



Play Policy



“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”
Kay Redfield Jamison

“It is a happy talent to know how to play”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”
George Bernard Shaw

Rationale – Why Spring Bank Primary school is doing this

At Spring Primary School, we believe it is important to create a vibrant and engaging environment where every child can thrive through play. We understand that play is not just a fundamental right but a vital component of children’s development. By providing diverse play opportunities, we foster exploration and creativity, allowing children to manipulate and experience their surroundings in meaningful ways.

We are committed to inclusivity, ensuring that our play spaces cater to the diverse needs of all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or other special requirements. Our dedicated playworkers are trained to create an atmosphere where every child feels valued and empowered to participate fully in play activities.

In alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we recognise the importance of listening to children’s voices regarding their play experiences. We encourage children to express their thoughts and preferences, ensuring that their views are integral to the planning and implementation of play opportunities. By doing so, we not only uphold their rights but also enrich their school experience, helping them build strong relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community.

At Spring Primary School, we are dedicated to nurturing a love for play that enhances children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, ultimately leading to a joyful and fruitful educational journey.

Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school attendance in playtime. This time is valuable and needs careful planning. Better play means happier children; fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, lessons that are more effective, development of core skills, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioural problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life.

Play England devised ‘The Charter for Children’s Play’ which sets out a vision for play and states that:

- Children need time and space to play at school
- Adults should let children play
- Children value and benefit from staffed play provision
- Children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers
- Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

Spring Primary School fully recognises its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime whilst they are here.

In September 2024 during play assembly children were asked to vote if playtimes have improved. Overall response was yes.

Before OPAL was introduced children said

- There were not enough things around to play with, spent time to make up games.
- There are places around the playground where they want to play but wasn't allowed.
- They only play on the grass in the summer.

Before OPAL was introduced staff said

- Behaviour incidents occurred more frequently
- Some children did not enjoy playtimes noisy & busy
- Children did not mix with younger or older children.

These results highlighted the need to improve our play resources and opportunities at Spring Primary School.

What is play?

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. 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, different concepts and different 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.

Commitment

- Spring Bank Primary School is committed to ensuring high quality and sustainable play opportunities are available for all children regardless of their needs and abilities. Inclusive play is achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play opportunities.
- We believe that play has a vital role in promoting children's happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, resilient, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. Changes in society and culture have led to a decline in play opportunities; our school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

Spring Bank Primary School will:

- Provide children with a play setting which is stimulating, challenging and helps develop a lifelong love of learning.
- Allow children to take risks in a secure and supportive environment.
- Provide children with a range of play opportunities that will support their learning as well as develop confidence and resilience.
- Allow children to mix with all age ranges across the school.
- Open more play spaces around the school for children to access.

Spring Bank Primary children will have the opportunity to:

- Feel happy, safe and secure
- Question, choose, evaluate, pose opinions and discuss rationally
- Develop social, communication and language skills
- Build resilience, confidence and a positive self-image
- Be creative and imaginative
- Be independent and take responsibility for themselves and others
- Develop problem solving skills
- Improve their physical development, co-ordination and fitness

Benefit

At Spring Bank Primary, we are dedicated to fostering an environment that prioritizes children's play opportunities while recognising the importance of balancing risk and safety. We understand that risk is an inherent part of play that contributes significantly to children's physical and mental development. By enabling children to explore and take calculated risks, we provide them with the chance to develop their skills, resilience, and confidence.

Our commitment is in line with Play England's Charter for children's play, which emphasise the necessity of providing stimulating and challenging play spaces. We acknowledge that children thrive in environments where they can challenge themselves, learn from their experiences, and grow. While we remain vigilant in managing risks to prevent serious harm, we believe that the developmental benefits of risk-taking in play are invaluable.

To ensure the health and safety of all our students, we adhere to our Health & Safety Statement of Intent, as well as all relevant policies and procedures. Our approach to risk management involves a thorough assessment of activities, continuously reviewing and adjusting safety measures as needed. This ensures that we maintain a safe yet stimulating play environment that promotes health, safety, and overall wellbeing.

Risk

This policy acknowledges that taking risks is an essential aspect of children's play and learning experiences, fostering their growth and development. Engaging in risk-taking allows children to build various competencies, explore their emotions, broaden their understanding, and test their boundaries. Moreover, it equips them with valuable practical experiences regarding personal responsibility for their safety.

At Spring Bank Primary, we adhere to the Health and Safety Executive guidance document 'Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach' (September 2012), which shapes our strategy for managing risk during play. Our approach is anchored in a benefits/risk framework as advocated by the Play Safety Forum's 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' Implementation Guide (2012). This document emphasizes that play is crucial for children's well-being and development, and the objective of planning play opportunities is not to eliminate risk entirely but to balance the risks against their benefits. It is important to note that children will not learn to navigate risks effectively if they are overly protected.

In addition to standard risk/benefit assessments, the school will:

- Practice dynamic risk management with children, fostering their engagement in the process.
- Encourage children to identify and manage potential risks in a supervised environment where adults offer guidance and support.
- Conduct Play Assemblies to discuss the benefits and risks associated with new play equipment, engaging children in establishing guidelines and rules for safe play.

By embracing this policy, Spring Bank Primary aims to create an environment that promotes safe, enjoyable, and enriching play experiences for all children.

By creating opportunities for meaningful play experiences, we empower children to engage with their surroundings, take responsibility for their own safety, and enjoy a holistic development journey. At Spring Bank Primary, we are excited to embark on this new direction for children's play, ensuring that it is both beneficial and safe.

Health and Safety and Wellbeing: checks and physical environment

This policy outlines the systematic approach to ensuring the safety and maintenance of play areas and equipment:

- **Regular Inspections:**

Play areas and equipment will undergo thorough inspections at least once a week, facilitated by the play lead and coordinators. All findings from these checks will be documented and securely filed for future reference.

- **Daily Assessments:**

Coordinators are tasked with conducting daily evaluations of equipment, particularly those subject to high usage, to ensure they are in good working condition.

- **Staff Responsibilities:**

Staff on duty will visually inspect the equipment throughout their shift. Any damaged items will be removed immediately, with all actions documented and reported to the play coordinators.

- **Handling Larger Equipment Damage:**

If larger equipment is found damaged, it will be marked as "out of use" to prevent any child from using it. Staff are required to notify the play coordinators on the same day the damage is identified.

Documentation of the damage will be maintained, and the equipment will only be reinstated for use once repairs have been completed and logged. In cases where equipment is heavily damaged and irreparable, it will be taken out of service and removed from the premises.

- **Child Participation:**

Children are encouraged to report any damage they observe on equipment to staff, promoting an environment of shared responsibility for safety.

- **Risk-Benefit Assessments:**

Comprehensive risk-benefit assessments for all play areas, equipment, and activities will be maintained and made available for review. Any new activities that entail significant risk will undergo an assessment as part of their planning.

Previous assessments will be revisited and updated as necessary to reflect any changes or developments.

- **Responsibility and Accountability:**

The play coordinators on duty are mandated to address any safety concerns swiftly and ensure that any risks are mitigated. They are also responsible for reporting any issues to the Play Leader promptly to facilitate swift action.

This approach will foster a safe, enjoyable, and responsive environment for children while using play areas and equipment.

Clothing

It is essential for children to wear appropriate clothing to ensure they can fully participate in outdoor activities throughout the year. All children should come to school equipped with a waterproof coat to stay dry during inclement weather.

During the winter months, it is expected that children wear wellington boots and waterproofs while playing on the field. It's important to note that they may get dirty as part of their outdoor play and exploration, which is a natural and beneficial aspect of their learning experience.

Encouraging children to dress for the weather not only helps keep them comfortable but also allows them to engage more freely in play and learning outside.

Supervision

The adult's role in play

Spring Bank Primary School recognise Play England's Charter for Children's Play which sets out a vision for play and states that children need time and space to play at school;

- adults should let children play;
- children value and benefit from staffed play provision;
- children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers;
- children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play.

Our approach to play is structured to enable adults to facilitate children's play:

- the Play Leader is a member of the Senior Leadership Team and is responsible for the strategic development of play within the school;
- the Play Coordinators support, monitor and implement meaningful, enjoyable and productive child-initiated play through the Play Team;
- Lunchtime staff (playworkers) are responsible for supervising and providing a stimulating play environment for children.

Playworkers at Spring Bank Primary School are guided by the Play England Playwork Principles, which support their role in facilitating and enhancing children's play experiences. Here are key elements that outline how lunchtime staff (playworkers) can effectively promote and maximize the benefits of play:

- **Recognition of Play as a Right:** Playworkers understand that all children have a right to play, and their role is to ensure that this opportunity is accessible to everyone, regardless of ability or background.
- **Play is Central to Childhood:** Playworkers appreciate that play is fundamental to children's development, learning, and overall well-being. They seek to create an environment where children feel safe and confident to express themselves through play.
- **Variety and Choice:** Lunchtime staff ensure a diverse range of play opportunities, resources, and environments are available, allowing children the freedom to choose how they want to engage in play.
- **Active Participation:** Playworkers are available to participate in children's play if invited, enhancing the experience without dominating it. They encourage children to take the lead, fostering independence and decision-making.
- **Observation and Reflection:** Playworkers are tasked with observing children's play to understand dynamics, interests, and needs. They reflect on these observations to inform their interventions and enhance the play environment.
- **Empowerment Through Engagement:** Playworkers recognize the importance of empowering children in their play experiences by providing support and guidance as needed, encouraging risk-taking and resilience.
- **Responsive Practice:** Based on observation and reflection, playworkers can modify the play environment or introduce new materials and tools that inspire creativity, exploration, and problem-solving.
- **Building Relationships:** Developing trusting relationships with children is essential for effective playwork. Playworkers engage with children, fostering a sense of belonging and community.
- **Inclusive Practices:** Playworkers demonstrate an inclusive approach, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of all children, ensuring that everyone can partake in play, irrespective of their individual differences.
- **Collaboration with Other Staff:** Playworkers collaborate closely with the Play Coordinator and other staff members, sharing insights and strategies to improve the play environment and ensure coherent support for children's play.

By adhering to these principles, lunchtime staff (playworkers) at Spring Bank Primary School will create a supportive and enriching play environment that fosters children's growth, creativity, and joy through play.

- play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, different concepts and ideas;
- play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices;

- play is critical to children’s physical and emotional health, and enables them to explore and develop the balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others;
- free play can have a direct positive impact on a child’s ability to reach their potential.

Staff will use and refer to ‘The Principles of Playwork when appropriate interventions are needed, but ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment which nurtures self-directed play.

Inclusion

This commitment to providing a rich and wide-ranging play environment is essential for nurturing each child's unique potential and fostering their overall development. By focusing on a wide array of play opportunities, the playworkers create a space where all children can engage meaningfully, regardless of their backgrounds or individual needs.

Encouraging a diverse play experience allows children to explore their interests, develop essential social skills, and build strong relationships with peers and adults. Play is a vital component of learning, and when it's tailored to be accessible and enjoyable for everyone, it becomes a powerful tool for growth and connection.

Furthermore, by actively promoting inclusivity, playworkers not only support each child's personal journey but also help cultivate an atmosphere of respect and understanding within the school community. This fosters a sense of belonging, encouraging children to recognize and celebrate their differences as they learn to collaborate and play together.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that all children feel valued and can thrive in a supportive environment, laying the foundation for lifelong friendships and a positive school experience. Through this inclusive approach, we can help each child shine in their own unique way.

Monitoring

The school will continue to use the OPAL audit tool and pupil survey to monitor the implementation of the play policy and action plan.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually so we can update the policy as OPAL progresses

Appendix 1

Play England

Charter for Play

Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

When children are asked about what they think is important in their lives, playing and friends is usually at the top of the list.

Defining play

How do we define what 'playing' actually means?

Our Charter for Children's Play describes play as: 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.'

Play has also frequently been described as 'what children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults.'

Having time and space to play gives children the opportunity to meet and socialise with their friends, keeps them physically active, and gives the freedom to choose what they want to do.

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life. Recent research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

- increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

Evidence is also available that outlines wider benefits of play provision for families and communities, suggesting that:

- parents can feel more secure knowing that their children are happy, safe and enjoying themselves
- families benefit from healthier, happier children
- buildings and facilities used by play services are frequently seen as a focal point for communities
- it offers opportunities for social interaction for the wider community and supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit, promoting social cohesion
- public outside spaces have an important role in the everyday lives of children and young people, especially as a place for meeting friends

- parks and other green spaces are popular with adults taking young children out to play and for older children and young people to spend time together.

Summaries of the research and evidence of the positive benefits of play are discussed in detail in [Play for a Change](#).

Children's right to play is a human right

On 1 February 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of **Article 31 of the Convention on the Right of the Child**.