

OPAL Play Policy

2025 - 2026

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1. Commitment

At Belmore Primary School, we believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Play is an important part of this

Our decisions regarding children's play are consistently guided by this policy. We are committed to providing strong leadership and dedicated support to ensure that all children have fun, inclusive, and high-quality play opportunities.

2. Rationale

We believe that play is a fundamental part of every child's life and development. Through play, children explore, experiment, and make sense of the world around them. We are committed to ensuring that every child—regardless of gender, background, culture, ability, or circumstance—feels welcome, valued, and included.

As outlined in the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) rationale:

"Better, more active and creative playtimes can lead to happier and healthier children. Happier, healthier, more active children tend to be more positive in their attitude to learning, resulting in

more effective lessons, fewer behavioural issues, fewer accidents during playtime, and a more positive school culture."

At Belmore Primary School, guided by the Therapeutic Thinking approach, our play policy supports the creation of emotionally safe, inclusive, and nurturing environments where all children can thrive. We view play not only as a means of enjoyment but as a powerful tool for emotional regulation, social learning, and building resilience. Staff are trained to observe and respond to behaviour through a therapeutic lens—seeking to understand the underlying needs behind actions and supporting children in developing positive relationships and self-awareness.

Our Belmore values are closely aligned with OPAL principles:

Be Kind, Respectful and Work Together

- Share, take turns, and include others in play.
- Demonstrate care and teamwork.

Be Resilient and Learn from Mistakes

- Try new things and learn through trial and error.
- Develop confidence through persistence.

Be Ready and Prepared to Work

- Use play as a tool to feel calm and prepared for learning.
- Improve focus and engagement in class.

Be Active in Body and Mind

- Engage in physical and imaginative play.
- Promote health and cognitive development.

Aspire to Be the Best We Can Be

- Learn new skills and embrace challenges.
- Take pride in personal achievements.

3. Definition and Value of Play

Play is defined as "activities engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, especially by children." At Belmore Primary School, we believe that play:

- Supports physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- Enables exploration of the environment, ideas, and self-expression.
- Fosters inclusion, empathy, cooperation, and communication.
- Builds confidence and resilience.
- Encourages creativity, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- Promotes lifelong curiosity and love for learning.

4. Alignment with school ethos

Our approach to play is fully aligned with Belmore Primary School's ethos:

- We have the highest expectations of ourselves and each other, and we do not put a ceiling on achievement.
- We treat everyone fairly and equally, always embracing difference and diversity.
- Kindness and respect are at the heart of everything we do.
- The rich and varied experiences and opportunities we provide ensure our pupils are well-prepared for the next stage of their life journey.

This ethos guides our play provision and highlights our commitment to embedding inclusive, purposeful play into the school day. Play supports wellbeing, fosters social development, encourages curiosity, and builds resilience. By aligning play with our Belmore values and ethos we ensure that every child thrives academically, socially, and emotionally.

5. Aims of the Play Policy

Belmore Primary School aims to:

- Provide engaging, varied, and challenging play spaces.
- Encourage children to take safe, age-appropriate risks.
- Foster strong friendships and respectful relationships.
- Support development: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive.
- Promote creativity, exploration, and imagination.
- Support cross-curricular learning through play.
- Encourage independence and teamwork.
- Strengthen emotional and physical resilience.

6. Children's Rights

We uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly:

- Article 31: The right to play, rest, and leisure.

- Article 12: The right to express views on matters affecting them.

We believe every child has the right:

- To feel safe and secure.
- To be treated fairly and respectfully.
- To be heard appropriately.
- To learn to their full potential.
- To be supported in making and learning from mistakes.

7. Benefits and Risks in Play

'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 recognise that purposeful risk and challenge are essential to meaningful play. Appropriate risk-taking enhances self-awareness, resilience, critical thinking, and decision-making.

Through climbing, balancing, negotiating, and collaborating, children develop:

- Confidence and responsibility.
- Conflict resolution skills.
- Ownership of their actions and learning.

These align with our behaviour policy, reinforcing respect, safety, and accountability.

We aim to create a play environment where safety and exploration coexist, enabling meaningful and joyful development.

Belmore Primary 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. 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).

See full H&SE Managing Risk Statement for further details (appendix 1)

8. Supervision

In accordance with legal requirements, all children in school must be appropriately supervised. While there are no statutory adult-to-child ratios specifically given for primary school playtimes or lunchtimes, the school is committed to ensuring that high levels of supervision are always maintained during the school day.

To support safe and meaningful play, the school ensures that adequate staff are present outdoors during playtimes and lunchtimes. The school adopts the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) framework, which outlines three models of supervision: Direct, Remote, and Ranging.

Except for new EYFS pupils—whose play skills and familiarity with the school environment require some assessment—the school does not consider direct supervision to be either feasible or beneficial for most play situations. Instead, staff will employ **remote** and **ranging** supervision strategies. These approaches allow children to independently explore and engage in play, while ensuring that adults remain accessible and can monitor the play environment effectively. This allows staff to respond promptly when needed and to maintain a clear overview of the types of play and associated risks occurring across the site.

Play supervision at Belmore is underpinned by our commitment to:

- Safety and inclusion.
- Enabling—not restricting—play.

Staff act as:

- Observers and facilitators.
- Guides who ensure safety and promote independence, cooperation, and resilience.

9. The Role of Adults in Play

See Playwork Principles for further information (appendix 2)

Adults play a vital role in ensuring the success and safety of play:

- Create inclusive, safe environments.
- Minimise hazards proactively.
- Encourage participation across all backgrounds and abilities.
- Observe to understand and support individual needs.
- Support, not direct, child-led play.
- Intervene only when necessary.
- Foster problem-solving and creativity.
- Model respectful and cooperative behaviours.

- Balance structured and unstructured opportunities.

The Play Team is committed to ensuring that all pupils experience a positive and enriching lunchtime each day. They are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive, and stimulating outdoor environment that promotes social interaction, physical activity, and imaginative play.

In addition, the Play Team supports a calm and enjoyable dining experience for all children. They work to ensure that pupils have sufficient time to eat their lunch comfortably while also maximising opportunities for outdoor play.

10. Equality and Diversity

We are committed to providing inclusive play opportunities for all children:

- Play is accessible regardless of age, gender, race, or ability.
- Children's individual needs are considered and supported.
- Every child is encouraged to build friendships and experience belonging.

This commitment reflects our values of equality, inclusion, and respect across school life.

[Please see Belmore Primary School Equality Objectives for further information](#)

11. Inclusion and Accessibility

At Belmore Primary School we believe that children with Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability should be identified and appropriately supported for them to thrive in all aspects of their lives, prioritising the well-being of the child being at the 'heart' of our practice. We believe that children should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum to enable them to become valuable citizens and reach their full potential. We also ensure that all staff are aware of the needs of individual children and receive up-to-date information and training wherever necessary.

The school recognises the value of the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme in supporting the development of all pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). OPAL is designed to promote physical activity, enhance social and emotional development, and contribute to overall well-being through inclusive and engaging outdoor play experiences.

Through OPAL, children are encouraged to explore, take appropriate risks, self-regulate their behaviour, and build resilience in a supportive environment. The programme aligns with our commitment to providing equal opportunities for all learners and fostering a sense of belonging and confidence among pupils with SEND.

11.1 Benefits of play for SEND pupils

At Belmore, we recognise the immense value of play in supporting the development and well-being of all children, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

- Physical activity is encouraged, which is particularly beneficial for children with SEND who may have limited opportunities for movement.
- Play supports social and emotional development by providing a space for children to interact, practice social skills, and develop emotional regulation.
- Through the OPAL approach, children are encouraged to persevere through challenges, helping them build resilience and grit.
- Opportunities for self-regulation are provided through trust, freedom, and engaging activities.
- Studies show that children involved in OPAL programs report greater happiness and improved mental well-being.
- Inclusive play environments are created where all children, including those with SEND, can participate and thrive.
- Play boosts communication by encouraging both verbal and non-verbal expression.
- Cognitive development is supported through activities that enhance memory, concentration, and problem-solving.
- Motor skills are improved through physical and sensory-rich play that supports both fine and gross motor development.
- Independence is promoted by empowering children to make choices and take initiative.

11.2 Our Approach to Supporting Children with Physical Limitations:

At Belmore Primary School, we are committed to enhancing the quality of children's playtimes and promoting their overall well-being. Through the OPAL programme, we strive to create a stimulating and inclusive outdoor environment that encourages active and imaginative play for all pupils. In line with our inclusive ethos, we ensure that the design and implementation of OPAL consider the needs of children with physical limitations.

- **Inclusive Play Spaces:**
We design and maintain outdoor play areas that are accessible to all children
- **Diverse Play Opportunities:**
A wide range of play activities are offered to cater to different abilities and interests. Children are encouraged to engage in activities that suit their individual preferences, such as climbing, running, swinging, or sensory play.
- **Risk Management and Supervision:**
We implement appropriate risk assessments and provide vigilant supervision to ensure that all children, including those with physical limitations, can participate safely in play activities.
- **Individualised Support:**
We recognise that each child's needs are unique. Where necessary, we provide tailored support and reasonable adjustments to enable full participation in outdoor play.

- **Collaboration with Parents and Specialists:**

We work closely with parents, carers, and relevant professionals (e.g. occupational therapists) to develop and implement personalised support plans for children with physical limitations.

- **Flexible and Creative Play Resources:**

The use of “loose parts” – versatile natural and manufactured materials – is encouraged to foster creativity and allow children to engage in play that aligns with their abilities.

- **Accessible Environment Design:**

We consider accessibility in the design of our outdoor spaces, incorporating features such as inclusive play equipment to ensure all children can engage meaningfully in play.

12. The Play Environment

Through OPAL, Belmore Primary School is dedicated to creating a high-quality outdoor play environment:

- Designed with safeguarding and inclusivity in mind.
- Encourages independence, creativity, and risk-taking.
- Promotes wellbeing and development across all areas.

Children will:

- Develop teamwork and communication skills.
- Build resilience, confidence, and self-advocacy.
- Experience the therapeutic benefits of outdoor and nature-based play.

We aim to instil a lasting respect for the natural world, contributing to the growth of environmentally conscious individuals.

Appendix 1

HSE Managing Risk Statement (Doc 4.6) as an appendix to your play policy.

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 risks¹ 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 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 providers² 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 2 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. 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. Understand Need

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.

2. Understand Process

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. 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. Support Process

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. Advocate for Play

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

5. Create Spaces

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. Learn and Reflect

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

7. Understand Impact

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

8. Choose Intervention Styles

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

**Appendix 3
Belmore Play Charter**



BELMORE'S PLAY CHARTER

1

WE ARE KIND
TO ONE
ANOTHER

2

WE SHARE OUR
PLAY EQUIPMENT
WITH ONE
ANOTHER

3

WE KEEP
OURSELVES
AND EVERYONE
AROUND US,
SAFE

4

WE FIND A
ADULT IF WE
NEED HELP

5

WE LET
OTHERS
JOIN IN
OUR GAME

6

WE ARE
HELPFUL
TO OTHERS

7

WE WILL
LISTEN TO ONE
ANOTHER WITHOUT
INTERRUPTION

8

WE TIDY UP
AFTER WE ARE
DONE, WE TREAT
OUR SPACE WITH
RESPECT

