

Viking Academy Trust



Play Policy

Approved by the Trust: Term 1 2026

Reviewed every year

Last review date: Term 1 2026

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roby', is written over a faint rectangular box.

Chair of Trust

Play Policy

The Viking Academy Trust

Empowering Children Through Education: One Childhood One Chance

Schools in the Viking Academy Trust (VAT)

Chilton Primary School
Ramsgate Arts Primary School
Upton Junior School

This Play Policy specific to Junior School.

OPAL Play Policy

1. Commitment

- Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, 'A child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'
- Upton Junior School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. Our play opportunities are in line with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Playwork Principles and the Play Safety Forum's publication: 'Managing Risk in a Play Provision.'
- At Upton, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. Play opportunities are evident throughout our curriculum, both in and out of the classroom. These inclusive learning opportunities in play are achieved by offering a carefully considered environment for learning in which children demonstrate that they are safe, ready and respectful. Upton Junior School provides a range of spaces, equipment and resources throughout our school day that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child, promoting every child's natural curiosity to learn, question, challenge and explore.
- Upton Junior School refers to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our children.

2. Rationale

- Upton Junior School believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.
- Our approach to play through the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme is closely aligned with the vision, values and ethos of Upton Junior School. Our vision, "*One Childhood, One Chance – Empowering Children Through Education*", recognises that children's development extends beyond the classroom. We want every child to be happy, safe and successful, and to develop the confidence, skills and attitudes needed to thrive. OPAL provides an important opportunity to achieve this through purposeful, child-led play.
- At Upton, our core values of Friendship, Aspiration, Respect and Resilience underpin the way we learn, play and work together. OPAL gives children regular opportunities to practise these values in authentic situations. Through shared play, children learn to respect others, negotiate,

cooperate and resolve disagreements. They develop resilience by managing challenges, taking appropriate risks, adapting their ideas and persevering when things do not go as planned. Open-ended play encourages aspiration and creativity, while the social nature of play helps children develop friendships, empathy and a sense of belonging.

- OPAL also supports our expectations to Be Ready, Be Respectful and Be Safe. Children are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their choices, their environment and the way they interact with others. Rather than viewing play simply as a break from learning, we recognise it as an essential part of children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Our school ethos places strong importance on children being confident, independent and well-rounded individuals. OPAL supports this by providing children with a wide range of opportunities to explore, imagine, create, problem-solve and collaborate. It enables children with different interests, strengths and abilities to find meaningful ways to participate and succeed, supporting our commitment to ensuring that every child can reach their full potential.
- OPAL also reflects Upton's commitment to providing a welcoming, stimulating and supportive environment in which children feel valued and respected. By developing a rich and inclusive play environment, we seek to ensure that all children have opportunities to experience success, develop positive relationships and build confidence.
- Our approach also reflects Upton's belief in the importance of teamwork and partnership. Effective play provision requires children, staff, families and the wider school community to work together. By creating a shared understanding of the importance of play, we can develop a consistent culture in which children are encouraged to take ownership, support one another and contribute positively to the school community.
- OPAL therefore represents a natural extension of Upton Junior School's existing vision and values. In adopting OPAL, Upton Junior School is making a commitment to giving children One Childhood One Chance to experience the rich, varied and joyful play opportunities that are essential to their development and wellbeing

3. Definition and value of play

- At Upton Junior School, we recognise play as an essential part of childhood and an important part of children's learning, development and wellbeing. We define play as freely chosen, self-directed and enjoyable activity where children can explore, create, imagine, take appropriate risks and develop their own ideas.
- Through OPAL, we provide children with the time, space, freedom and resources to play in a wide variety of ways. We believe that play is learning, helping children develop physically, socially, emotionally and creatively.

Our approach to play reflects our core values of:

- **Friendship** – developing positive relationships, empathy and teamwork.
- **Aspiration** – being curious, creative and willing to try new things.
- **Respect** – learning to cooperate, share, listen and value others.
- **Resilience** – managing challenges, taking appropriate risks and learning from setbacks.

Play also supports our expectations to Be Ready, Be Respectful and Be Safe, encouraging children to make positive choices and take responsibility for themselves, others and their environment.

We believe that every child has the right to play and that high-quality, inclusive play is an essential part of a happy, safe and successful childhood. At Upton we believe play has many benefits, including:

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas.
- Play enhances children's self-esteem and their understanding of others through freely chosen social interactions, within peer groups, with individuals, and within groups of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures.

- Play requires ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others.
- Play enables children to experience a wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness and happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration and achievement, boredom and fascination, fear and confidence.
- Play encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.

4. Aims

In relation to play our school aims to:

- Allow children to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits.
- Ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop their relationships with each other.
- Enable children to develop respect for their surroundings and each other.
- Aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Provide a range of environments that will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- Provide a range of environments that will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.
- Promote independence and teamwork within children.
- Build emotional and physical resilience.

5. Rights

- At Upton Junior School, we recognise that every child has a right to play. Play is fundamental to children's wellbeing, development and enjoyment of childhood, and is recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Our commitment to children's right to play reflects our school values of Friendship, Aspiration, Respect and Resilience. Through play, children are given the freedom to make choices, explore, take appropriate risks, solve problems and develop positive relationships.
- **Friendship** – children build relationships, learn to include others and develop empathy and teamwork.
- **Aspiration** – children are encouraged to be curious, creative and develop their own ideas.
- **Respect** – children learn to listen, cooperate, share and value others.
- **Resilience** – children experience challenge, make mistakes and develop confidence to try again.

By protecting and promoting children's right to play, we are supporting our vision of "One Childhood, One Chance" and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to enjoy a happy, safe and successful childhood.

6. Benefit and risk

- *'Play is great for children's wellbeing 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.'*
- Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012)
- Upton Junior School will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, Upton Junior School will adopt a risk-

benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

- Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in the play sector publication 'Best Play', play provision should aim to '*manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm*'.
- In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments Upton Junior School will practice dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.

7. Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the school day there should be one or more adult present outdoors. The school recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Upton Junior School does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial for children. Supervisors will use ranging and remote supervision models, so that children can quickly find an adult and adults can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

8. The adult's role in play

- Upton Junior School will help children maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures children's self-directed play.
- The playworker's core function is to create an environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced playworker can enrich the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools, and they can act as a stimulus to children to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited.

9. Equality and diversity

At Upton Junior School, we are committed to ensuring that every child has an equal right and opportunity to play, participate and belong. Our OPAL approach reflects the principles set out in the school's Equity and Diversity Policy, promoting inclusion, respect and equality for all members of our school community. We recognise that children have different interests, abilities, backgrounds, experiences and needs. Our play provision therefore aims to provide a wide range of opportunities, spaces and resources so that every child can find ways to participate, succeed and enjoy play.

We will:

- Ensure play is inclusive and accessible to all children.
- Challenge discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes in play.
- Respect and celebrate difference and diversity.
- Make reasonable adjustments where needed to enable children to participate.
- Encourage children to respect, include and support one another.
- Consider the individual needs of children when developing and reviewing our play provision.

Environment



- At Upton Junior School, we believe that a rich and varied play environment is essential to children's wellbeing, development and learning. Through our OPAL approach, we aim to provide an environment that is safe, stimulating, inclusive and engaging, offering children opportunities to explore, create, imagine, collaborate and take appropriate risks.
- A well-designed play environment supports safeguarding by providing clear expectations, appropriate boundaries and spaces where children can play confidently and independently, while adults maintain appropriate oversight and support.
- Our environment encourages children to develop confidence, teamwork and leadership skills. Children are supported to make decisions, negotiate, solve problems and advocate for themselves and their right to play. This helps develop their independence and their understanding of their own rights and responsibilities.
- Rich play experiences also support children's social and emotional development, helping them to build friendships, manage emotions, communicate effectively, resolve disagreements and develop empathy and resilience.
- We place particular value on outdoor play and providing opportunities for children to connect with the natural environment. Developing a love and enjoyment of the outdoors helps children develop curiosity, respect and a sense of responsibility for the world around them. We believe that children who develop a positive relationship with nature are more likely to value, protect and care for their environment.
- Our play environment will therefore continue to evolve in response to children's needs and interests, ensuring that it reflects our school values, while supporting our vision of providing every child with a happy, safe and successful childhood.
- We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf

Appendix A HSE Managing Risk Statement

Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach

Decisions on whether certain play and leisure activities carried out by children and young people should be discouraged are often based on misunderstandings about what health and safety laws require.

Such decisions are often based on misunderstandings about what the law requires. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) worked with the Play Safety Forum in 2012 to produce a joint high-level statement that gives clear messages tackling these misunderstandings. HSE fully endorses the principles in this statement.

This statement makes clear that HSE recognises:

- play is important 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
- those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion

Joint statement on promoting a balanced approach for children's play and leisure

Health and safety laws and regulations are sometimes presented as a reason why certain play and leisure activities undertaken by children and young people should be discouraged. The reasons for this misunderstanding are many and varied. They include fears of litigation or criminal prosecution because even the most trivial risk has not been removed. There can be frustration with the amounts of paperwork involved, and misunderstanding about what needs to be done to control significant risks.

The purpose of this statement is to give clear messages which tackle these misunderstandings. In this statement, HSE makes clear that, as a regulator, it recognises the benefits of allowing children and young people of all ages and abilities to have challenging play opportunities.

HSE fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, while well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger.

HSE wants to make sure mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities.

This statement provides all those with a stake in encouraging children to play with a clear picture of HSE's perspective on these issues. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks and not on unnecessary paperwork. HSE's primary interest is in real risks arising from serious breaches of the law and our investigations are targeted at these issues.

The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose burdens on employers that are wholly unreasonable. (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 660 [27])

Recognising the benefits of play

Key message: '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.'

HSE fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.

Striking the right balance between protecting children from the most serious risks and allowing them to reap the benefits of play is not always easy. It is not about eliminating risk. Nor is it about complicated methods of calculating risks or benefits. In essence, play is a safe and beneficial activity. Sensible adult judgements are all that is generally required to derive the best benefits to children while ensuring they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer bench marks that can help.

Striking the right balance does mean:

- weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- focusing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

Striking the right balance does not mean:

- all risks must be eliminated or continually reduced
- every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities
- ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- mistakes and accidents will not happen

What parents and society should expect from play providers

Key message: 'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork.'

Play providers should use their own judgement and expertise as well as, where appropriate, the judgement of others, to ensure the assessments and controls proposed are proportionate to the risks involved.

Providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday playschemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

They should communicate what these controls are, why they are necessary and so ensure everyone focuses on the important risks.

It is important that providers' arrangements ensure that:

- the beneficial aspects of play - and the exposure of children to a level of risk and challenge - are not unnecessarily reduced
- assessment and judgement focuses on the real risks, not the trivial and fanciful
- controls are proportionate and so reflect the level of risk

To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector produced the guidance publication [Managing risk in play provision: implementation Guide \(on the Playwork Foundation website\) \(PDF\)](#).

The approach in this guidance is that risks and benefits are considered alongside each other in a risk-benefit assessment. This includes an assessment of the risks which, while taking into account the benefits of the activity, ensures that any precautions are practicable and proportionate and reflect the level of risk. HSE supports this guidance, as a sensible approach to risk management.

If things go wrong

Key message: 'Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.'

Play providers are expected to deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, it is important to know how to respond to the incident properly and to conduct a balanced, transparent review.

In the case of the most serious failures of duty, prosecution rightly remains a possibility, and cannot be entirely ruled out. However, this possibility does not mean that play providers should eliminate even the most trivial of risks. Provided sensible and proportionate steps have been taken, it is highly unlikely there would be any breach of health and safety law involved, or that it would be in the public interest to bring a prosecution.