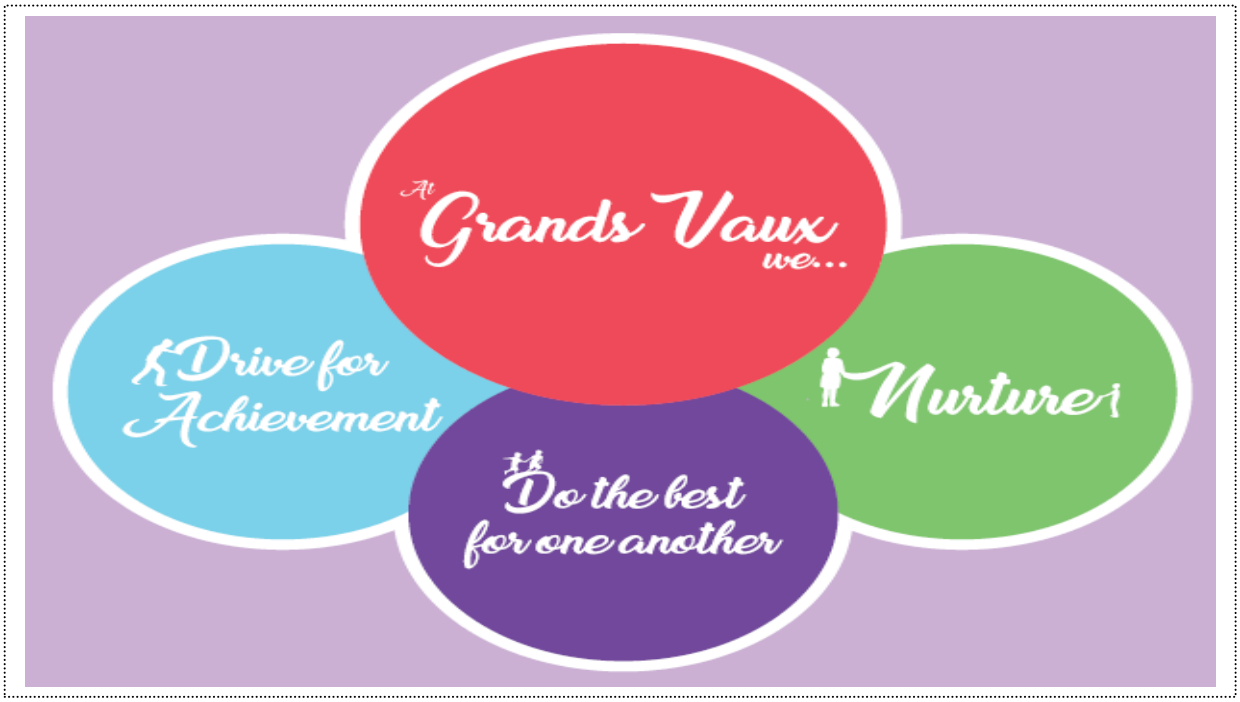
Play Policy



Agreed: ……

Review Date: October 2025

UNCRC - Article 29. Aims of education
Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities.

UNCRC - Article 3. Best interests of the child
When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children. Governments should make sure children are protected and looked after by their parents, or by other people when this is needed. Governments should make sure that people and places responsible for looking after children are doing a good job.

UNCRC – Article 31
Children have the right to play, recreation and Leisure

UNCRC – Article 12
The right of children to be listened to on matters important to them.

1. Commitment

Our school undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. Rationale

Our school believes that all children need opportunities to play that 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.

The OPAL Primary 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 behavioural problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life."*

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:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, with 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.

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

5. Benefit and risk

'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: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 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 principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play (appendix 1). In doing so, the school will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012).*

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in 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 addition 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.

Part of our ethos at Grands Vaux School if for children to know the importance of their current role and to be prepared for their future role in society. We aim to support them with understanding what this looks like and give them the tools to prepare them for their future, in more ways than just academic. Play plays an important role in this – our children, from Nursery up to Year 6, play together. Through play, they learn how to interact and share, how to support each other and how to mediate when necessary. Our Year 5 and 6 children all have Peer Mediation training which enables them to take the lead in helping other children find resolutions if needed, and helps all children realise how important their voice is.

At all times, staff must keep central the fundamental factor that **benefit must outweigh the risk**.

6. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children, whose skills and

orientation in the school environment need to be assessed, the school does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision 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.

At Grands Vaux we have zoned our play area and staff know which area they are to cover on the timetable. Staff can close a zone if needed, for example if a member of staff is off and the availability of cover is low to adjust supervision.

There will always be a adult on duty in the Quiet Room.

Staff on duty outside and in the quiet room will have walkie talkies which enable them to communicate and adjust staffing levels as needed.

7. The adult's role in play

The school will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.

The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced playworker 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. Playworkers 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 also available to participate in the play if invited.

All staff on duty can give out OPAL gems to reward children following our playground charter (appendix 3). These are then placed in the GV letters at the front of school. When full, the children earn a whole school reward of extra playtime. Our Playground Charter has been developed and agreed by the children in school and is regularly referred to in Assembly.

Children can also be awarded "Play Legends" in Assembly for going above and beyond whilst outside.

8. Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability, or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

9. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or 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. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain.
www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

As our outdoor area continually evolves, we believe it is important to ensure the children have a voice. The school council will input into the pay area, and play assemblies ensure all children are consulted about what is happening, what they like, what they would like more of and what could change. This develops our children's confidence in team building and advocating for their own rights. We also believe that it will increase children's social and emotions capabilities. All staff and children know that our outdoor area is not just for playtime – children can and do you it for their own regulation and learning during other parts of the day as well. Altogether, this helps to develop and promote a love and enjoyment of the outdoors, which is a key foundation for caring for the environment.

10. Wet Playtime

We believe that children should play outside in all weather, which is why we ask parents to ensure their children come to school with suitable clothing. However, we also recognize that some children may not want to play outside in certain conditions. If the weather is wet but the play team deems it still suitable for outdoor play, we will close Forest School and open the Year 2 classroom instead. The staff member on duty in Forest School will then supervise the classroom, which will be set up with "wet play games." If more than 20 children wish to stay inside, the area outside of Key Stage 1 will be closed, and the Year 1 classroom will also be opened for "wet play games." Staff from the Key Stage 1 area will then oversee the two classrooms, while other staff remain outside.

If the weather is too wet and the Opal team calls a wet break, we will revert to the wet break timetable. In this case, all children will remain inside, and "wet play games" will take place in their own classrooms.

Version	Date Issued	Issued by	Reason for Change	Presented To	Approved by:	Date
0.1	October 2023	Sam Tanner	New policy	SLT	SLT	Oct 23
0.2	September 2024	Sam Tanner	Additional appendices	SLT	SLT	Sep 24
0.3	March 2025	Sam Noel	Addition of wet play clarification and playground charter	SLT	SLT	March 25

Appendix 1

HSE

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[1] 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

[1] 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])

Appendix 2 – Playwork Principles 1 and 2, taken from "Childhood, Play and the Playwork Principles. Play Wales.

Play and the Playwork Principles (1 and 2)



Play is a spontaneous and active process in which thinking, feeling and doing can flourish. When we play, we are freed to be inventive and creative, in the process we may change ourselves and our view of the world. Play is important to all children no matter what their impairments or behaviour. The pleasure and excitement of playing, the intensity and concentration, the freedom to experiment, to explore and to create, to find out how things and people work and what we can do with them, to give the imagination free rein, and to fill the gap between reality and desire, all derive from the fact that in play we are in charge. '*Play is an innate drive*' producing a range of flexible behaviours to cope with change and uncertainty. Play has immediate as well as longer-term benefits and needs to be under the control of the child.

The Playwork Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. The Principles describe what is unique about play and playwork and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and teenagers. They are based on the recognition that children and teenagers' capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities[1]. There are eight Principles, the first two Principles attempt to describe what is unique about play and its importance in children's lives, while Principles 3 to 8 highlight some of the most important concerns for playworkers.

In this section we will look at some of the play theory that informs Principles 1 and 2 before going on to consider some of the wider issues influencing our understanding of and practice with playing children. Finally, we return to Playwork Principles 3 to 8 to describe what playworkers do, how they do it and why. We don't want to patronise, but this section comes with a bit of a health warning! Section two and volumes two, three and four are all really accessible and readable guides, for some readers this section may be less so.

Much of the content in this section comes from the fields of developmental psychology, and the sociology of childhood. For readers not used to these areas of study, there may be a lot of new words and ideas that take some working through. The ideas we discuss are incredibly embedded

in the way children and childhood are understood and provided for. It is important we have some understanding of them, to be able to critique them and work with others whose practice is informed by them. That said, they can be hard going, so, please take the time to read them but take a break regularly and be content to come back to give things a second read if necessary – it's good to do that with ideas that are new to us.

Playwork Principle 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 well-being of individuals and communities.*

Evidence for children's play appears in every culture, from every part of the world and from every period in history. Some of the earliest toys we know of come from ancient Egypt and consist of balls, tops and dolls. In ancient Greece both Plato (427-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) wrote about children's play. In the medieval period we have the famous painting 'Children's Games' (1560) by Pieter Breugel that illustrates nearly 80 different games, most of which are still recognisable today. In more modern times, cross cultural studies have found that despite varying greatly in different cultures, '*everywhere a child playing is a sign of healthy development … Play has universal dimensions, but also culture-specific aspects*'[2].

The term '**all** children' is used to mean exactly that – there are no exceptions. To use the definition from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child[3], it means every child irrespective of his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Playworkers believe that all children are born with the urge to play. It is an essential characteristic and part of what makes us who we are. Although there is much we still have to learn about play it is certain from the scientific evidence that it is essential for our psychological and physical well-being. Indeed, if play is taken away from young animals, including human children, the effects are harmful.

Playwork is an inclusive approach that recognises the play needs of all children. However, we know that not all children have access to a range of stimulating play opportunities. Children may be marginalised or prevented from playing because of adult fears, disability, bullying and prejudice, conflict, abuse or isolation. It is our role to actively support play for these children and advocate for their right to play.

Playwork Principle 1 asserts that '*the impulse to play is innate*'. This implies that play is present from birth in every child and is an essential component in our human identity. Indeed, play appears in virtually all mammals, and in many other animals, including birds and fish[4]. Play is a biological drive, which is often said to be intrinsically motivated[5]. Play is frequently highly rewarding and pleasurable and usually done for its own sake.

Sutton-Smith[6] suggests that play may have developed in two stages. First, as a way of reinforcing potential physical and chemical connections in the brain that ensure the child adapts to his or her environment. '*Play opens up possibilities in the brain that may be picked up later or discarded; the important feature is that the potential is kept alive, more so than if play never occurred in the first place.*'[7]

Secondly, the child deliberately introduces risks and uncertainties to exercise control and mastery over them. These uncertainties include both physical and emotional aspects.

'*The importance of play lies with developing emotional flexibility by rehearsing the emotional aspect of being surprised or temporarily disorientated or unbalanced – that is by playing in a relatively safe context, emotions are modulated in play by the frame in which play occurs and the lack of serious consequences from losing control*'.[8]

Play is an ambiguous behaviour. We have all played (and continue to play). There are many competing theories and opposing views on its role in human evolution and development. Play encompasses multiple areas of children's lives. It is difficult to separate this out and identify particular benefits to the child from a specific act of play. This may be because play's role '*is likely to be multifaceted, variable and often involve complex, indirect and subtle processes*'[9].

Nevertheless, play is essential for children's development in three broad areas – biological, psychological and social growth. Brown[10] lists nine generally accepted categories of benefits, which include:

- cognitive development
- creativity and problem solving
- emotional stability and coping with anxiety
- flexibility and the opportunity to test out new behaviour
- freedom to explore, experiment and act independently
- arousal seeking, fun and enjoyment
- physical activity, co-ordination and the development of motor skills
- self-discovery and the development of identity
- socialisation and social interaction.

Play in the here and now

For many years the traditional way of thinking about these benefits was to list ways they would be helpful when the child became an adult. The difficulty with this approach is that the scientific evidence for any delayed benefits of play is scarce. More recently, many writers[11] have suggested that play may not necessarily prepare the child to become a better adult, '*rather the benefits of playing in the present moment help to make a better child*'[12]. In other words, play has immediate benefits for the child and is primarily about the 'here and now'. Experiences in play influence us in the moment and from moment to moment, they enrich our lives and enable us to express and refine our emerging capabilities. Those experiences are also likely to influence our journey through growth and development, however direct links between what children play and what adults they become are almost impossible to establish.

In comparison with other mammals, human development from infancy to adulthood occurs over a long time period. Lester and Russell suggest this offers us the opportunity to experiment with and explore a wide range of behaviours and responses essential for coping with complex environments. Skills can be practiced, expressed and refined, with knowledge and emotions developed, safe from the consequences of the real world. Play allows us a flexible range of behaviour to cope with change and uncertainty[13]. It might be thought of as '*training for the unexpected*'[14].

Play is essential for the well-being of individuals. Play allows children opportunities to deal with difficult emotions and overcome stress and painful feelings. Play also builds physical development, dexterity and motor skills. In addition to traditional objective measures of well-being, such as physical and mental health, Lester and Russell[15] note that well-being encompasses three broad subjective areas:

- emotional well-being or satisfaction and happiness with life
- psychological well-being or a positive sense of self and purpose
- social well-being or the quality of relationships, belonging, acceptance and participation.

These areas focus on the current lives of children and the quality of their childhoods in the present – as well as their future development. This reinforces the notion that play impacts on children's lives in the here and now, and is an essential component in their physical, emotional and social lives.

Finally, Playwork Principle 1 suggests that play is essential for healthy communities. Children who experience everyday life in their own community have a greater sense of connection and this in turn increases neighbourliness[16]. Children's play can improve community spirit, reduce social isolation and make communities more desirable to live in. However, in recent times the number of children playing out has declined and their independent mobility reduced. Children who travel to school in a car are more likely to overestimate threats such as strangers and crime[17]. Healthy communities are also essential for children's well-being. Public space offers opportunities for children to build social networks and to escape adult supervision[18].

Playwork Principle 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.

A characteristic of play that often troubles adults is that the end product of play is not especially important to the child who is playing. Adults tend to prefer processes that evidently demonstrate cause and effect[19]. However, play doesn't usually have set goals – instead it is a process defined by how it is done rather than what is done. For example, it's not unusual to observe children spending many hours planning and organising a den only for it to be abandoned when it's complete. For the child, play is about the moment. Failure to appreciate that in play, process is more important than product, can lead us to being overly 'precious' and reluctant to accept change.

Playwork Principle 2 is arguably the most influential and is based on a definition of play developed by Bob Hughes. At the heart of this definition is the assertion that '*play is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated*'.

'Freely chosen' means that children should be able to make choices without pressure to conform or to participate and that those choices should be their own, and free from interference or manipulation[20]. 'Personally directed' means that the child controls how the play happens. '*Play relates only to first-hand interaction. It is neither overtly taught, nor demonstrated*'[21]. Play is not purely an individual or selfish pursuit though.

In play children will compromise and regularly be observed engaging in play with playmates where they are not perhaps playing the role they would have preferred. In these cases, there is some mutual consensus achieved amongst the players, equally a player may just submit to the will of another at times, perhaps it is better to play someone else's game than play no game at all sometimes? As playworkers we might keep a watchful eye on these aspects of play and try to ensure there are opportunities where all children can have freedom of choice and personal direction as much as they need.

Play is its own reward and needs no external goals. Children play to have fun. Not for any practical reason or overt developmental benefit. The drive to play comes from within, although it might be triggered by any number of different stimuli in the environment. '*This appreciation of play as a constant seeking out of stimuli that are personally relevant suggests that play is intrinsic, that is, it arises from motivations and urges to engage with the environment, an appetite for seeking out emotionally rewarding experiences*'[22]. Play is characterised by how a child behaves rather than what they do.

Taken together Playwork Principles 1 and 2 establish what we believe about play and how and why children engage in it. In the following section we will explore some of the ideas, concepts and theories about child development and about childhood that have influenced and continue to influence our understanding of children and their play and as a result are important to those practicing playwork. Following this, we will return to the Playwork Principles and consider Principles 3 to 8, which look at what is special about playwork and what playworkers do.

Grands Vaux's Playground Charter

OUR RULES	WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE
We will use kind words and actions	Saying please and thank you Sharing Helping each other
Invite others to join games and activities	Nobody is left out on their own Listening to what everybody wants to play
We will take turns and wait patiently	Everybody gets a go We can use timers to help us share Play with something else whilst we wait
We use playground equipment as intended	We look after our equipment We put things away If something breaks we tell an adult
We resolve conflicts peacefully	We use our words Peer Mediators can help us We can walk away if we are angry
We listen to and follow instructions from adults	Adults keep us safe Adults hlep us follow the rules and model them to us

