



Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL PLAY) Policy

Governor Committee Responsible:	Finlay Community School Combined Committee	Staff Lead(s):	Michelle Bryce Family Services Manager
Status (Statutory / Advisory)	Non-statutory	Review Cycle	3 years
Approved by Headteacher	June 2025	Next Review Date	June 2028

Finlay Community School – Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy

1. Introduction

At Finlay Community School, we believe that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience, and affect their environment. Play is a vital part of every child's development and wellbeing, and we are committed to ensuring that every pupil has access to high-quality play every day.

We aim to provide a rich and inclusive play environment that supports our values of respect, resilience, curiosity, and community. Play at Finlay Community School is not separate from learning — it is an essential part of it.

2. The OPAL Rationale

Our school is part of the OPAL Primary Programme, based on the belief 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.”

(OPAL Primary Programme, 2022)

We strive to create an environment where play is purposeful, inclusive, and full of opportunity for growth and joy.

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 physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual development; encouraging exploration, self-esteem, and creativity; and promoting communication, negotiation, and independence.

4. Aims

In relation to play, Finlay Community School aims to:

- Provide varied, challenging, and stimulating play environments.
- Allow children to take risks using a common-sense, risk–benefit approach.
- Encourage positive relationships and teamwork through play.
- Foster respect for the environment and one another.

- Aid physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual development.
- Support cross-curricular learning through play.
- Promote independence, collaboration, and resilience.

5. Experiencing Risk and Challenge Through Play

At Finlay Community School, we believe that play — like learning — involves taking risks and facing challenges. Allowing children to encounter and manage risk is essential for developing confidence, self-awareness, and resilience.

We encourage children to test ideas, explore boundaries, and make informed choices within a safe but stimulating environment. Experiencing manageable risk helps children to:

- Develop resilience and perseverance.
- Build judgement and a sense of responsibility.
- Strengthen confidence and problem-solving skills.
- Experience and regulate a range of emotions.
- Collaborate, negotiate, and care for others.

We follow the Health and Safety Executive's guidance *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach* (2012) and adopt a risk–benefit approach, as recommended by the Play Safety Forum.

“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, Play Safety Forum, 2012)

Our aim is to manage risk responsibly, not remove challenge. By doing so, we prepare children not just for play, but for life.

6. Rights of the Child

We recognise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly:

- Article 31: The right to play, recreation, and leisure.
- Article 12: The right to be listened to on matters important to them.

We take these rights seriously, listening to children's views about their play experiences and including their voices in how our play provision develops.

7. Equality and Diversity

Through a rich and inclusive play offer, Finlay Community School ensures that every child, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or background, can develop, thrive, and enjoy

school life. Our approach to play reflects our Equality and Diversity Policy and supports inclusion for all.

8. Supervision

The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote, and Ranging.

- For most children, remote and ranging supervision models are used, enabling staff to patrol and maintain awareness across all play areas.
- Reception children receive closer supervision initially.
- Adults are trained to recognise when to step in and when to allow play to unfold naturally.

9. The Role of Adults in Play

Staff and play supervisors are guided by the Playwork Principles. Their role is to:

- Create and maintain environments that stimulate children's play.
- Observe, support, and facilitate play without unnecessary interference.
- Intervene only when necessary for safety or inclusion.
- Help children access resources and opportunities for self-directed play.
- Reflect and improve play provision through training and feedback.

10. Environment

We aim to provide a rich, stimulating, and continually evolving play environment that offers challenge and excitement while managing risk sensibly. We use Best Play: What Play Provision Should Do for Children (Free Play Network) as a guide for developing our playground and outdoor learning spaces.

11. Managing Risk

Finlay Community School follows the Health and Safety Executive's guidance and the Play Safety Forum's Managing Risk in Play Provision (2012). We adopt a risk–benefit approach that recognises risk-taking as essential to play and involves children in identifying and managing risks dynamically.

12. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body. Monitoring will include play audits, pupil feedback, incident logs, and ongoing staff reflection.

13. References and Supporting Documents

- OPAL Primary Programme Resources
- Managing Risk in Play Provision (Play Safety Forum, 2012)
- HSE: Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (2012)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Best Play (Free Play Network)

- Finlay Community School Policies: Equality and Diversity, Behaviour, Safeguarding, Outdoor Learning, Health and Safety