐ Play may be solitary or social
- ☐ Play invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries
- ☐ Play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better

- ❑ Children have a right to play with a wider range of resources as long as it is safe regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- ❑ Play is something you choose to do and that it is fun!
- ❑ Play enables children to process their experiences of the world

Benefit, Risk Assessment and Play

“Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury.”

Play England

Play Resource and Equipment Inspections

To maintain a safe play environment without limiting challenge, the school operates a three-tier inspection system:

- **Daily Visual Checks:** Adults / Play Leaders will visually scan play zones and loose parts before and during sessions to remove broken items, sharp plastics, or standing water.
- **Operational Reviews:** The OPAL Play Team conducts termly reviews of the play landscape to assess resource wear-and-tear and structural stability.
- **Annual Independent Audits:** All fixed, engineered play structures undergo a formal safety inspection once a year by a certified external professional.

An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risk develops their ability to judge risk independently and learn new skills. All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore their limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences.

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk assessments of all play provision within the school will be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change or development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances takes place.

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).

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the following guidelines:

- ☐ Recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals
- ☐ Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children
- ☐ design spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent
- ☐ Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed
- ☐ Provide staff with training to supervise play setting.

Adults' Role in Play

We, as an entire 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 half-termly play assemblies, School Council involvement, annual surveys and other pupil voice outlets. The adult's role will also be to 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 Dundale.

In addition to this, the Dundale Play Team will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, MSAs and all other staff. Any parent volunteers or external stakeholders regularly supporting playground sessions will undergo robust safeguarding and safer recruitment checks in complete alignment with KCSIE 2026 statutory frameworks before working on the field. Teaching assistants and MSAs 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.

Children's Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy through a play charter. In 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
- ☐ Actively participate in the daily tidy-up and safe storage of loose parts at the end of playtime
- ☐ To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- ☐ Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children's charter will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and School Council.

Environment and Clothing

To be able to enjoy the space and activities children should always come to school with a waterproof coat. We try to keep all of the school playground open all year so the children will play on the field even in the winter months. In the winter, children are expected to wear wellington boots or other outdoor shoes and waterproofs on the field, in poorer weather. Families have been asked to provide/ donate wellies for use at playtimes. Hand washing facilities are provided in toilet areas.

While year-round outdoor play is expected, safety remains paramount. The Headteacher or SLT will restrict outdoor or field play only during extreme weather events, defined as active thunderstorms, significant rain, high winds exceeding 40 mph, severe ice creating unmanageable slip hazards, or temperatures reaching statutory heat/cold warning thresholds. If children do not have appropriate clothing / shoes activities may also be restricted. In these instances, indoor play configurations will be deployed using OPAL principles where possible.

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.

Dundale Primary School has generous ratios of adults to children for playtimes and lunchtimes. We recognise 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 (where staff maintain strategic visual oversight of a wider play zone from a distance rather than standing directly over a specific activity), so that children can quickly find an adult.

Adult play leaders are designated to an 'area' daily. It is expected that staff will move around throughout playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Staff can then check in on the children's play throughout playtime.

All staff will follow the school's behaviour policy over lunchtimes and playtimes with the aim of solving conflict by working alongside children where possible. Any significant incident requiring physical intervention or reasonable force will strictly adhere to the DfE framework *Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools*. In accordance with this framework, the school will maintain a

mandatory record of the incident and report it to parents or carers as soon as reasonably practicable on the same day. For further details, please see the school's Positive Behaviour Policy.

Inclusion

All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure adequate provision is provided. Play opportunities will hold no barriers to any of the children within our school.

Review

This policy will be closely monitored by the OPAL Play Team, SLT and governors. A working play group, led by the head, composed of play leader, lunchtime supervisor and play governor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play. This policy has been shared by the whole school community.

This policy is under continuous review in line with our OPAL Journey. A written log of all playground assemblies and School Council play reviews will be appended to the OPAL Action Plan annually to evidence ongoing compliance

Dundale Primary School Play Charter

Our Rights (What we get to do)

-  Choose our own games.
-  Have a say in playground changes.
-  Explore and try new things.
-  Take challenges to test our limits.
-  Play outside during every season unless it is deemed not appropriate due to weather or lack of appropriate clothing.

Our Responsibilities (What we must do)

-  Include everyone who wants to join.
-  Wear appropriate clothing and shoes
-  Pack away toys and equipment safely.
-  Stop any behaviour that is dangerous.
-  Talk to solve our games arguments.

Our Play Makers (How adults help us)

-  Watch from a distance to let us be independent.
-  Supply amazing loose parts and tyres.
-  Step in if we need help sorting a problem.