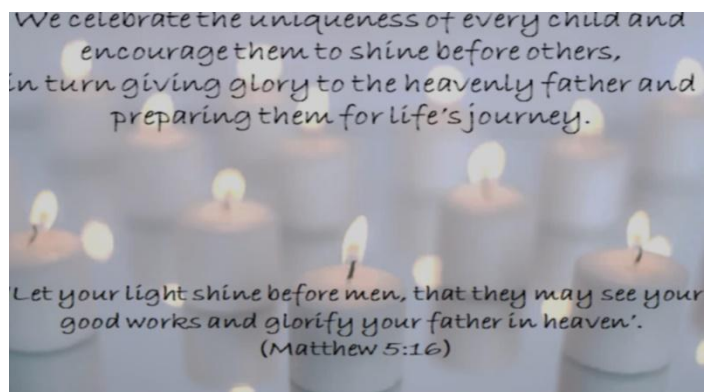




Elveden C of E Primary Academy



Our Outdoor Play and Learning Handbook



'Let Your Light Shine before men, so they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven'

Matthew 5:16

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Statement of Ownership

This handbook was created by Mrs Fox-Echols (Play Co-ordinator) and Mrs Maguire (Curricular Lead for Play) at Elveden C of E Primary Academy, throughout July to August 2022. This document will be reviewed and updated according to any changes that have to be made. These may be changes to the actual Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) zones or how the sessions may run.

Information about school policy is taken directly from Elveden C of E Primary Academy website and relevant policies can be found on here.

The next review for our OPAL Handbook will be August 2024. However, if any changes occur before this time, this document will be updated and relevant amendments made and all staff will be asked to read the handbook again and signatory evidence will be obtained.

Outdoor Play and Learning Handbook created by:

Patricia Fox-Echols.

Zoe Maguire.

Introduction to Outdoor Play and Learning-(OPAL)

OPAL is an award-winning, mentor supported school improvement programme, established, founded and directed by Micheal Follet in 2011, author of 'Creating Excellence in Primary School Playtimes' JKP 2017. The programme addresses all the areas that schools must plan for, if they want to strategically and sustainably improve the quality of their play opportunities. OPAL is the only programme of its kind that has been independently proven to sustainably improve the quality of play in British primary schools. Its success comes from a series of interrelated actions undertaken with specialist support from an OPAL mentor. This embeds play into the school's policies and practices and establishes clear guiding principles and strategies for initiating lasting changes at playtimes. (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk).

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty which grants all children and young people a comprehensive set of rights, including the right to play. (Article 31) OPAL is committed to ensuring that Article 31 is recognised and implemented in all UK schools and by all organisations which have an impact on the quality of childhood.

Elveden C of E Primary Academy recognises and are also committed to ensuring that Article 31 is implemented in our school and we acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to all our children's views on their play.

How we began our OPAL Journey

Elveden C of E Primary Academy began the journey of improving Outdoor Play and Learning for all our children with the OPAL programme in October 2021. Recognising that outdoor play is an integral part of our school day and that through outdoor play our children get to encounter, explore and make sense of the world and their place within it, was really the determining factor for us implementing it. The benefits of outdoor play are comprehensive; they help our children to build imagination and creativity, foster their cognitive growth, emotional and mental health wellbeing and has proven behavioural benefits. Also outdoor play improves literacy and encourages greater independence through learning about risk and encountering challenge, it also supports social and spiritual development and promotes physical activity and fitness. Furthermore, Outdoor play helps with language, arts, culture, science, maths, technology and supports self-regulation, all key areas of personal development that we at Elveden, believe are fundamental to a child's education.

'Play is the natural vehicle through which children practice the skills and values of their culture and learn how to get along with others, solve their own problems, regulate their emotions and impulses and generally take control of their own lives.' 'In order to foster children who will thrive in today's constantly changing world, we must entrust them to steer their own Learning and development.'

Peter Gray, PH.D. (author of 'Free to LEARN')

OPAL at Elveden C of E Primary Academy follows the Playwork definition of a process which is, freely chosen by the Child, self-directed by the Child and intrinsically motivated by the Child and our children are given the time, space and permission to play. Our OPAL sessions comprise of two play sites encompassing four zones within the schools grounds and take place every day at lunchtimes. Our children are able to freely choose which site they would like to play in and to free flow between zones, our children are able to play with whomever they choose and are therefore able to play and interact with peers of all ages. This encourages solid relationships to be

built and social connections to be made across our whole school. Our OPAL offers a stimulating, flexible, challenging and diverse environment to our children through the use of playful resources and the integrated use of loose parts, supporting varied and complex play opportunities. Loose parts refer to anything within the play environment that is not fixed and that children can freely use as part of their play, loose parts can be natural or man-made.

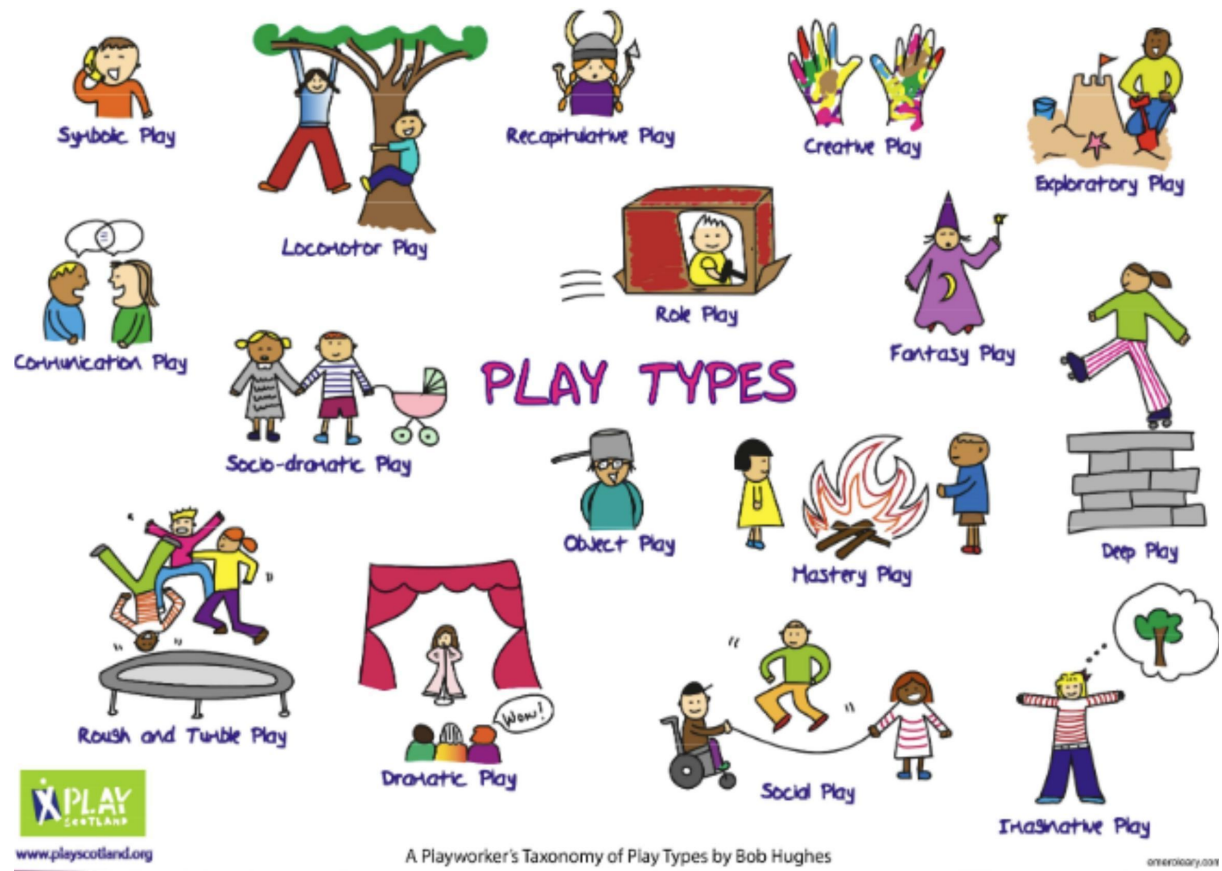
The 'Theory of Loose Parts' (an article written by architect Simon Nicholson in 1971) says that the more moveable things there are in a play environment, the greater the number of possibilities there will be for invention, creation and imagination.

"When children interact with loose parts, they enter a world of "what if" that promotes the type of thinking that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. Loose parts enhance children's ability to think imaginatively and see solutions, and they bring a sense of adventure and excitement to children's play".

Lisa Daly and Miriam Beloglovsky (authors of 'Loose Parts Inspiring Play in Young Children')

OPAL play sessions at Elveden are delivered by our Opal Play Team, who have all completed the OPAL Playwork Essentials Course. Our Play Team work together to enrich and diversify our children's play opportunities and they recognise that good quality play is essential to our children's health, happiness, development and well-being. They value the Playwork principles of being able to: understand the need, understand the process, support the process, advocate for play, create spaces, learn and reflect, understand adult impact and choose appropriate intervention styles. By using and reflecting upon Bob Hughes Taxonomy of play types, our Play Team are able to identify, understand, integrate and continually adapt and improve the quality of our play environments, the accessibility to resources and the play opportunities on offer to our children at Elveden.

Our OPAL handbook is available for all stakeholders to read and when reviewed will be emailed out to all Staff and School Governors.



Bob Hughes Taxonomy of Play Types

Our Aims and Principles For Outdoor Play and Learning

As a Church school, we have five clear aims which are inextricably intertwined with our Christian vision, mission statement, physical and mental well-being and Building Learning Power. These five aims can be learnt and observed during play and therefore are regarded by us as being of the utmost importance to enhancing our children's holistic development.

Our five aims are:

***Ready to learn:** Children have a positive, confident attitude to learning. They are both physically and emotionally ready to learn.

***Resourceful:** Children show initiative, ask well thought out questions and are prepared to use a variety of strategies to learn.



***Reflective:** Children are curious, able and willing to learn from their mistakes and can describe their progress.



***Resilient:** Children are prepared to persevere and stay involved in their learning, even when the process is challenging.



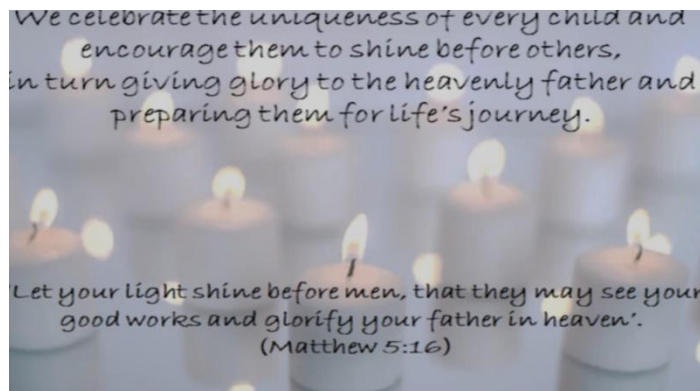
***Reciprocal:** Children are prepared to help each other and work as a team.



Elveden C of E Primary Academy is committed to providing a high quality learning experience for all pupils and our OPAL provision is no exception, our five aims are sufficiently interwoven within the free play ideology. The curriculum at our school is designed to provide a broad and balanced education that is inclusive of the needs of all pupils and gives them the skills, knowledge and understanding to prepare them for life's journey. It ensures academic success as well as physical and mental development and health and well-being are key elements that support the development of the whole child and promote a positive attitude to learning, with an OPAL environment being an ideal setting to develop these. Furthermore, the aim of our curriculum is for pupils to have the necessary skills to be successful, independent and motivated learners in readiness for their next stage of

education. We feel it is important that the curriculum prepares children for their future and builds on our key values of *hope, trust, respect and forgiveness*. The curriculum celebrates diversity and values all God's children with dignity. We encourage children to be confident and enthusiastic learners and enable them to take risks.

As a Christian school, we believe that in whatever they undertake in life, all children deserve a chance to '*Let Their Light Shine*, and skills learnt outdoors are a great way to show this.



Within a climate of high expectation and challenge, all children are guided, supported and inspired to fulfil their true potential, emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually, both during their time at school and in their life ahead. Therefore, our OPAL sessions provide a safe environment where all participants can acquire skills in an outdoor environment, they get to take risks, build resilience, make autonomous choices about their own play and learning and initiate free play with those around them.

Our OPAL sessions help our children to appreciate and respect their outdoor play environment, whilst building a bank of valuable outdoor learning experiences where each one of them can truly shine. In addition to this, our OPAL sessions encourage all learning styles and uncover 'multiple intelligences' in our children allowing them to develop holistically within their play environment.

Health & Safety For Outdoor Play and Learning

The Health and Safety for Elveden C of E Primary Academy, sets out a clear statement of the schools approach to the health and safety of the children, staff and visitors whilst at the school. This statement applies fully and inclusively to our OPAL sessions.

Please see our Health Safety and Welfare Policy on our school website.

Risk Benefit Assessment For Outdoor Play and Learning

Risk benefit management is an essential part of our Outdoor Play and Learning sessions at Elveden C of E Primary Academy. As an OPAL school we have a Play Policy that states that risk and challenges are essential for our children's learning and development and that enabling our children to learn to identify and manage risk in a supported environment is an essential feature of play provision. Our play provision therefore aims to offer our children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging play environment that is also free from unacceptable and unnecessary risks.

Our school uses the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *'Children's Play and Leisure-Promoting a Balanced Approach (September 2012)* as the principle value statement informing its approach to managing risk in Play. In doing so, our school adopts a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *'Managing Risk in Play Provision': An Implementation Guide*.

Elveden C of E Primary Academy have written Risk-Benefit Assessments on file for our outdoor play and learning sessions, covering its four zoned areas, for the environment and the resources available within these zones. These guide all school staff in how our school manages identified common and serious risks regarding our outdoor play sessions. In addition any play activity or new resource that requires a risk assessment is put in place before the activity takes place or the resource is added.

Further to our Risk-Benefit Assessments our Curricular Lead for Play holds regular whole school play assemblies, records of which are kept as Risk-Benefit Discussion Logs. Our play assemblies enable staff and children to agree management and mitigation, giving our children a voice that they know is valued and therefore empowering them to engage in becoming partners in their play processes and opportunities.

Our play assembly approach:

**Celebrates-Embraces and celebrates our children's freely chosen, self-directed and intrinsically motivated play experiences and learning processes and celebrates our children demonstrating and using our schools Christian values and Bp aims in their play choices and interactions.*

**Informs-Discussions on what OPAL play is and what it's not, how children keep themselves and others safe, how they respect themselves and others, the environment and resources. How children are responsible in their play choices and actions. Discussions about new resources that are to be introduced, any risks identified, discussing issues, concerns and sharing of ideas as our children's play evolves. Development of our children's play literacy. Acknowledging that all experience is relevant*

**Negotiates-Discussions on how we can improve and enable play choices, environments and resources available, maximising play benefits. How we can make sustainable changes for the better. Seek balanced and proportionate solutions to management of risk in our play provision.*

**Innovates-How we will act on and implement the solutions, methods and ideas discussed that will enhance our children's play value, affordance and opportunity and how we will ensure we provide a sustainably engaging and inclusive play sessions for all our children.*

Prior to all our OPAL sessions, a Daily site check is carried out by the Play Co-coordinator and a record kept on file, this site check assesses both sites and all four zones: the access to zones, boundaries, canopy, shrub, field, ground layers, shelters and other ground structures, equipment and

resources. This site check also assesses the outdoor weather conditions to evaluate and identify any issues and the course of action to be taken by the Play Team staff, the children and to the outdoor play sessions. Our Play Team staff also practice Dynamic Risk Management in their allocated zones where by all resources are weekly checked for safety and an Ongoing Safety Check Log is signed and kept on record. They also put into practice Dynamic risk management when on duty, they are constantly aware of the changing nature of play taking place and use a common sense approach with our children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks during their play.

Under UK Law there is no recommended ratio for how many adults should supervise play, or is their guidance on what form supervision should take. Elveden C of E Primary Academy recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervision takes the remote and ranging models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging. Our play sites and zones are made aware of to our children before their opportunity to play and they must decide in which site they wish to play (each site has two zones and is supervised by two Play Team staff).

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

¹ 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])

Equality and Inclusion For Outdoor Play and Learning

Elveden C of E Primary Academy School is committed to the idea that there should be equal opportunity for all. Through our policies and by providing a rich play offer and environment we ensure that we promote the individuality of our children, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

At Elveden we celebrate the uniqueness of every child and encourage them to shine in all they do, building a bank of learning experiences which prepare them for life's journey with our vision 'Let Your Light Shine'(Matthew 5:16) encompassing an inclusive approach under God's Guidance.

Our Equality Plan follows seven key principles:

- 1 All learners are of equal value.
- 2 We recognise, respect and value difference and understand that diversity is a strength.
- 3 We foster positive attitudes and relationships.
- 4 We foster a shared sense of cohesion and belonging.
- 5 We observe good equalities practice for our staff.
- 6 We have the highest expectations of all our children.
- 7 We work to raise standards for all pupils, but especially the most vulnerable.

Please see Our Equality and Inclusion Policy on our school website.

Safeguarding For Outdoor Play and Learning

Elveden C of E Primary Academy School recognises its responsibilities for child protection and for confidentiality. We understand that effective Child Protection work requires sound procedures, excellent multi-agency cooperation and a workforce that is confident in responding to child protection situations quickly and efficiently.

Please see our Safeguarding Policy on our school website.

Behaviour For Outdoor Play and Learning

Elveden C of E Primary Academy Behaviour Policy is followed exactly the same during our daily OPAL Sessions. We aim for our children to grow and develop in an environment where they are cared for, listened to and respected as well as being given consistent, secure and firm boundaries, we ensure all adults and children understand our behaviour expectations, these expectations are embedded through school life.

Our OPAL Play Charter also not only shows our adult obligation to respect our children's rights under the UN convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31, but also states how our children will behave and engage in their play choices and how our Play Team will support our children's behaviour and engagement in their play choices. Our schools behaviour expectations, Christian values and beliefs and BLP aims are also embedded in our play assembly discussions further ensuring consistency across the whole schools learning environments.

Please see our Behaviour Policy on our school website.



Elveden's Play Charter



During our play we will be:



Resourceful- use resources creatively, try new things and apply skills we already have to play!



Reflective- think about ourselves, others and what we want to do with our play resources.



Resilient- not given up with play, try hard and being brave to take risks in play



Reciprocal- play and learn from others, share ideas about play

During our play we will:

Keep ourselves and others safe.

Respect ourselves and others.

Be responsible when we play.

During our play, the Play Team will:

Encourage us to try new play.

Let us play how we wish (as long as we are safe).

Not take over our play, but join in when we wish them too!

Help us to tidy up after our play.

