St Paul's Play and Risk Management Policy

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Approval:	Head teacher	Author:	Head teacher
LC Approval approval*:	LC Chair		
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Introduction to this Policy

'Play is essential for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the aim is not to eliminate risk but to balance risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool' (Health and Safety Executive, 2012)[1]

Children have rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Those rights are concerned with freedom and protection to access and do the things that make life worth living. Article 31 of the UN Convention acknowledges that all children have a right to play. At St Paul's CofE Primary School, 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 the 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 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 our children. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) supports the provision of diverse play environments, recognising that well-managed spaces may involve some degree of risk and occasional danger and that safety concerns should not create restrictive environments that limit challenge, preventing children from expanding their learning and capabilities (HSE, 2012). This policy provides a framework for supporting play and making decisions about the associated risks.

To support the development of high-quality play times, our school has invested in the OPAL programme, providing us with a tried and tested framework for improving children's opportunities for play. We will be following the principles and practices recommended by OPAL, as we seek to ensure every child in our school has an amazing play time every day.

[1] Health and Safety Executive (2012) Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a balanced approach, HSE.

Policy Rationale

'The opposite of play isn't work, it's depression'
(Brian Sutton-Smith, 1997)[2]

Play is often trivialised as childhood frivolity, either treated as an unimportant pastime or valued only when it contributes to adult-focused outcomes[3]. This instrumental approach can lead to overzealous adult intervention, with play expected to be "purposeful" and spontaneous or imaginative forms of play discouraged. As a result, many children's play environments have become overly controlled by adults, limiting children's ability to create uncertain, open-ended experiences. This is further reinforced by fears of litigation, which can shift the focus towards safety rather than play itself.

Beyond adult-supervised settings, children's opportunities for self-directed play in public spaces have also declined. In the UK, traffic is a major constraint on children's freedom of movement and play. Economic priorities have marginalised outdoor play, prioritising the movement of goods and workers or the use of land for building. Economic factors have also placed more parents and carers in work, increasing the use of childcare and reducing the time for playing out with friends in local neighbourhoods after school. A range of anxieties about community safety also further erodes opportunities for children's self-directed outdoor play.[4]

Furthermore, a risk-averse culture has developed in the UK and North America[5], where risk is typically seen as something to be controlled or eliminated. This perspective frames children as vulnerable and incapable, leading again to overprotective adult intervention. The result is a "cotton-wool culture", where attempts are made to remove risks completely, or children are kept away from them entirely. This failure to recognise children's natural play behaviours and self-led development has restricted children's freedom to play in both staffed settings and public spaces. The drive to limit liability undermines children's well-being and growth and has significant costs. This includes reductions in physical activity levels, increases in sedentary lifestyles, higher rates of childhood obesity, diabetes, hyperactivity and attention deficits, increases in adolescent mental ill-health, and other long-term health risks.

These long-term risks can be considerably more significant than the minor physical risks children commonly encounter in play. If children's freedom to play in public spaces is constrained, school play times become even more essential. To ensure children benefit fully from their play, existing risk-averse practices must change. At St Paul's CofE Primary School, we take a balanced approach to risk management — one that loosens adult control while maintaining "safe enough" environments for play. We recognise that play spaces should offer:

- Freedom for children to engage with uncertainty,
- A relaxed atmosphere where adults support play rather than overly manage it,

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[2] Sutton-Smith, B. (1997) *The Ambiguity of Play,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[3] Meire, J. (2007) Qualitative Research on Children's Play: A review of recent literature, in Jambor, T. and van Gils, J.(eds) Several Perspectives on Children's Play: Scientific Reflections for Practitioners, Antwerp: Garant, pp. 29-78.

[4] Russell, W., Barclay, M. and Tawil, B. (2024). *Playing and being well: A review of recent research into children's play, social policy and practice, with a focus on Wales (summary).* Play Wales.

[5] Gill, T. (2007) No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation;

- Recognition that children's natural risk-taking builds resilience, confidence, and well-being.

By developing fantastic play times for all our children, where they can experience self-directed play, we can compensate them for the loss of time, space and permission for play outside of school and support their growth and development, and mental and physical health.

What is Play and Why is it Important

Our children told us:

- You enjoy play times
- That adults help you if you hurt yourself or feel scared
- There are lots of places for you and your friends to sit
- You would like more stuff to build with
- There are areas you want to play but you are not allowed

The United Nations' 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'*[6].

Play can be understood as a non-serious, self-directed behaviour, free from external rules and constraints. At its core, play is about joy, freedom, and exploration. It provides a temporary escape from life's complexities. Playing can shake up space, bring light and optimism to difficult situations, foster a sense that life is worth living, and create moments of delight, laughter, friendship, adventure and silliness.

Through play, children explore, express, and refine their capacities to navigate the world and their place in it. Play supports children's physical, emotional, and social health, but this relies on adults creating supportive conditions[4]. The intrinsic value of play lies in its freedom and autonomy, making it profoundly important in ways that adult-structured activities cannot replicate.
Research into play has identified a range of unique features that make play what is[7]. Our play environments and staff practices will focus on nurturing these unique features of play (as set out below), and creating the conditions that support them:

- **Personal control -** In play, children have freedom to decide their own actions. Playing has a spontaneous quality that cannot be totally planned for.
- **Intrinsic motivation -** play is driven by joy and curiosity, not external outcomes or rewards.
- **Relational** – through play, children develop attachments, cooperation, empathy and an understanding of themselves and others.
- **Emotional resonance** - play provides a space to explore emotions and process experiences.

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[6] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) *General Comment 17 on the Right of the Child to Rest, Leisure, Play, Recreational Activities, Cultural Life and the Arts (art. 31),* Geneva: United Nations

[7] Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play For a Change: Play Policy and Practice. A review of contemporary perspectives.* London: Play England; Cowan, K. (2020) *A Panorama of Play: A literature review,* Digital Futures Commission, London: 5Rights Foundation.

- **Flexibility and variability** - play is ever-changing, helping children to adapt, cope with change and be creative.
- **Imagination and pretence** - play is often not the real thing. Children create imagined scenarios, playing with actions and ideas in pretend ways.
- **Novelty and uncertainty** – children seek out challenge and uncertainty in their play, developing resilience and risk perception.

These unique features of play work together as a kind of **"ordinary magic"[8],** enabling children to contribute to their own well-being and resilience through continued opportunities to:

- **Form attachments** to people and places,
- **Regulate emotions** and cope with **stress**,
- **Develop cognitive skills** such as creativity and problem-solving,
- **Build motivation** through experiences that bring **joy and fulfilment**.

The Health and Safety Executive also recognise that play is vital for children, providing opportunities to explore abilities, learn, and develop while engaging with real-world risks. Play is not risk-free, but it helps children develop risk awareness and prepare for their future lives (HSE, 2012).

Providing for Play

So far as is reasonably practicable, we want children in our school to have freedom of movement across the whole school grounds, making the most of the opportunities for play the environment affords. We also recognise the value of different ages and abilities of children mixing and the importance of promoting children's self-regulation of their play. This includes children being allowed to be out of sight for short periods of time, enabling them to make dens, play hide and seek type games, and enjoy a degree of privacy in their play. Importantly, there will be adults on hand to check in on children and offer help or guidance should they need it.

Again, so far as is reasonably practicable, children should be enabled to control what, where, with whom and how they play. To support this, we will use the principle of 'everyone has a right to play', meaning that children have freedom to play in ways that are of value to them so long as this does not prevent others from doing the same.

To enable full site access, it is also essential that children have access to a change of footwear/wellies and appropriate clothing to enable them to play out in most weathers and continue to access the field when it is wet and muddy. To support this, wellies and coats will be made part of the school uniform, and we will be providing suitable storage and other facilities to enable more playing throughout the year.

To further enhance and extend children's opportunities for play, we will develop and maintain our school grounds in ways that maximise their play value. This includes providing children with easy access to a large quantity and wide variety of loose parts—junk materials and natural resources that children can use creatively in their play. Enhancing children's opportunities for play in these ways will support children's enjoyment of school, their learning and creativity, the development of friendships and, in turn, their sense

[8] Masten, A (2001) Ordinary Magic: Resilience processes in development, American Psychologist, 56 (3): 227-238

of well-being and resilience. These benefits of quality play time experiences are also key to the realisation of our school values: kindness, respect, perseverance, courage, community and forgiveness.

Given the importance of play to children and the school's commitment to upholding children's right to play, children's access to play times will only be restricted if their behaviours present an unreasonable risk to themselves or others. Such action will only be taken when necessary, and careful consideration will be given to how these children can be supported to return to play times.

Taking a Risk-Benefit Approach

Risk arises where uncertainty creates the possibility of harm. The level of risk reflects both how likely that harm is and how serious it could be. In play, however, exposure to risk and uncertainty can also generate important benefits. For example, balancing along a wall may involve a risk of physical injury, while also generating pleasure, excitement, self-awareness, confidence, risk perception and management skills, and a sense of achievement. In Great Britain, the provision of play opportunities is governed by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the relevant occupiers' liability legislation. Taken together, these require schools to:

- reduce risks so far as is reasonably practicable under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- undertake suitable and sufficient assessments of risk and manage those risks appropriately and proportionately under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999;
- in England and Wales, take reasonable care so that lawful visitors are reasonably safe when using the premises for the purposes for which they are invited or permitted to be there. Schools must also take reasonable care in relation to people who are not lawful visitors where the conditions set out in the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984 apply; and

Undertake suitable and sufficient assessments of risks and manage those risks appropriately and proportionately (Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999). The level of risk to which children may reasonably be exposed is a question of what is reasonable and practicable. In occupational health and safety, risk reduction or elimination is ordinarily the objective. In children's play, however, exposure to risk and uncertainty can contribute to important benefits. Risks and benefits must therefore be considered together when deciding what is reasonable and proportionate. The Health and Safety Executive highlights this in its high-level statement **Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach**[1]:

> *'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 about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring they are not exposed to unnecessary risk.'*

In 2023, the International Organization for Standardization published ISO 4980:2023, a voluntary international standard on benefit-risk assessment for sport and recreational facilities, activities and equipment, including children's play. OPAL uses the term "risk-benefit assessment", while ISO uses "benefit-risk assessment". In this context, both describe the same balanced process of considering risks and benefits together when making decisions. ISO 4980:2023 defines benefit-risk assessment as:

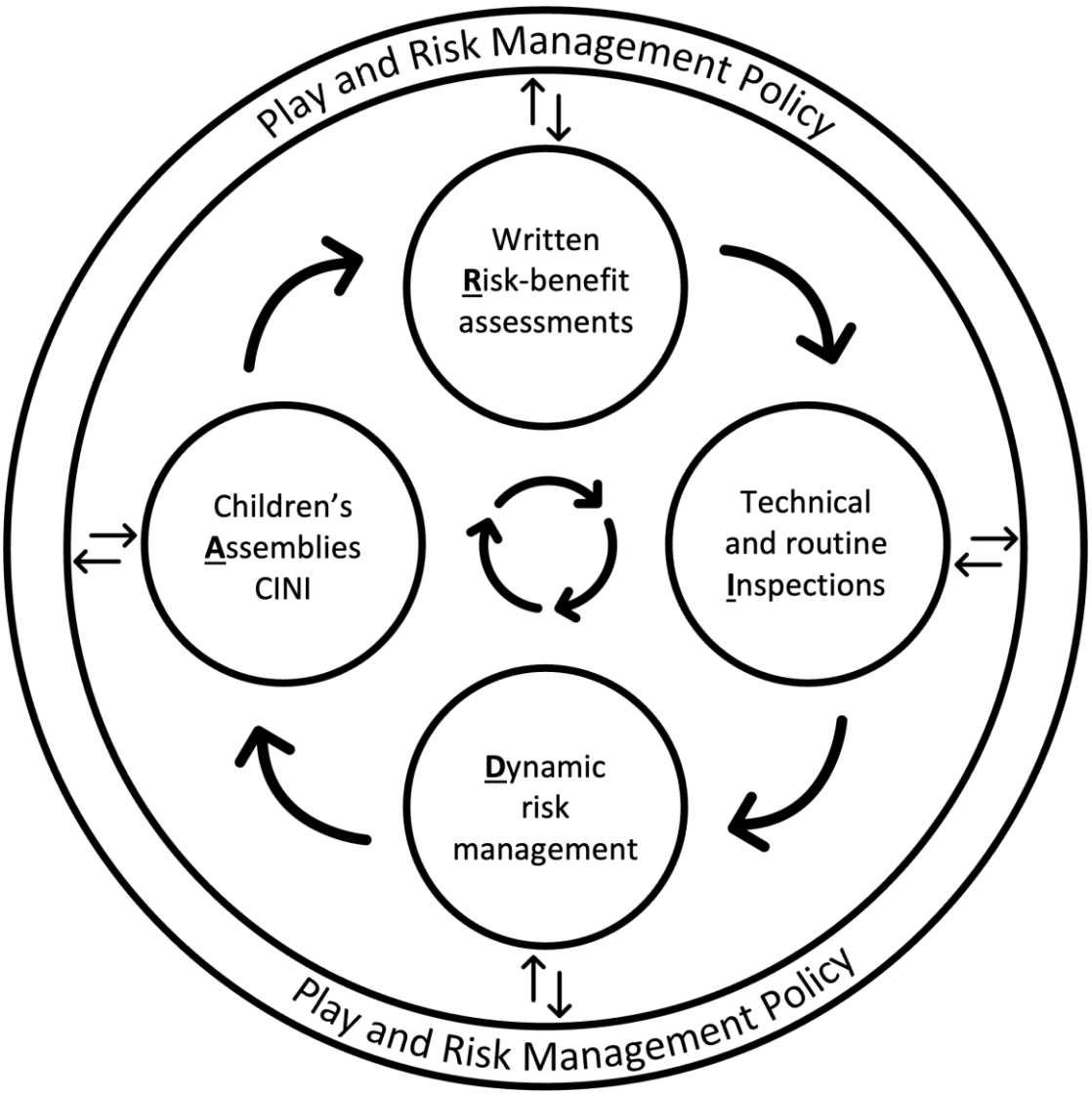
'A form of risk assessment that considers both risks and benefits in parallel when making decisions. Benefit-risk assessment is a balanced approach involving judgment based on clear values and understandings. Where appropriate, it takes account of local circumstances and includes an evaluation of social, physical, and developmental considerations.'

We will use a risk-benefit approach when making decisions about what is reasonable and the desirability of children engaging with heightened levels of risk. This approach aims to ensure that children can experience the benefits of uncertainty in their play while seeking to reduce the risk of serious harm and those risks that are not beneficial to children. This decision-making will be based on evaluating:

- **the benefits of the play opportunity;**
- **the likelihood and potential severity of harm;**
- **the children involved and the wider context;**
- **relevant guidance, good practice and comparisons with similar accepted activities; and**
- **the effect that possible controls or restrictions may have on the quality and benefits of the play.**

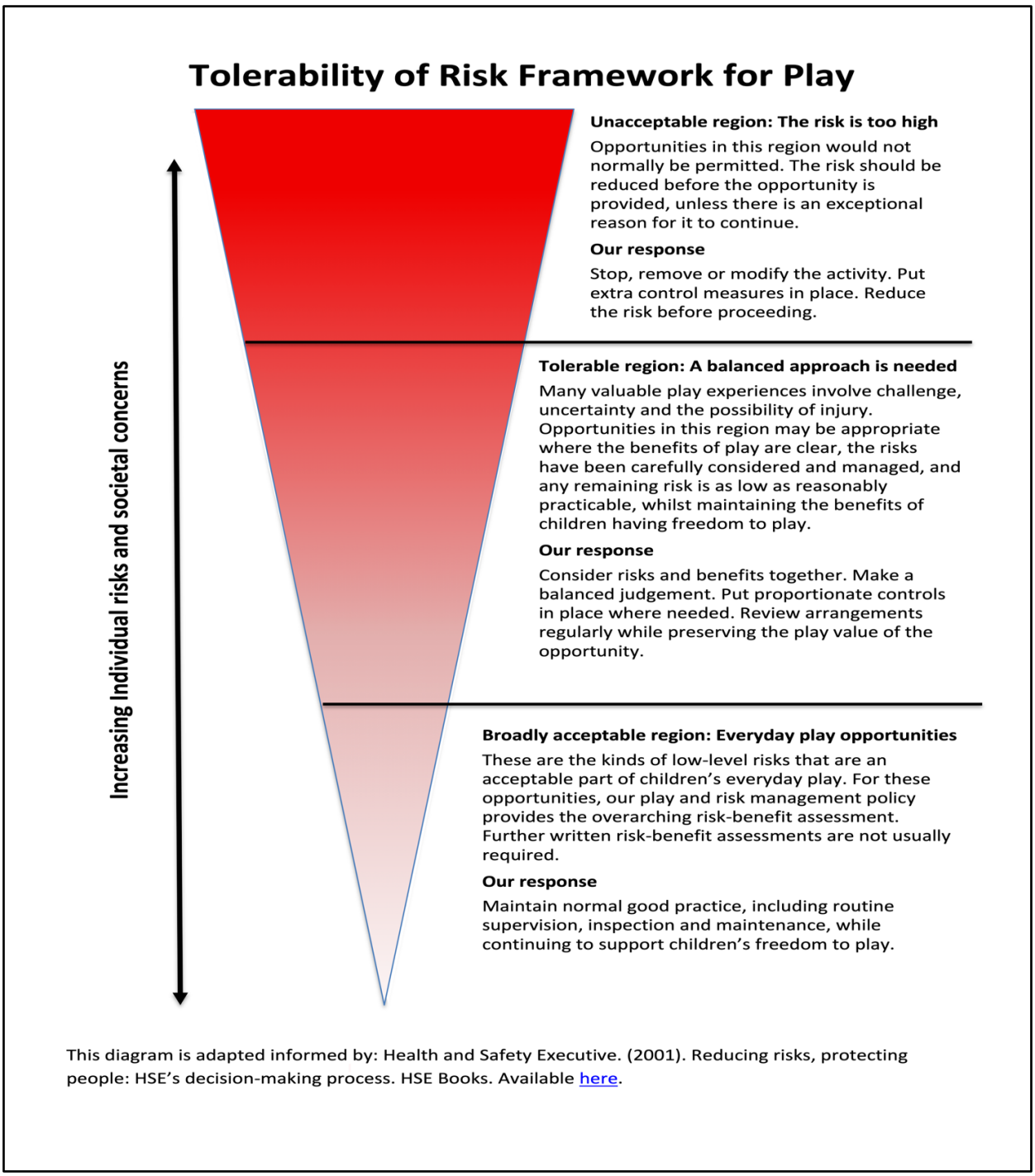
Strategic Risk Management

Our risk management strategy is an ongoing process informed by OPAL's RAPID approach to risk management in play. RAPID stands for Risk-Benefit Assessments, Assemblies, Policy, Inspections and Dynamic Risk Management. These different elements of our risk management strategy work together (as depicted in the diagram below), ensuring we have robust systems in place to support good decision-making and the ongoing maintenance of a 'safe enough' environment for play.



Following HSE guidance (see Appendix 1), we recognise that detailed risk-benefit assessments for every scenario are unnecessary, impractical, and time-consuming. Instead, we take a proportionate and balanced approach to risk assessment, ensuring that higher-risk activities receive greater scrutiny but low-risk opportunities (whilst still subject to professional judgement), remain unburdened by excessive paperwork.

The broadly acceptable region contains everyday play opportunities where the risks are low-level, familiar and generally acceptable without the need for a separate detailed written risk-benefit assessment. For play opportunities considered to fall within this region, this Play and Risk Management Policy serves as our overarching risk-benefit assessment. Sections of this policy take account of the behavioural characteristics of children's play, their associated benefits and risks, and describe the approaches and systems used to manage the everyday play behaviours likely to occur within our play environment.



Where we judge that an environmental feature or play opportunity presents a level of risk beyond the broadly acceptable region, it will be covered by a routine written risk-benefit assessment, either through an existing relevant assessment or through the development of a new one.

This assessment will evidence our decision-making, explain how the risks and benefits have been balanced, and identify any measures needed to ensure that the remaining risks are as low as is reasonably practicable while preserving the benefits of play. This might include situations where:

- Play structures, site-specific features or impact surfaces fall outside of commonly accepted standards (for example the relevant benchmarks within BS EN 1176 and BS EN 1177)
- Through adults' actions, children are exposed to a greater risk of injury than they might normally encounter of their own volition

- Staff are unsure about the risks involved and how to manage them (the process of completing risk-benefit assessments can aid discussion and provide greater clarity and confidence)
- Staff feel additional justification is required due to concerns about how risks may be perceived by the public.

There will also be situations where children, during play, create their own heightened levels of risk which adults may not have planned for. In such situations, risk-benefit assessments may be applied in two ways:

- **Routine play opportunities with heightened levels of risk** - if a play opportunity is regularly occurring (e.g., most days or weeks), it should be covered by a written risk-benefit assessment.
- **Novel play opportunities with heightened levels of risk** - where an opportunity emerges spontaneously during play, staff should apply a dynamic risk-benefit assessment. If the opportunity becomes routine, it should be incorporated into an existing written risk-benefit assessment or become the subject of a new one.

Our written risk-benefit assessments will be reviewed and updated in response to experience, knowledge and new evidence, ensuring that they remain current, effective and proportionate. Updates will be informed by contributions from children through OPAL assemblies, the Play Team, the Play Coordinator and the Curriculum Lead for Play. The OPAL working group will formally review this policy and the school's written risk-benefit assessments at least annually. This does not mean that every document must be rewritten each year where no change is required.

Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment

Children naturally seek opportunities for uncertainty and novelty in their play. This means play is inherently exploratory, flexible and varied. Staff therefore use dynamic risk management to remain attentive to changing play conditions and emerging risks. When staff perceive a risk that requires closer consideration, they make a dynamic risk-benefit assessment: a real-time judgement that considers the benefits of the play alongside the likelihood and potential severity of harm, the children involved and the wider context.
Risk perception is subjective, and individual staff may differ in their tolerance of risk. To support consistency in decision-making, we have adopted guidance on dynamic risk-benefit assessment (see Appendix 4), supporting staff in making balanced and informed choices.

Our approach aims to balance intervention with the benefits of freedom and uncertainty in play. Whenever possible, staff should observe how children navigate risks for themselves before deciding if intervention is necessary. In doing so, staff should consider:

- **Children's self-management of risk** – Have they removed hazards, adjusted their behaviour, or set their own safety rules?
- **Contextual factors** – Are children adapting to different ages and abilities while keeping risks balanced with benefits?
- **Intervention necessity** – Staff should intervene where serious harm is imminent or probable. Any response should be proportionate and preserve the benefits of the play wherever possible. Play should be stopped only where the risk cannot be reduced sufficiently through a less intrusive response.

Where a dynamic risk-benefit assessment involves a significant, unusual or recurring decision, or one likely to inform wider practice, staff will briefly record and reflect on the opportunity, the judgement made and

any action taken. Where appropriate, this learning will be used to update an existing written risk-benefit assessment, inform a new assessment or identify staff training and development needs. Routine moment-to-moment judgements do not need to be recorded individually.

Good and Bad Hazards

In making risk-benefit decisions, we will use the concept of good and bad hazards, recognising that the hazards children encounter should be considered in relation to whether they are perceptible, contribute to play value and generate risks that are reasonable and proportionate.

- **Good Hazards** – objects, features or situations that children can reasonably perceive or anticipate and that are integral to the play opportunity, contributing to its play value or benefits. We aim to retain and manage these hazards so that the associated risks remain reasonable and proportionate.
- **Bad Hazards** – objects, features or situations that are hidden or difficult for children to perceive or anticipate and/or that make no meaningful contribution to play value or benefit. We aim to remove or control these hazards proportionately.

Inspection and Maintenance

We conduct regular inspections of the play environment and resources to ensure that associated risks remain reasonable and proportionate. This includes:

- **Daily/weekly site inspections** – visual checks of the play environment, its features, structures and equipment.
- **Routine inspections of play resources** – visual checks of loose parts on an agreed schedule to ensure they are safe enough for use in play.
- **Monthly/quarterly site inspections** – more in-depth checks involving closer inspection of moving parts and structural integrity, ground conditions, and natural features that may require attention due to growth or decay.
- **Annual and specialist inspections –** formal inspections of fixed engineered play equipment and associated surfacing will be undertaken annually by a competent person with appropriate specialist knowledge and experience. Self-built structures, non-standard play features, trees and other natural features will be subject to proportionate inspection arrangements based on their construction, condition, use and associated risks, with specialist advice or inspection obtained where necessary.

Across these inspection arrangements, hazards that are hidden, unnecessary, deteriorating or no longer contribute to play value will be removed, controlled, taken out of use or scheduled for repair or maintenance, as appropriate. Beneficial and perceptible hazards will be retained and managed so that the associated risks remain reasonable and proportionate. Inspection findings will be recorded, and any resulting actions will be monitored through to completion.

Supervision of playtimes

At St Paul's CofE Primary School, we understand the importance of suitable and sufficient supervision during play times. The law requires children at school to be adequately supervised, but from the start of the term following a child's fifth birthday, there are no prescribed adult-to-child ratios for primary-school playtimes. Schools must determine suitable and sufficient supervision according to the children, the environment and the play opportunities available.

At St Paul's CofE Primary School, we will use OPAL's three models of supervision: direct, remote and ranging. Direct supervision may be used where children are new to an environment or play opportunity, where instruction or closer adult support is needed, or where a risk-benefit assessment identifies it as a proportionate risk-management measure. Most of our playtime supervision will use remote and ranging models, enabling children to make full use of the school grounds while ensuring that they can quickly find an adult and that adults maintain awareness of the play and levels of risk emerging across the site.

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 maintain an overview of the whole site and offer support in specific areas as necessary. Adults within each zone will communicate via walkie-talkies, and a fixed first-aid point will be used to respond to significant accidents.

The staff involved in supervising playtimes are called our Play Team. The Play Team's role is to facilitate and enhance children's play, enabling all children to play in ways that are of value to them, and encouraging children to assess the risks and benefits of their play behaviours. We will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from playing by training our Play Team to work in accordance with the Playwork Principles (see Appendix 2). These principles will help to guide the ways in which supervising staff interact and intervene in children's play.

Ultimately, we strive to facilitate an environment which nurtures children's self-directed play. However, children's play is complex and allowing children freedom is not always an easy thing for adults to do. The Play Team will therefore be provided with regular opportunities to reflect on and develop both their practice and the play environment.

Whole school communication

At St Paul's CofE Primary School, we as an entire staff team, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will maintain an open dialogue with children about our play provision, with the aim of further developing their playtime experiences using their voices and ideas as guidance.

Play assemblies are a key aspect of our risk-management strategy. They will be held at least once per half term, with additional assemblies arranged where emerging issues require more immediate discussion. Assemblies provide opportunities to discuss the play opportunities available, the play environment, children's play behaviours and our approach to supporting play.

We use OPAL's C.I.N.I. format: Celebrate children's play; Inform children about aspects of our play provision; Negotiate with children about the play offer; and Innovate with children to improve it. These assemblies routinely include conversations about risk management and support children to participate in identifying, discussing and managing risks.

A brief written log will record the matters discussed, and any actions or risk-management measures agreed.

As a school, we will also maintain an OPAL working group to oversee implementation of the OPAL programme, ensuring that all aspects of school life that influence our play times are aligned with the aims

and aspirations of this policy. The diagram in Appendix 3 sets out the staffing structure we have in place to support quality play times.

Appendix 1

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 risks[9] 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 about complicated

[9] 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 Chargot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer benchmarks that can help.

8. Striking the right balance does mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

9. Striking the right balance does not mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided[10] security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: *'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork'.*

10. Play providers[11] should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure that the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

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[11] Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

11. They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

12. It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- The beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- Assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- Controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: *'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'*

14. Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

15. In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.

September 2012

Appendix 2 - The Playwork Principles

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

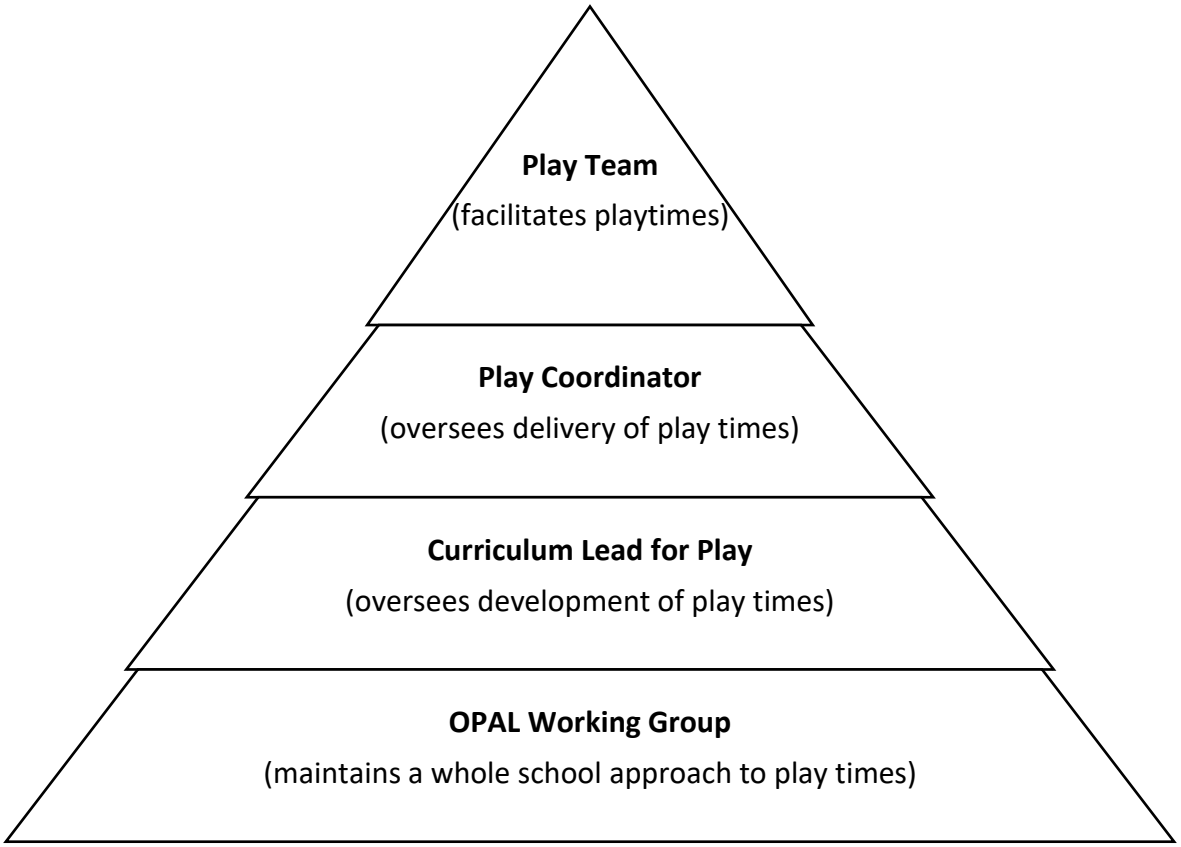
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

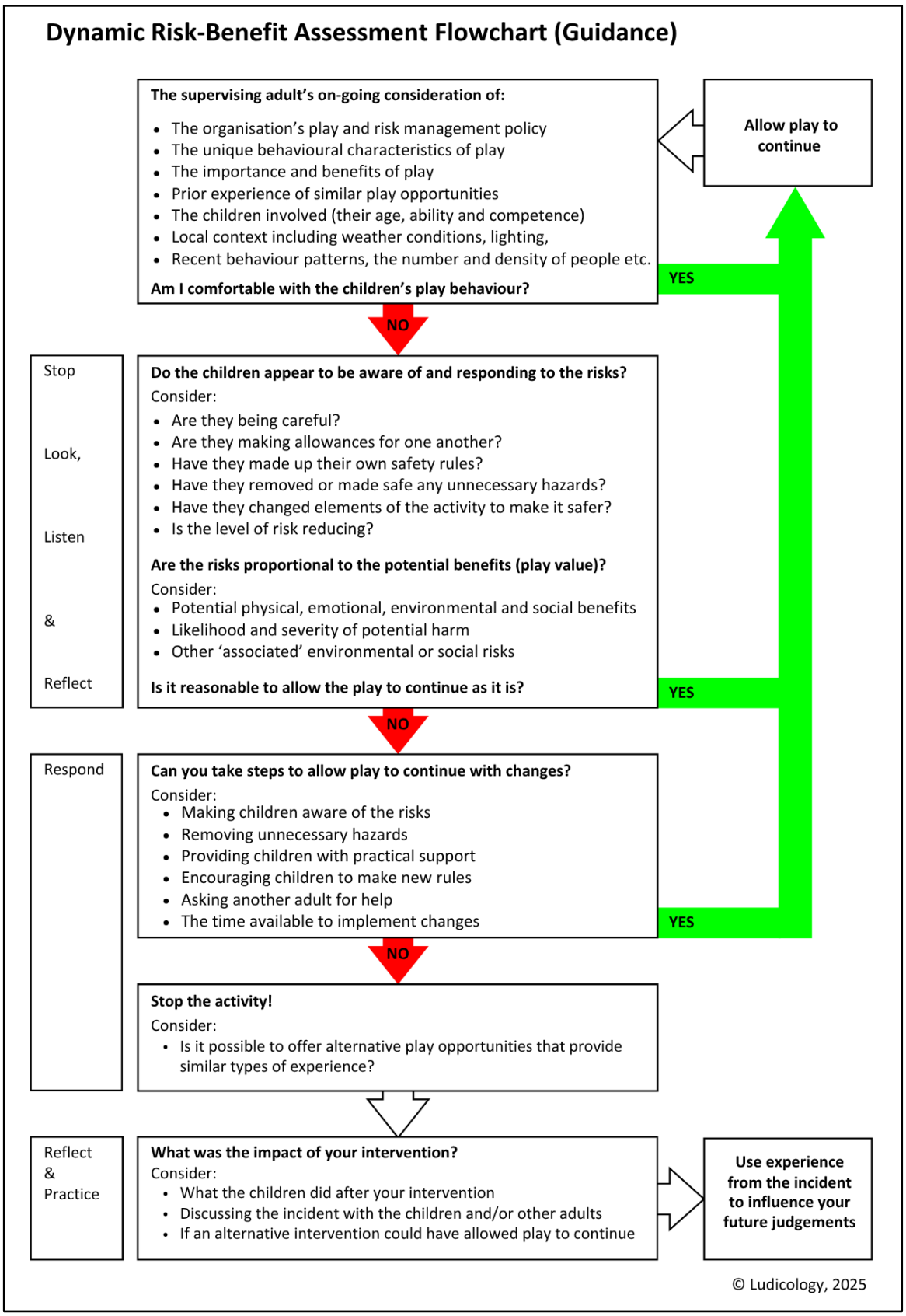
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

The Playwork Principles are held in trust for the playwork profession by the Scrutiny Group that acted as an honest broker, overseeing the consultations through which they were developed. © Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff 2005.

Appendix 3 - Staffing structure to support playtimes:



Appendix 4 Dynamic Risk-benefit Assessment Flowchart (Guidance)



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