



St Thomas More RC Primary School Play Policy



St Thomas More RC Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide 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 St Thomas More we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. 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. 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.

St Thomas More RC Primary School believes that all children need opportunities to play which allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. The school acknowledges the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 31, and supports the child's right to play. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that,

'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

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.

St Thomas More has developed its play provision with support from OPAL. The OPAL 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 school, with more effective classroom lessons, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioral problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life*".

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 are children. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types eg 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.

The Value of Play

Play is defined as any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. We believe the learning opportunities of play include: -

- Emotions e.g. learning about oneself and others, sadness/gladness, rejection/acceptance, frustration/achievement, boredom/fascination, fear/confidence.
 - Social interactions - enhancing self-esteem and understanding of others through freely chosen interactions e.g. within peer groups, with individuals, with groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.
 - Making choices, problem solving, being creative,
 - Playing with scrap materials, tyres and other multipurpose objects,
 - Achieving and also coping with failing,
 - Communication and negotiation skill
- Play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
 - Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, different concepts and ideas.
 - 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.

Aims: The school aims to address the provision of improved play opportunities:

To ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.

To allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to these risks and their benefits.

To provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.

To enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.

To aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.

To provide a range of environments which will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.

To provide a range of environments which will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.

To promote independence and team work within children.

To build emotional and physical resilience.

Benefit and Risk

'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'
Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide is published for Play England 2012.

The school will use 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. It will adopt a benefits/risk approach as detailed in 'Managing Risk in Play Provision' Implementation Guide. Managing Risk in Play Provision Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children and young people legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children and young people the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of 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 additions to standard risk/benefit assessments the school will practice dynamic risk management with children encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

Supervision

During the school day there will be adults present outdoors. The school recognizes 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 will take remote and ranging models so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

The Adults' Role in Play

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.

The play-worker's core function is to create an environment which will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced play-worker 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. Play-workers 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 available to participate in the play if invited.

Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to a stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable risk and thereby offer the opportunity to explore both themselves, through their freely chosen play.

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if necessary.