



# Priory Junior School Play Policy

*Date of review: October 2026*



## **Commitment**

At Priory Junior School, our play policy reflects our belief that play is an essential part of every child's development and wellbeing. We are committed to ensuring that all decisions affecting children's play uphold our PRIDE values — Peace, Respect, Independence, Determination, and Equality.

Our leadership team will provide the strategic and operational support required to ensure high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable play opportunities for all pupils.

## **Rationale**

At Priory Junior School, we believe that play is central to children's happiness, health, and growth. Play allows children to explore, imagine, and take ownership of their environment.

We are committed to providing play opportunities that are peaceful and respectful, that nurture independence and determination, and that ensure equality for every child — regardless of gender, background, ability, or circumstance.

In line with the OPAL Primary Programme, we recognise that better, more active and creative playtimes lead to happier, healthier children who approach learning and life with positivity, curiosity, and confidence.

## **Definition of Play**

Play is a process that is freely chosen, self-directed, and intrinsically motivated. It is vital to every aspect of children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

## **The Value of Play at Priory Junior School**

Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual development. At Priory Junior School, we see play as a vital way for children to live out our PRIDE values: Peace, Respect, Independence, Determination, and Equality.

- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as ideas and concepts, fostering **independence** and encouraging them to make choices and decisions in a safe, supportive space.
- Play enhances self-esteem and understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions with peers of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, and cultural backgrounds, nurturing **respect and equality**.
- Play encourages children to experience and manage emotions, including happiness, sadness, frustration, achievement, fear, and confidence, helping them develop emotional resilience and **determination**.

- Play promotes communication, negotiation, and teamwork, allowing children to balance their right to act freely with their responsibilities to others, reinforcing **peaceful** relationships and mutual **respect**.
- Play supports creativity, problem-solving, and risk-taking, enabling children to explore challenges and persevere in the face of difficulty, reflecting **determination and independence**.
- Play maintains openness to learning, developing children's capabilities and helping them push the boundaries of what they can achieve, while encouraging them to value themselves, others, and the world around them, living our **PRIDE** values in practice.

At Priory Junior School, we believe that by embedding PRIDE into all aspects of play, children not only grow in confidence, skill, and resilience, but also develop the values and attitudes that will help them thrive inside and outside the classroom.

### **Aims**

Our aims for play at Priory Junior School are to:

- Provide varied, stimulating, and challenging play opportunities that reflect our PRIDE values.
- Encourage children to take manageable risks and use their judgment responsibly.
- Foster positive relationships built on respect and kindness.
- Promote independence, creativity, and teamwork.
- Support physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development through meaningful play experiences.
- Help children appreciate and care for their school environment and one another.
- Enable all children to experience success, resilience, and belonging.

### **Rights**

Priory Junior School upholds the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 12 and 31), recognising every child's right to play, leisure, and to be heard.

We take these rights seriously and ensure that pupils' voices help shape our play provision in line with our PRIDE values.

### **Benefit and Risk**

At Priory Junior School, we recognise that challenge and managed risk are key components of learning and play.

Our approach follows the Health and Safety Executive's guidance Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (2012). See appendix. In doing so, we adopt a risk-benefit

approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)*.

*'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.'*

We believe children should experience manageable risk as part of developing independence, determination, and confidence, while adults ensure environments remain safe and supportive.

Staff are encouraged to use risk-benefit assessments and involve children in identifying, understanding, and managing risks in play. This helps pupils develop resilience, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills within a nurturing and peaceful community.

## **Supervision**

We ensure appropriate adult supervision during all playtimes in line with OPAL's 3 models: Direct, Remote, and Ranging.

Adults act as facilitators, observing play, ensuring safety, and supporting children to resolve conflict peacefully and independently.

We encourage staff to model our PRIDE values at all times — promoting respect, inclusion, and cooperation.

Our lunch 'Play Team' staff will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol zones to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

## **The Adult's Role in Play**

Staff at Priory Junior School are trained and guided by the Playwork Principles. Their role is to create an environment that nurtures self-directed play while supporting children to learn, take risks safely, and enjoy freedom and creativity.

Adults will:

- Model and promote **Peace** through positive relationships.
- Encourage **Respect** and inclusion across all play.
- Foster **Independence** by allowing children to make choices and lead their own play.
- Inspire **Determination** by supporting challenge and resilience.
- Ensure **Equality** of opportunity so every child is valued and involved.

## **Equality and Diversity**

Priory Junior School values diversity and is committed to ensuring that every child can experience the joy and freedom of play.

Through inclusive play provision, we promote Equality, foster Respect, and celebrate the individuality of every pupil.

We align this with our school's Equality Policy to ensure that all play spaces reflect and reinforce our inclusive ethos.

## **Environment**

We believe that a rich, engaging play environment is essential for supporting our PRIDE values.

We will continually improve our school grounds to ensure they are stimulating, safe, inclusive, and supportive of children's right to play.

Our aim is to provide spaces that promote:

- Peace through calm, well-structured areas.
- Respect for the natural and built environment.
- Independence through open-ended play opportunities.
- Determination by allowing for challenge and discovery.
- Equality by ensuring every child has access to meaningful play.

We use the document Best Play as a guide to developing high-quality play environments and will review this policy annually to ensure it remains a living, evolving reflection of our school's ethos.

[BEST PLAY BOOK](#)

## **Review**

This policy will be reviewed yearly, with input from staff, pupils, governors, and parents, ensuring that our approach to play continues to reflect Priory Junior School's commitment to PRIDE and the wellbeing of every child.

# Appendix: HSE Managing Risk Statement



Health and Safety  
Executive

## 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<sup>1</sup> 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

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])

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 that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks 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 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<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

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<sup>2</sup> providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday schemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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.

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