Bottesford Schools Federation
Play Policy

Approved by:	Miss R Busby – Executive Headteacher	**Date: Autumn 2026**

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Helping Every Child to RISE

Strategic commitment: The Federation will refer to this policy when making decisions affecting play, including timetabling, staffing, grounds, resources and improvement priorities. Governors and leaders will provide the strategic and operational support required to sustain high-quality play provision.

1. Our vision for play

At Bottesford Schools Federation, play is not a break from learning: play is learning. We believe that every child deserves time, space, freedom and support to play every day. Through rich, inclusive and child-led outdoor play, children build relationships, develop confidence, explore challenge, solve problems, regulate emotions and experience joy.

As an OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) school, we will make play a whole-Federation priority. We will improve the quality of playtimes for children across Reception, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, recognising different developmental stages while maintaining a shared ethos. We will protect the freedom of play, not turn playtime into a teacher-led lesson.

Our commitment: Every child belongs. Every child can play. Every child can RISE.

Definition of play: Play is intrinsically motivated, freely chosen and directed by the child. It has value in its own right, whether children play alone or together, with or without equipment. Children should have meaningful choice over what, how and with whom they play, within boundaries that protect safety, dignity and the rights of others.

2. Purpose and scope

This policy sets out our shared approach to outdoor play at breaktimes and lunchtimes, including access to space, resources, adult support, inclusion, appropriate challenge, safeguarding and review. It applies to pupils, employees, lunchtime staff, volunteers and visitors involved in play provision. It should be read alongside the Federation Behaviour, Relationships and Inclusion Policy, safeguarding and child protection procedures, SEND and inclusion policies, health and safety arrangements, first aid procedures and relevant site risk assessments.

3. Our RISE values in play

Value	What this looks like at playtime
Respect	We show kindness and consideration; invite others to join when appropriate; respect personal space and boundaries; celebrate different ways of playing; care for our environment and resources.
Integrity	We are honest and take responsibility; use resources safely; acknowledge mistakes; help repair harm; make thoughtful decisions even when adults are not beside us.
Strive	We try new games and challenges; persevere when play does not go to plan; negotiate and problem-solve; learn through manageable mistakes; build resilience without pressure to compete.
Empowerment	We choose how and with whom to play; share ideas and use our voices positively; assess age-appropriate risks; develop independence; help others participate and lead their own play.

RISE is a shared language for relationships and safety, not a checklist used to control imaginative, noisy, adventurous or self-directed play.

Children's rights underpin our approach. We recognise Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the right to rest, leisure and play) and Article 12 (the right to express views on matters affecting them). We will listen to children when designing, reviewing and improving their play opportunities.

4. Our principles of high-quality play

- Play is a right and a vital part of childhood. Children need sufficient time to become absorbed in their own play.
- Children lead their play. Adults enable, observe, encourage and intervene thoughtfully rather than routinely directing activities.
- Play is for everyone. We provide diverse choices and make reasonable adjustments so children with SEND and other additional needs can participate meaningfully.
- Challenge and uncertainty are valuable. We manage genuine hazards while allowing developmentally appropriate risk, exploration and adventure.
- All kinds of play matter: imaginative, creative, physical, social, sensory, exploratory, quiet, solitary and cooperative.
- Our spaces and resources evolve through pupil voice, staff reflection and ongoing review.

5. Play environments and opportunities

We aim to provide a varied and stimulating outdoor environment with opportunities for movement, construction, imaginative play, loose-parts play, nature exploration, creativity, socialising and calm or quieter play. Resources may include suitable recycled and open-ended materials, subject to agreed checks and risk-benefit assessments. Provision will reflect the site, season, available resources and children's ideas.

We will avoid unnecessarily restricting children to narrow age-based or activity-based zones. Where shared spaces are appropriate, adults will support respectful interaction between older and younger pupils. Any separation of areas will be based on clear developmental, accessibility or safety reasons and reviewed regularly.

Children will be encouraged to care for, move, use and return resources responsibly. Tidy-up systems will be clear and proportionate, without unnecessarily interrupting play.

6. Inclusion, equity and belonging

Our behaviour policy states that equity means giving children the support they need to succeed. At playtime, this means proactively removing barriers rather than expecting every child to enjoy the same activity. Staff will consider physical access, communication, sensory needs, social confidence, developmental stage, culture and individual preferences.

- Offer different types and intensities of play, including quieter spaces and opportunities to play alone without assuming isolation.
- Use visual prompts, modelling, familiar adults, communication support or supported introductions to games where needed.
- Seek children's views and work with parents/carers and the SENDCO/Inclusion Lead on individual adjustments.
- Ensure children are not excluded from desirable play opportunities simply because they need support to access them.
- Review patterns of exclusion, conflict or non-participation and adapt the environment or adult support.

Appropriate risk-taking is a necessary part of adventurous, creative play. We will balance the developmental benefits of challenge against the likelihood and severity of harm, rather than aiming to remove all uncertainty. Adults will support children to recognise and manage risks through dynamic risk-benefit thinking.

7. Risk, challenge and safety

We recognise the difference between a hazard that poses unacceptable danger and a beneficial, manageable risk that helps children learn. Our approach is risk-benefit assessment: considering the developmental value of play alongside foreseeable harm and proportionate controls. We do not aim to eliminate every bump, disagreement or uncertainty, but we will act promptly where there is a significant or unacceptable risk.

The designated play lead and relevant site/health-and-safety staff will maintain written risk-benefit assessments

for significant play environments and activities, review them after material changes or incidents, and ensure appropriate daily checks. Staff will make dynamic assessments during play, taking account of weather, ground conditions, age, equipment, visibility and individual needs. Unsafe or damaged resources will be removed or made safe. First aid and emergency procedures always apply.

Adults will consider: What is the benefit? What might go wrong? Can the child manage this risk? What proportionate adjustment allows the play to continue safely?

Our practice is informed by the Playwork Principles: adults create conditions for freely chosen play, observe carefully, respond sensitively and consider the impact of any intervention on children's ownership of their play. Staff may join play when invited, but should not routinely set its agenda.

8. The role of adults: enabling rather than directing

All adults are play enablers and positive role models. They will maintain active, appropriately positioned supervision; know how to summon assistance; observe children's play; support access to resources; and use calm, respectful language. They will join play when invited or when support is helpful, without taking ownership away from children.

Adults will intervene when necessary for safety, safeguarding, exclusion or harm, but avoid stopping play simply because it is messy, loud, unfamiliar or involves a manageable challenge. Adults will model RISE and offer specific recognition for effort, inclusion, responsibility and problem-solving.

9. Relationships, conflict and behaviour at playtime

Play provides authentic opportunities to learn negotiation, boundaries, emotional regulation and repair. Everyday disagreements should not automatically end a game or lead to adult-imposed solutions. Where safe, adults support children to explain their views, listen, problem-solve and agree how to continue.

When behaviour needs intervention, staff follow the Federation's relational and restorative approach: Notice → Redirect → Remind → Regulate → Reflect → Repair → Restore, using professional judgement and the RISE Behaviour Pathway as appropriate. Adults will use the least intrusive effective response, allow processing time, and distinguish dysregulation from deliberate unsafe behaviour.

A child who is overwhelmed may need co-regulation or a regulation break; this is support, not automatically a sanction. When children are ready, staff use developmentally appropriate restorative questions, help repair any harm and provide a fresh start. Any consequence should be proportionate, educational and related to the behaviour, such as practising safe use of equipment with additional adult support. Blanket withdrawal of play should not be used as a routine punishment.

Serious incidents, bullying, discrimination, sexualised behaviour or safeguarding concerns must follow the Federation's relevant reporting and safeguarding procedures. A restorative meeting must not be used where it could place a child at further risk.

OPAL identifies three complementary approaches to supervision: direct (close oversight where needed), remote (adults visible and accessible without controlling play), and ranging (adults moving through areas to understand play and emerging risks). Leaders will agree on a site-specific combination based on age, orientation, SEND, visibility, activity and risk. Reception pupils new to the site may need closer supervision until familiar with routines and spaces.

Supervisors will know their coverage areas, communication methods, first-aid and emergency arrangements. Children must know how to find an adult quickly. No single supervision model or staffing number is assumed suitable for every situation.

10. Supervision, routines and transitions

School leaders will ensure supervision arrangements, deployment, communication systems, first-aid access and emergency responses are appropriate for the site and provision. Staff will know the boundaries of accessible areas, arrangements for toilets and medical needs, procedures for missing pupils and expectations for reporting hazards and incidents.

Transitions into and out of play will be predictable, positive and adapted for pupils who need extra warning, visual cues or support. Children will be given sufficient time to play, and tidying and lining-up routines will be taught explicitly rather than relying on repeated reprimands.

11. Weather, clothing and access to outdoors

Our ambition is to make outdoor play available in a wide range of weather conditions, with sensible adjustments for safety, comfort and accessibility. Decisions will consider conditions such as ice, high winds, lightning, extreme heat, unsafe surfaces or other site-specific hazards. Wet or muddy conditions alone should not automatically prevent outdoor play when appropriate clothing, space and supervision are available.

The Federation will communicate practical expectations about outdoor clothing, spare items and footwear to families, while considering affordability and ensuring that children are not unfairly disadvantaged.

12. Pupil voice and family partnership

Children will help shape their play provision through conversations, surveys, play assemblies, observations and opportunities to suggest or evaluate resources and spaces. Younger children and pupils with communication differences will be offered accessible ways to contribute. Families will be informed about our OPAL approach, including why we value loose parts, outdoor access, challenge and manageable risk, and how they can support provision.

13. Roles and accountability

- Governors: provide strategic oversight, ensure appropriate resourcing and review impact.
- Executive Headteacher and senior leaders: champion play, align it with RISE and Federation policies, ensure staffing, training and safe implementation.
- OPAL/play lead and play working group: coordinate development, consult children and staff, maintain improvement plans and review risk-benefit assessments with relevant colleagues.
- Play team, teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime staff: consistently enable inclusive play, supervise actively, model RISE, report concerns and contribute to review.
- Pupils: contribute ideas, respect others' boundaries, take increasing responsibility for resources and seek help when needed.
- Parents and carers: share relevant needs or concerns, support appropriate clothing and engage with the school's play vision.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually, informed by children's experiences, staff and parent feedback, incident patterns, participation, inclusion and the quality of the play environment. Decisions affecting children's play will refer to this policy, and the Federation will maintain a practical play development plan.

14. Training, monitoring and review

All staff involved in play will receive appropriate induction and ongoing development in the OPAL approach, playwork principles, inclusive practice, risk-benefit thinking, safeguarding and the Federation's RISE behaviour approach. The play lead and senior leaders will review play provision using pupil voice, staff feedback, observations, participation and inclusion, incidents, condition of resources and environmental opportunities. The policy and associated practice will be reviewed at least annually during implementation and following significant changes or incidents.

15. Our play promise

We will protect time for play. We will provide opportunity rather than unnecessary restriction. We will support every child to belong, explore and thrive. We will use Respect to build community, Integrity to take responsibility, Strive to embrace challenge and Empowerment to give children ownership of their play. Together, we help every child to RISE.

Appendix A: Adult decision prompts

- Is this play child-led, and can I enable it without taking over?
- Is there an unacceptable hazard, or is this a worthwhile and manageable risk?
- Who is participating, and who may need an adjustment or invitation?
- Does the child need support to regulate before they can reflect?
- Can children resolve this disagreement with light-touch adult coaching?
- What needs recording, reporting, repairing or changing in the environment?

Appendix B: OPAL reference documents and local arrangements

The Federation will use the Health and Safety Executive's Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach (2012) as a guiding statement and the Play Safety Forum's Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (2012) to inform risk-benefit assessment. The full HSE statement (identified by OPAL as e-Pack document 4.6) should be attached to the approved policy after checking the authorised version.

The eight Playwork Principles should be attached or linked in the approved policy and incorporated into staff induction. These principles inform adult decisions to enable children's own play without unnecessary adult direction.

Before approval, leaders will agree and document site-specific supervision coverage, communication and emergency procedures, provision for Reception pupils, risk-benefit assessments, wet-weather arrangements and the named accountable staff.

Appendix C: Suggested implementation checklist

- Agree named OPAL/play lead and working group; consult all staff, including lunchtime colleagues.
- Complete a baseline audit of spaces, equipment, access, supervision and pupil experience.
- Develop and approve site-specific risk-benefit assessments, supervision plans and emergency arrangements.
- Agree resource storage, inspection, maintenance, clothing and wet-weather arrangements.
- Train staff in playwork, RISE language, SEND adjustments and restorative responses.
- Explain the approach to pupils and families; gather pupil voice before and after changes.
- Set measurable improvement priorities and review them termly.

Source and implementation note: This Version 2 incorporates the OPAL e-Pack 3.1 Template Play Policy (© OPAL CIC 2023) alongside the Federation draft Behaviour, Relationships and Inclusion Policy. Site-specific arrangements remain subject to consultation and approval.

Background: OPAL outdoor play policy guidance and e-Pack 3.1 template; Bottesford Schools Federation draft Behaviour, Relationships and Inclusion Policy. This document is a consultation draft, not an assertion of completed local arrangements.