

Commitment

We have a play policy because we value play as central to children's learning, development, and well-being.

It is important to us because it ensures every child has the chance to explore, take safe risks, and build confidence in a supportive, inclusive environment.

We will use this policy to guide all decisions about play, from planning environments to supporting staff and children. We will provide leadership by setting clear expectations, monitoring provision, and continuously improving practice so all children can thrive.

Rationale

We believe that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, create, take risks, and develop confidence, resilience, and independence. Play should be welcoming and accessible to every child, whatever their background, abilities, or circumstances.

We feel it is important to address play in our planning, use of time, and allocation of resources because children are asking for more freedom, variety, challenge, and creativity. Staff value play highly and recognise its significant impact on wellbeing, behaviour, and learning, and parents consistently view playtimes as extremely important. Developing our play provision will increase enjoyment, improve inclusion, and build life skills in line with OPAL principles.

We aim to provide more open-ended, child-led opportunities, including loose parts, sand and water, music, physical challenges, and safe outdoor risk-taking. By investing in these experiences, along with staff training and support, we will create a richer, more engaging, and inclusive play environment that strengthens resilience, enhances behaviour, and supports children to thrive.

Value of Play

At Ferndale Primary School and Nursery, we believe that some of our fondest memories as children were created through play — running freely, building dens, solving problems with friends, or imagining whole worlds together. Play is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child, and freely chosen. It has its own value and purpose, whether it involves equipment, other children, or simply imagination.

We know from our staff, children, and our own experiences that play is essential to children's health, wellbeing, and development. It allows children to explore their environment, experiment with ideas, and test out new skills in a safe and supportive way. Through play, children develop confidence, resilience, creativity, communication, and problem-solving, while learning to negotiate, collaborate, and respect others.

Play at Ferndale reflects our vision: it nurtures relationships, values individuality, and gives every child the chance to thrive. It provides rich, hands-on experiences that empower children to take safe risks, explore their curiosity, and express their learning with confidence. Play maintains openness to learning, supports emotional and social growth, and builds lasting memories — helping our children develop the skills and resilience to succeed beyond school.

Rights

At Ferndale, we recognise that children have the right to play, recreation, and leisure (Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the right to be listened to on matters that are important to them (Article 12). We understand that we have a legal and moral obligation to uphold these rights.

We take children's views on their play seriously and ensure they are actively involved in shaping play experiences. By listening to their ideas and respecting their choices, we create inclusive, engaging, and meaningful opportunities for all children. Play at Ferndale is not just a break from learning — it is an essential part of how children grow, explore, and thrive in a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment.

Equality and Access

At Ferndale, we are committed to providing equal opportunities in all aspects of play. Every child, regardless of age, gender, ability, ethnicity, culture, economic background, or individual needs, has the right to access high-quality play experiences. We ensure that play is inclusive, welcoming, and accessible so that every child can explore, take safe risks, and express themselves freely.

This commitment extends across all areas of equality and aligns with our wider school policies, including our Equality Policy, Inclusion Policy, and SEND Policy. By promoting equality in play, we support children to build confidence, develop relationships, and thrive in a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment. We actively challenge barriers to participation and strive to ensure that all children's voices are heard and valued in shaping their play experiences.

Benefit and Risk

Play is essential for children's wellbeing, learning, and development. It enables children to explore, be creative, take safe risks, develop social skills, and build confidence, resilience, and independence. For the school, good play opportunities support positive behaviour, enhance learning, and contribute to a happy, inclusive, and engaging environment.

At Ferndale, we are committed to balancing our duty of care with providing these essential benefits. We recognise that the goal of play provision is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh risks and benefits so that children can learn and grow safely. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.

We will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) to inform our decision-making, and *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012) as the framework for putting this into practice.

In addition to written risk assessments, the school will use dynamic risk management to respond to the fluid nature of risk and challenge in the play environment. The school will also manage risk by building children's skills in identifying and managing appropriate risk themselves. Risk-taking is an essential feature of play, and our provision aims to offer children acceptable risks within stimulating, challenging, and well-managed environments, following the OPAL RAPID framework (see Appendix 1: HSE Managing Risk Statement).

Supervision Styles

At Ferndale, we provide supervision that is appropriate, flexible, and responsive to children's play. Following OPAL guidance, our staff use a combination of direct supervision, where adults are actively engaged with children, indirect supervision, where adults observe from a distance and intervene only when necessary, and ranging supervision, where adults move across the play environment to monitor several areas while allowing children freedom to explore. This approach ensures safety, supports risk-taking, and encourages creativity, independence, confidence, and resilience, while enabling staff to respond dynamically to the changing nature of play.

The Adults' Role in Play

At Ferndale, we recognise that the role of adults in play is to support, facilitate, and enhance children's self-directed play rather than control it. Following the Playwork Principles, our staff create environments that stimulate curiosity, creativity, and exploration, providing resources, space, and opportunities that enrich children's play experiences. Adults observe, listen, and intervene only when necessary to extend learning, model language, or ensure safety, while always respecting children's choices.

As members of the senior leadership team, we are committed to supporting this role by providing ongoing training, guidance, and resources for staff, and by fostering a culture where the value of play is fully understood and prioritised. This ensures that play at Ferndale is purposeful, inclusive, and empowering, giving every child the chance to explore, take safe risks, build relationships, and develop confidence, resilience, and independence.

Environment

We believe that a rich play environment provides children with access to stimulating, varied, and engaging spaces that encourage exploration, creativity, and challenge, while remaining free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks. Our collective view is that children should be able to make choices, take safe risks, and develop independence through freely chosen play.

We are committed to continually enhancing the quality, variety, and accessibility of our play environments, both indoors and outdoors. We will use the publication *Best Play* to guide our provision and ensure that our school offers a diverse, inclusive, and high-quality play experience for all children (www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf).