



Play Policy

Date reviewed:	February 2026	
Approved by:	LGB	TBC
Next review due by:	February 2029	

For Office Use Only:

Policy Version: 1.0

To make changes to this policy, please
email admin@lincolnshiregateway.co.uk.



**Lincolnshire Gateway
Academies Trust**

Commitment

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

Rationale

Our Academy 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 academy, 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 Pilgrim Academy, we hold the belief that every child is capable of achieving something, and we strive to provide our pupils with opportunities to develop their play in such a way that they are able to work towards and accomplish our three core values; courage, kindness and respect. The manner in which we conduct ourselves within the environment of the classroom, by exemplifying our core beliefs and ideals, is carried over into our play.

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. It may be serious or light hearted. It may produce something or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children an opportunity to be creative, to make decisions and to assess and manage risks.

At Pilgrim Academy we recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe that the role of the adults is to support the play process. We aim for children to have the opportunity for 'free range' play within the Academy grounds.

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 an Academy we aim to improve the way we think and provide opportunities for play. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. The Academy grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

The Government's Play Strategy states: *Fun and exciting opportunities to play are at the heart of a happy, healthy and enjoyable childhood. Better outdoor play opportunities are good for children, good for families and good for communities.*

At Pilgrim Academy the children and staff think that:

- Play allows children to be creative and co-operative;
- The adults' duties in great play are to be receptive to children's invites and requests, to conduct out dynamic risk assessments to weigh the risks and advantages of play activities, and to increase the children's risk awareness;
- Play stimulates study and exploration, which may push boundaries;
- Play can be either solitary or social;
- Play makes children happier and happier children are healthier children who in turn can learn better;
- Children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources and as long as it is safe regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background;
- Play is something you choose to do and that is enjoyable;
- Enables children to process their experiences of the world.

Aims

In relation to play our Academy 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;
- Allow children the right to assess risk, get out and tidy away equipment;
- Ensure adults respect these rights, providing inclusive opportunities for creative, exciting play, use of restorative justice to resolve conflicts and to support children who have additional needs at playtime;
- Adults to dynamically risk assess and to encourage children to assess risk and to support the children in taking out and tidying away equipment;
- Adults support the children to develop new opportunities for play, listening to their ideas about play and supporting all children to access play;
- Enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.

Rights

Our Academy 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.

Alongside the rights of the children, we want all children to follow the Academy values and also to aspire at break and lunch times to aspire to the Academy's values and vision of 'Pride, Achievement, Confidence and Effort; Everyone is an Achiever.' It is our belief that all children can aspire to this at Pilgrim Academy and have the right to be safe and enjoy play times, and to demonstrate excellence in their play. Children's achievements at break times and lunchtimes will be acknowledged and highlighted to show the value of good play.

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)

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children grow more adaptive, resilient, and eager to try new things. Children should be given the chance to test their limits and encounter both success and disappointment. Risk and challenge are not just confined to physical danger; they also encompass the unknowns associated with making new friends, playing with children from other backgrounds, and developing emotional resilience by trying out new things that may fail.

The Academy 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.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childs-play-statement.htm>

At Pilgrim Academy we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way.

The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that: *'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 dangers'*. (HSE, 2013)

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 Academy will practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Pilgrim Academy will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (**Appendix 1**) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play. As play providers, it is our responsibility to ensure that children have as many enriching experiences as possible. Instead of a risk-free environment, they must learn to manage risk for themselves in one that is as safe as is necessary. When carrying out risk assessments, it is important to weigh the advantages of providing children with demanding play opportunities against any possible risks. We will manage our responsibility to safeguard and meet the needs of children by using a risk-benefit approach and dynamic risk assessments (**Appendix 2**).

Supervision

The law requires that children in the Academy have supervision but for primary playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the academy day there should be one or more adults present outdoors.

We recognise OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in Reception, whose skills and orientation in the academy environment need to be assessed, the Academy 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 move around the site to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

The adult's role in play

The Academy 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.

We, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their academy. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies, Academy Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.

At Pilgrim Academy 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 Academy is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Pilgrim Academy.

In addition to this the Play Team (**Appendix 3**) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, TAs and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Teaching assistants will take on the role of Play Makers; they will make sure that children have the widest range of play possibilities feasible. They will watch, reflect on, and analyse the play that is taking place, then choose an intervention strategy or, if necessary, alter the play area. The play area is made inclusive by Play Makers, who help every child take advantage of the opportunities in their own unique way.

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (**Appendix 4**). 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;
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour;
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody.

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

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 the Academy.

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 academy's grounds to enhance play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freoplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

At Pilgrim Academy we will:

- Use the outdoors as a natural resource for learning and play, encouraging the children to value found or natural objects for play;
- Involve the children in planning for outdoor play and learning;
- Ensure that the outdoors gives every child the chance to investigate, take risks, explore, and use their imagination and creativity;
- Expect the children to respect the outdoors and care for living things;
- Ensure that the playground is an integrated space where all children from Nursery to Year 6 may play securely;
- Give children the chance to handle the space and freedom offered by the outdoors;
- Improve the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play activities;
- Ensure that the playground be an integrated area where all children from Nursery to Year 6 can play safely.
- Make sure the children are actively involved in teaching them about their responsibility for maintaining the condition of their outside space and the equipment they have access to;
- Encourage children to be proud of the outside place that is theirs.

To manage risks

- Our custodian performs regular Health & Safety checks of the play areas;
- The Opal working party and all playtime monitoring staff will look for dangers/ risks when accompanying the children outside;
- The children will be made aware of any potential risks and assisted in managing them by staff informing them, such as slippery or wet surfaces;
- Creation of quiet spaces and areas for active play by dividing the play area into zones to maintain a risk/benefit management system.



CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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'.

- 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.
- 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 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 benchmarks that can help.

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

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'.

Play providers 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.

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

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

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 Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

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

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.'

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.

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

Appendix 2 – Pilgrim Academy Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment Date _____

Assessed by _____

Date	Detailed explanation of the activity, principle, or object in question, along with information regarding who might be at risk and the nature of any potential harm.	A description of the risk management and maintenance practises that have been agreed upon	Nominated person	Action

Appendix 3 – Structure within Pilgrim Academy

The OPAL Team

At Pilgrim Academy, this is the team that is working directly with OPAL to develop play and outdoor learning opportunities, as well as to ensure that the appropriate policies are in place. It includes the following:

- Principal
- Play Co-ordinator
- Play Leader / Governor
- Parent Representative

Everyone who works at the Academy counts as a member of the play team and is responsible for adhering to the rules outlined in this policy. Play Makers are employees who are on duty on the playground during designated play periods.

Nevertheless, during lunch hours, the following structure will be in place (though the specifics of this will change depending on capacity):

- Play Co-ordinator (Leads and manages strategy)
- Play Leader (Leads and manages playtimes)
- Assistant Play Leader (Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)
- Play Makers (Support children's play as described this policy)