

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

PLAY POLICY

This policy sets out St Thomas More Catholic Primary School's commitment to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children.

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces and equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. At St Thomas More Catholic Primary School we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks. These skills link closely to our Mission Statement to develop children who are:

- Happy
- Confident
- Resilient
- Respectful
- Compassionate
- Ambitious

Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years 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, fewer areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play deprivation' for many of today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital. Better quality play leads to happier children and happier staff.

The OPAL 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'*.

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 which is vital for all our children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.

In addition to these reasons to prioritise play in school, Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, 'Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.' (Appendix 1).

We surveyed the children in October 2020 for their views on play time. Many were positive about the playground but some children's comments included; *'there is not enough to do'*, *'we need more things to play with'*, *'the playground needs an extra things'*, *'it needs more resources'*. These comments by children highlighted the need to improve our play resources and opportunities for them at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School.

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;
- improve physical development, co-ordination and fitness.

Definition of Play

The Government's Play Strategy (Appendix 2) defines play as:

"Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child". This definition draws closely on the work of Bob Hughes and Frank King.

Through play, we aim to meet 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).

At St Thomas More Catholic Primary School the children and staff think that:

- play allows children to be creative and co-operative
- adults' roles in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests, and to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.
- play may be solitary or social
- play invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries
- play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better
- children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources, as long as it is safe, regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- play is something you choose to do and that it is fun
- play enables children to process their experiences of the world

Equality and Access

All children, whatever their age, culture, ethnicity or social and economic background, need time and space to play freely and confidently with their peers, free of charge, indoors and outdoors, somewhere they feel safe. Play provision should actively include the widest range of children and seek to engage with those from minority groups, holding no barriers to any child within our school.

Benefit and Risk

The Health and Safety Executive document states that '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.' (Appendix 3). Our school extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it. We recognise the child's need to test boundaries and respond positively to that need. We will manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm. Our school maximises the range of play opportunities, utilising all areas of the outdoor provision. We aim to promote and foster independence and raise self-esteem of all children. At the heart of our play opportunities, we foster and promote children's respect for each other and offer opportunities for social interactions across all age groups.

Adults' Role in Play

Play Leaders are designated to an 'area'. It is expected that adults play alongside the children and model good behaviours in play to them.

Remote/Ranging supervision

Play Leaders may not be able to see every child all of the time, especially when the children are playing amongst the trees. It is expected that Play Leaders will move around throughout lunchtime in their designated area, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Play Leaders can then check in on the children's play throughout lunchtime. Regular assemblies are held with the children about the designated adults and how to behave responsibly and independently.

Conflict Resolution

All staff will follow the school's behaviour policy over lunchtimes and playtimes with the aim to solve conflict by working alongside the children where possible. At times children may need time out but this is encouraged to be outdoors so the children can continue to have time outside.

Environment

To be able to enjoy the vast space and activities children should always come to school with a coat as our playground is exposed to the wind even in the summer. We try to keep all of the school play zones open all year so the children will play on the field even in the winter months. In the winter, they are expected to wear wellington boots and waterproofs on the field, particularly in poorer weather. Children are asked to provide wellies or old outdoor shoes for use at playtimes. Hand washing facilities are provided both in classrooms and bathroom areas.

Part of our children's learning experiences involve playing out in all weather types and conditions so we try to avoid having indoor playtimes when wet, where possible.

Review

This policy will be closely monitored by the head teacher and play leader. A working play group, led by the head, comprising of play leader, lunchtime supervisors and play governor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play.

Review date: September 2021

Next review date: September 2023