



## Town End Academy Play Policy

This policy sets out Town End Academy's commitment to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children. As a school we aim to improve the way we think and provide opportunities for play. We believe that play is essential for physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development. In a time where outdoor play environments and opportunities are on the decline, the school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play.

### Rationale

Children spend up to 20% of their time in school at play. Therefore this time needs to be coherent and planned for. Changes in society such as heavier traffic, busier lifestyles, less areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play poverty' for today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better play leads to happier children and in turn less behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, skills development, fewer accidents and more effective learning in the classroom as less staff time is spent resolving issues.

2016 data from 'Public Health England' shows the national average obesity rates for children in reception year of school are 9.1%. This increases to 10.7% within Sunderland and increases again to **14%** within Town End Academy. For year 6 pupils the average obesity rates nationally is 19.1%. This increases to 22.4% within Sunderland and increases again to 25.4% within Town End Academy. (Public Health England, 2016)

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

In addition to all the policy guidance on the importance of play, and the issues associated with lack of play, we also surveyed the children about their views on play time. Many were positive about the playground but some children's comments included; *'we hardly ever get to play on the grass', 'there are not enough places to sit' and 'there is nothing/little to do to make up games or build a den'*. These comments by children highlight the need to improve our play resources and opportunities at Town End Academy.

As a result of implementing this policy within school we believe that children will:

- be happier;
- increase self-awareness and self-esteem;
- improve language and communication skills;

- improve concentration;
- improve their imagination, independence and creativity;
- improve social skills;
- be resilient, confident, good problem solvers;
- be ready for anything as a result of negotiation and independence of thought;
- be better at problem solving;
- develop life skills; and
- improve physical development, co-ordination and fitness.

## Our Aims

Our school aims are:

- To provide children with a play setting which is both stimulating and challenging.
- To allow children to take risks
- To provide children with a range of environments which will support children's learning across the curriculum and about the world around them.

We aim to give the children the opportunity to:

- Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving.
- Encourage resilience and self-confidence.
- Think creatively
- Develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and others.
- Develop physical health
- Develop emotional health, allowing the balance between acting freely and allowing everyone to have their rights. Our rights and responsibilities are displayed in every classroom.
- To develop skills in self-assessing and managing risk.

## What is Play?

Play is any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It may be serious or light hearted. It may produce something or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children an opportunity to be creative and make decisions.

We recognise that play may need to make a noise, get dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe the role of the adults is to support the play process. Children will also have the opportunity for 'free range' play within the school grounds.

Bob Hughes (2002) identified 16 types of play which children engage in. It is our aim to enable children to access all of these different play types within our playground (see appendix 1)

## Risk assessment and play

An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risk develops their ability to judge risk independently and learn new skills.

*'All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury.'* (Play England, 2006)

*'HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understand 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 dangers'* (HSE, 2013)

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk assessments of all play provision within the school should be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change or development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances takes place. Risk assessment will be produced and displayed on the OPAL play board outdoors.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the following guidelines:

- Recognise the need for professional judgment in setting the balance between safety and goals
- Ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children.
- Design spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent.
- Ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed
- Provide staff with training to supervise play setting.
- Use the HSE guidance on managing play and leisure ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))

## Conflict resolution

All lunch staff will use the 'restorative practice' model when supporting children in the playground.

The protocol is as follows

- Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions
- Acknowledge children's feelings
- Gather information about what happened from all parties
- Restate the problem
- Identify the harm caused

- Ask for ideas and solutions to resolve the issue and choose one together
- Be prepared to give follow up support

## **Inclusion**

All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure adequate provision is provided.

## **Play Practices at Town End Academy**

Town End Academy had entered into an agreement with OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning CIC to support the development of the quality of our playtime provision.

### **1. The Outdoor Environment**

Town End Academy will create plans to transform the school grounds over several years to promote the continued creation and recreation of the play space by the children. Our ultimate aim is to have an integrated playground from reception to Year 6. In order to do this we have to landscape the playground and provide plenty of open ended materials for play opportunities.

### **2. Activities**

Research shows that the greater the range of experiences presented by a play environment, the more children will naturally explore and learn through play. The vital ingredients for these experiences are:

- Loose parts: attractive, flexible materials that children can readily change, manipulate and control for themselves. Links with local businesses will be established to provide ongoing supply of recycled and reusable loose parts. The school council and play group will support the school in accessing these businesses
- Creation of a range of social spaces of a variety of sizes from small (2/3 children), to large (12+)
- Play props - dress up materials, small world characters, resources which children can use imaginatively
- Structures for children to use for a range of purposes
- Links to real life role play situations and resources to support this acting in role
- Range of levels and textures, with creative routes to and from social spaces

Activities will be adapted in line with pupil and parent views and links to new resources as and when they are available.

### **3. Supervision**

#### **Remote supervision**

We may not be able to see every child all of the time, especially when the children are using the trees. It is expected that staff will move around throughout playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Staff can then check in on the children's play throughout playtime.

#### **Rota of supervision**

A rota of supervision will be produced for all play professors so they are clear of their role daily. This will be displayed on the OPAL play board outdoors.

### **4. Monitoring**

The school will continue to use the OPAL audit tool and pupil surveys to monitor implantation of its play policy, strategy and action plan. An annual report will be presented to governors. A play governor will be appointed and be responsible for monitoring the play policy in school.

A 'play suggestions box' will be put in place for future development accessed by pupils and parents. Play apprentices will make up a play team led by one of the play professors to gather ideas from pupils and support with monitoring the provision.

The OPAL team will have meetings monthly to consider the policy, check resources and feedback any issues. This team will also set up a link on the school website to help inform parents, create whole school play days, provide the link to the whole staff and continue to work with OPAL to monitor and action plan.

Weekly play professor meetings (15 mins with agreed agenda) will take place to address any emerging issues and this will feed into the OPAL team meetings. These will cover areas such as : Play Leader organisation, Activities to be provided, Health and Safety, OPAL display boards updates, OPAL newsletters

Weekly play awards will be given out from each of the play professors to highlight pupils who are playing co-operatively and following the rules. (see appendix 2)

### **Review**

This policy will be closely monitored by the head teacher and deputy. A working group, led by the head teacher, comprising of lunchtime staff (play professors), play consultant, governor and site supervisor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play. The Trust health and safety and estates manager will be consulted on a regular basis around risk assessments and implementation of the policy.