



Saint Michael Catholic Primary School

Play Policy

Mission Statement:

Excellence • Enrichment • Enjoyment

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Date for review: September 2027

Introduction

St. Michael Primary School recognises the importance of the need for high quality sustainable play for children regardless of their needs and abilities and that inclusive play is achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play opportunities.

Commitment

St. Michael Primary School is committed to using this play policy as a key document in all decisions it makes which have an impact on children's play.

At St. Michael Primary School, we want to help children to be safe, reliable, independent and **successful citizens** for the 21st century, embodying our St. Michael's values and Catholic ethos. We want to ensure each child is making appropriate progress in line with school achievement aims. We aim to give our children confidence and a desire to achieve their full potential whilst in a safe, loving and nurturing environment. We want to provide our children with the tools and initiative to succeed but also be caring and thoughtful members of our school community in servitude of one another.

St. Michael Promise:

- To implement the statements set out in this policy gradually and systematically in line with our OPAL play project guidance
- To be informed by the children and work with the children to create a space that is exciting, engaging and enthuses children. where they feel safe to take risks and explore their world
- To work in partnership with parents and the community making use of local expertise
- Build projects collaboratively, respecting existing boundaries

Rationale

Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school attendance in playtime. This time is valuable and needs coherent planning. Changes in culture and society have led to 'play poverty' in childhood which has numerous negative impacts.

Better play means happier children. Happier children mean fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, more effective lessons, core skills development, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary problems, fewer accidents and happier staff.

Play England drew up The Charter for Children's Play which sets out a vision for play and states that:

Children need time and space to play at school

Adults should let children play

Children value and benefit from staffed play provision

Children's play is enriched by skilled playworkers

Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

St. Michael Primary School fully recognises its duties and responsibilities to support children's playtime while they are at primary school.

Links to Learning

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types eg through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries. Research also suggests that “the learning outcomes from play are enhanced when play is ‘properly directed’” by adults.

The other area of focus for the impact of play and playwork on education and learning is the role of play at school break periods and the impact on children's behaviour and learning in class. One of the current concerns voiced is that children's opportunities for imaginative play and its educational benefits are being limited because of the demands of the school curriculum threatening to make school playtimes shorter.

As a result of implementing this policy 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.

Definition

Play is recognised as any activity that a child enters into that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated and that actively engages the child. This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);

Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);

Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and

Social (the development of values, beliefs and self perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

St. Michael Primary School recognises that:

- great play allows children to be creative and co-operative;
- adults' roles in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests;
- great play may be solitary or social;

- great play invites investigation; and
- great play makes children happy and happy children are better learners.

Rights, Equality and Access

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.

St. Michael Primary School acknowledges that every child has the right to choose the kind of play that is suitable for them whatever their age, gender or background.

Johan Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens* states that play is "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress the difference from the common world by disguise or other means."

Health, Safety, Benefit and Risk

Research shows that the uncertainty and challenge of much of children's play is a very large part of its appeal to them, and that it also enhances the development of their brains and bodies, making them more adaptable and resilient as they grow. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

Children should be encouraged and supported to encounter and manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk to their wellbeing.

The Adults' Role in Play

We believe that it is the job of a playworker to ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children, to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or make a change to the playspace if needed. Playworkers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

Environment

At St. Michael Primary School we will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore, problem solve, use their imagination and creativity;
- encourage the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things; and
- give children the opportunity to manage, play in and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors.
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value

Strategic Aims and Practices

St. Michael Primary School has 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

St. Michael Primary School 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 Class 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. Loose Parts

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.

The school intends to provide plentiful loose parts and to get the necessary training for the initiate to run successfully.

3. Nature

Research shows that children using green spaces are more creative and play imaginatively and collaboratively. St. Michael Primary School will develop and build appropriate areas such as: a meadow, sand pits, a mud kitchen, wooden planks, crates, enclosures, huts and willow tunnels.

4. Supervision

Job descriptions and person specifications of playworkers at St. Michael Primary School will continue to be drawn up. The school will move towards a much greater emphasis on playwork roles and skills for play supervision.

5. 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 should be presented to governors.

“The social standing of children depends less on physical dominance more on inventiveness and language skills. Perhaps forcing children to study rather than run wild in the woods, is counter productive.” (George Monbiot)

6. Health and Safety

All activities, play areas and equipment will be subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis. These checks will be kept on file in the office.

Risk-benefit assessments for areas, equipment and activities will be held on file in the office for inspection. All new activities which involve potential significant risk will be subject to individual or generic assessment as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate.

The play workers will be responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They will also be responsible for any activities which are directly led by the play workers, visiting carers, teachers and parents will be responsible for the conduct and behaviour of those in their care. They will be responsible for ensuring that those persons in their care use the site and equipment in a safe, controlled and appropriate manner to ensure the well being of ALL users on site.

It is the responsibility of all visitors and staff to work within agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments.

It is the responsibility of all carers to bring any potential hazard or concerns regarding the site, equipment or activities to the attention of the Playleader on duty.

It is the responsibility of the Playleader on duty to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Playleader as soon as possible.

7. Play Zones

We provide a wide range of carefully planned play zones designed to offer rich, varied experiences that support every child's development. Our play areas include the Pond Area, Sandpit, Story Chair, Dressing Up, Lego, Multi Skills Area, Treasure Trail, Mud Kitchen, Loose Parts, Ping Pong, Speaker Corner, Bikes and Scooters, Book Nook, and Nurture Space. Each zone is thoughtfully resourced to encourage imagination, creativity, exploration, and self-expression. Through access to these diverse environments, children are supported in developing social interaction and team-building skills, cooperative play, problem-solving abilities, resilience, communication,

and both fine and gross motor skills. By offering choice and opportunity across these areas, we promote holistic development while ensuring play remains engaging, inclusive, and meaningful for every child.

Appendix 1

Play Types

There are acknowledged to be a number of different play types (around 16) which provide playworkers, managers and trainers with a common language for describing play. There are in no particular order.

- 1 Symbolic Play – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of depth eg using a piece of wood to symbolise a person or an object or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring.
- 2 Rough and Tumble Play – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. This type of play allows children to participate in physical contact that doesn't involve or result in someone being hurt. This type of play can use up lots of energy.
- 3 Socio-dramatic Play – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row.
- 4 Social Play – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended eg any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols ie games, conversations, making something together.
- 5 Creative Play – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. Allows children to design, explore, try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different tools, props, equipment. It can have a beginning and an end, texture and smell eg enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake. Self expression through any medium, making things, changing things.
- 6 Communication Play – play using words, nuances or gestures e.g. mime / charades, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, whispering, pointing, debate, street slang, poetry, text messages, talking on mobiles / emails/ internet, skipping games, group and ball games.
- 7 Dramatic Play – play which dramatises events in which the child is not a direct participator eg presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral.
- 8 Locomotor Play – movement in any or every direction for its own sake eg chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing.
- 9 Deep Play – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear eg light fires with matches, make weapons, conquer fear such as heights, snakes, and creepy crawlies.

Some find strength they never knew they had to climb obstacles, lift large objects etc eg leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam, roller skating, assault course, high jump.

- 10 Exploratory Play – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects eg engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks.
- 11 Fantasy Play – This is the make believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild. Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur eg playing at being a pilot flying around the world, pretend to be various characters/people, be where ever they want to be, drive a car, become be six feet nothing tall or as tiny as they want to be the list is endless as is a child's imagination.
- 12 Imaginative Play – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply eg imagining you are or pretending to be a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there.
- 13 Mastery Play – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments eg digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires.
- 14 Object Play – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements eg examination and novel use of any object eg cloth, paintbrush, cup.
- 15 Role Play – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature eg brushing with a broom, dialling with a telephone, driving a car.
- 16 Recapitulative Play – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

References

<http://www.playengland.org.uk>

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