



St. Michael's Community Academy Play and Risk Management Policy

The policy will be reviewed annually and revised where necessary.

Date of implementation: **February 2025**

Date for Review: **May 2026**

1. Commitment

At St. Michael's Community Academy we recognise that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. We aim to provide high quality, enjoyable play experiences for all children across school. We will do this by providing carefully considered outdoor spaces, play structures and resources that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. We will refer to our school's vision and this play policy in all decisions that affect our children's play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

We provide a wide range of balanced learning opportunities in a caring and stimulating environment; this extends to the learning, and positive experiences that can be achieved at play times. We aim to seek the maximum potential development of each individual and look for high all round achievement in all aspects of a child's development.

2. Rationale

At St. Michael's Community Academy we acknowledge Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which 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 that all children need opportunities to play which 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.

At St. Michael's Community Academy we seek to attain the highest standard for all our children, in all aspects of school life. With children spending up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play, it is imperative that this time needs to be coherent and well thought out. The current climate and ever-changing society, for example: heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led children having less time, space and permission for play in the wider public realm. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

When speaking to children in September 2022, there were many comments about them enjoying playtimes, but some children requested "more things to do", "a bigger choice of activities, not just toys" and "more space to play". We therefore believe that it is important to maximise our use of the grounds we have and to invest in high quality play resources to fulfil our school's aims of creating a secure environment where children can play in peace and happiness alongside one another and approach their world of joy and wonder, seeing childhood as a place in its own right and not just a preparation for the next stage of life.

3. Definition and Value of Play

The United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child defines play as: *“any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end”*.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types, for example, through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a secure environment. At St. Michael's Community Academy we believe that children should have the opportunity to experience different types of play. By having these opportunities, our children will have the potential to reap the many benefits that play has.

Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times (**Appendix 1**), there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

4. Aims

In relation to play, we aim to:

- Ensure that children have access to a wide range of opportunities for play which they enjoy.
- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment, which encourage children to explore, learn about and process the world around them.
- Allow children to take risks and use a balanced approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other, but also for play to be co-operative or solitary.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Promote self-regulation, independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience amongst our children.
- Ensure that children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources, as long as it is reasonably safe for them to do so, regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background.

- Encourage adults to be responsive to children’s invitations and requests, and to carry out dynamic risk-benefit assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children’s risk awareness.

5. Benefit and Risk

We adopt the RAPID response to risk as illustrated below:

R:	Risk-benefit assessment
A:	Assemblies focused on playtime
P:	Policy for play ratified by governors and parents regularly communicated with.
I:	Inspections carried out regularly
D:	Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

At St. Michael’s Community Academy, we believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play enhances children’s self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, 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.

We commit to providing the children of St. Michael’s Community Academy with all of the benefits of play, whilst managing any risks involved. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play 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’*. Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences.

We will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance *‘Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach’* (**Appendix 2**) as the principal document informing our approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, we will adopt a risk-benefit approach to play. In addition to written risk assessments (**Appendix 3**), the school will practice dynamic risk-benefit management with children encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

5. Supervision

At St. Michael's Community Academy we understand the importance of appropriate supervision during play times. The law requires that children in school have supervision, but for primary school playtimes there are no stated adult to children ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors.

At St. Michael's Community Academy we will use OPAL's three models of supervision: **Direct, Remote and Ranging**. In order to allow children to make full use of our school grounds, direct supervision is not always possible or beneficial. Whilst direct supervision will be initially used for our youngest children starting school, the majority of our playtime 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.

Our school grounds will be divided into supervision zones with an adult patrolling each area. An additional 'floating' member of staff will be present during each playtime to have an overview of the whole site and to offer support in a specific areas if necessary. Adults within each zone will communicate via walkie-talkies and a fixed first aid area will be used for any accidents.

8. The Adults' Role in Play

At St. Michael's Community Academy we, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground, which will aim to further develop their playtime experiences using their voice and opinions as guidance.

We will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play, by training our play team to work in accordance with the 'Playwork Principles' (**Appendix 4**). Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment which nurtures children's self-directed play.

The play team's role will be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. We are working with OPAL to help guide a strategic approach to developing play. Our Play Team (**Appendix 5**) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, MDAs and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. The play team will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and make a change to the play space if needed. Play Makers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all

children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

9. Children's Role in Play

At St. Michael's Community Academy we believe that it is equally as important for children to have a say in their play. The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy (**Appendix 6**).

It will 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, play structures and resources
- 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.

10. Environment

At St. Michael's Community Academy, we believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable/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 school's grounds to enhance play.

At St. Michael's Community Academy, we will:

- Use the outdoor space as a natural resource for playing and learning, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play
- Include the children's views and opinions when planning for play and learning outdoors
- Ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- Expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things
- Enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value
- Ensure that the school grounds be an integrated area where all children from Reception to Year 6 can play together and alongside each other
- Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the resources available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
- Promote children's pride for the outdoor space that belongs to them.

It is important to note that this policy works in conjunction with the school's Safeguarding policy and the PSHE policy.

Appendix 1

'Best Play' – Play Types:

Play types

The following fifteen play types and explanations are adapted from those given in Hughes (1996b).

◆ **Symbolic play**

Play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding, without the risk of being out of one's depth. For example using a piece of wood to symbolise a person, or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.

◆ **Rough and tumble play**

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength, discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. For example playful fighting, wrestling and chasing where the children involved are obviously unhurt and giving every indication that they are enjoying themselves.

◆ **Socio-dramatic play**

The enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.

◆ **Social play**

Play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended. For example any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols, i.e. games, conversations, making something together.

◆ **Creative play**

Play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. For example enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake.

◆ **Communication play**

Play using words, nuances or gestures for example mime, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, debate, poetry.

◆ **Dramatic play**

Play which dramatizes events in which the child is not a direct participator. For example presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.

◆ **Deep play**

Play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear. For example leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam.

Play types

◆ Exploratory play

Play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects. For example engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.

◆ Fantasy play

Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way which is unlikely to occur. For example playing at being a pilot flying around the world or the owner of an expensive car.

◆ Imaginative play

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply. For example imagining you are, or pretending to be, a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.

◆ Locomotor play

Movement in any and every direction for its own sake. For example chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.

◆ Mastery play

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments. For example digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.

◆ Object play

Play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements. For example examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup.

◆ Role play

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.

Appendix 2

'Health & Safety Executive: Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting A Balanced Approach'

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

Appendix 3

St. Michael's Community Academy Risk Assessment for Outdoor Play (separate document, available upon request)

St. Michael's Community Academy Risk Benefit Assessment (separate document, available upon request)

Appendix 4

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/best-play/>

Criteria for an enriched play environment

The following criteria for an enriched play environment are adapted from those given in Hughes (1996a). The examples given for each section are in no sense exhaustive, merely indicative.

Play provision should provide opportunities for:

- ◆ **A varied and interesting physical environment**
Examples: Things at different levels, spaces of different sizes, places to hide, trees and bushes as well as things that have been made, places to inspire mystery and imagination.
- ◆ **Challenge in relation to the physical environment**
Examples: activities which test the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, sports and games, chase.
- ◆ **Playing with the natural elements - earth, water, fire, air**
Examples: campfires, digging, playing snowballs, flying kites.
- ◆ **Movement - e.g. running, jumping, rolling, climbing, balancing**
Examples: beams and ropes, soft mats, bike riding, juggling equipment, ladders, space.
- ◆ **Manipulating natural and fabricated materials**
Examples: materials for art, cooking, making and mending of all kinds; building dens; making concoctions; using tools; access to bits and pieces of all kinds.
- ◆ **Stimulation of the five senses**
Examples: music making, places where shouting is fine, quiet places, different colours and shapes, dark and bright spaces, cooking on a campfire, rotting leaves, a range of food and drink, objects that are soft, prickly, flexible, large and small.
- ◆ **Experiencing change in the natural and built environment**
Examples: experiencing the seasons through access to the outdoor environment; opportunities to take part in building, demolishing, or transforming the environment.
- ◆ **Social interactions**
Examples: being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts. Being able to interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.
- ◆ **Playing with identity**
Examples: dressing up, role play, performing, taking on different kinds of responsibility.
- ◆ **Experiencing a range of emotions**
Examples: opportunities to be powerful/powerless, scared/confident, liked/disliked, in/out of control, brave/cowardly.

Appendix 5

Structure of adult roles in practice

OPAL Team

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at St. Michael's Community Academy. It consists of:

The Principal – David Jobling
Curricular Lead for Play – Katey Shenton
Play Co-ordinator – Darren Royle
Play Champion Governor – Glyn Lowe
Play Champion Parent – Lara Evanson and Kerry Jones
Site Manager – Dave Ennis

St. Michael's Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes, staff all should act as Play Makers.

However, more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

Katey Shenton
Play Co-ordinator
(Leads and manages strategy)

Darren Royle
Play Leader
(Leads and manages playtimes)

Play Champions
(Support children's' play)

Tanya Fletcher, Kylie Prophett, Cilla Bannister, Kath Davenport, Karen Astbury, Sam Jones, Jack Reddock, Sam Challinor, Hannah Swift, Sarah Johnson, Becky Lightfoot,

Appendix 6

St. Michael's Community Academy Children's Play Policy

We have the right to have fun at playtimes. We have the responsibility to make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.

We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do. We have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.

We have the right to choose who we play with. We have the responsibility to make sure that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.

We have the right play with lots of different things and have a well looked after environment. We have the responsibility to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and play things.

We have the right to explore, be creative and take thoughtful risks. We have the responsibility to think about what we are doing and talk to a play maker about the risks we are taking if they ask us too.

Appendix 7 – Play Charter

OUR OPAL CHARTER



Everyone chooses what to play



We share equipment fairly and kindly



We take care of equipment



We treat each other how we like to be treated



We keep everybody safe



We help people if they need us



We allow people to join in games



We ask grown-ups if we need help to sort out our problems



We listen to one another



We are kind to others



We play safely