

Play Policy

Date of Last Review	September 2026	Date of Next Review	September 2027
Author	Angela Thorogood	Owner	St Mary's School
Type of Policy	School Level Policy	Approval	Local Governance Committee

School Mission Statement

Love of Learning,

Love of One Another,

Love of the World,

Love of God.

1. Vision and Ethos

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Whitstable, we celebrate, respect and value every child as a unique gift from God. Guided by our mission *Love of Learning, Love of One Another, Love of the World, Love of God*, we believe that play is a vital expression of each child's individuality and potential.

Through play, children explore God's world, develop curiosity, creativity and confidence, and learn to build positive relationships with others. Our approach to play reflects our Gospel values of respect, stewardship, care and joy.

2. Aims

Our play policy aims to:

- Provide high quality, inclusive play opportunities that support physical, emotional, social and spiritual growth.
- Balance protection from harm with opportunities for risk, challenge and discovery.
- Embed the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) principles and the RAPID framework (Risk Benefit, Assemblies, Policy, Inspected and Intentional Environment, Dynamic Risk Management).
- Encourage children to take responsibility for themselves and others, acting as good stewards of the environment.
- Ensure that staff, governors, parents and pupils share a common understanding of how we manage play and risk.

3. The OPAL Approach

St Mary's is proud to be an OPAL school. We recognise that play is not an optional extra but an essential part of learning and wellbeing.

Our OPAL play environment includes:

- A large field
- Sand pit and digging area
- Climbing frame
- Water area
- Tyres and blocks
- Small world and kitchen area
- Arts and crafts zone
- Music and stage area

These spaces allow children to choose, create and direct their own play within a managed, safe enough environment.

4. Risk Benefit Assessment (R)

We believe that children learn best when they experience appropriate risk and challenge. We distinguish between hazards (unintended dangers) and risks (intentional challenges that help learning).

Risk Benefit Assessments are carried out for significant play activities and reviewed regularly by the Play Team. These include:

- Climbing frame use
- Scooter and wheel play (restricted to the race track)
- Digging, water play and use of large loose parts

Tree climbing is currently not permitted at St Mary's.

Assessments are reviewed annually and after any significant change or incident. Each review considers:

- The benefits of the activity

- The potential risks
- The agreed mitigations to make the play safe enough

5. Assemblies and Communication (A)

Play Assemblies and class discussions are key to communicating expectations, celebrating play and teaching children about managing risk.

Through assemblies and classroom conversations, we:

- Remind children of safe use of spaces and equipment
- Celebrate creative and cooperative play
- Review new play offers or changes to rules
- Empower children to identify and report hazards
- Promote our shared responsibility for each other's safety

A record of play assemblies is maintained as part of our OPAL evidence.

6. Policy, Roles and Responsibilities (P)

Governors

- Approve and review this policy annually.
- Ensure play provision aligns with the school's Catholic ethos and safeguarding responsibilities.

Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team

- Oversee implementation of the policy and ensure staff training.
- Support the Play Coordinator and Play Team to deliver safe, inclusive play.

Play Coordinator and Play Team

- Lead OPAL development, training and monitoring.
- Maintain risk benefit assessments and inspection logs.

- Meet regularly to review play practice, update resources and share findings.

All Staff on Duty

- Practise ranging supervision, staying alert and mobile across assigned zones.
- Communicate clearly with other supervisors.
- Model positive, calm engagement and relaxed vigilance.

Children

- Take care of themselves, others and the environment.
- Follow safety guidance shared in assemblies.
- Report broken or unsafe items immediately.

7. Inspected and Intentional Environment (I)

Our play environment is intentional. Every resource and material is chosen with purpose and regularly reviewed.

- Inspections: Fixed equipment is inspected annually by a qualified provider.
- Internal checks: The Play Team, led by Angela Thorogood and Jack Stephens, conduct monthly and daily visual checks.
- Maintenance: Children are encouraged to report damage and take part in keeping play areas tidy and safe.
- Intentionality: Only purposeful resources remain in play areas. Litter, debris or broken items are removed promptly.

8. Dynamic Risk Management (D)

Play is dynamic and ever changing. Staff are trained to use dynamic risk management, making real time judgements based on observation and professional experience.

- Immediate danger (risk of serious injury or harm): intervene immediately.
- Possible risk: move closer, monitor or advise children on how to manage it safely.
- Low level risk: observe or engage positively without interfering.

Staff practise relaxed vigilance: aware, supportive and responsive without unnecessary restriction. Reflection and team discussion after playtimes help to improve judgement and consistency.

9. Safeguarding, Inclusion and Wellbeing

All play practice is underpinned by the school's safeguarding policy. Play is inclusive and accessible for all pupils regardless of age, need or background. Adjustments are made so every child can participate safely and confidently.

We believe that play contributes directly to wellbeing, resilience and the development of self-regulation and social skills.

10. Monitoring and Review

- The Play Policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher, Play Coordinator and Governors.
- Risk Benefit Assessments are reviewed at least once a year and after significant changes.
- The Play Team meets regularly to evaluate practice and record progress.
- Evidence of ongoing reflection is recorded through play assemblies, supervision logs and team minutes.

11. Conclusion

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, play is an expression of our mission to help every child become the best version of themselves. Through OPAL, we provide a rich, engaging and challenging play environment where children can grow in independence, compassion and confidence under God's loving care.