

# Play Policy

## St Francis' Catholic Primary School

St. Francis'  
Catholic Primary



**Approved by FGB on:** Nov 2018

**Committee Responsible:** Curriculum

**Next review due by:** Nov 2020

## **Rationale:**

At St Francis' School, we carefully balance the risks presented by allowing children to play with their rights to explore, create, judge hazards for themselves and be free to be children. Our rationale is based on the principles of the Health and Safety Executive document published in September 2012 (extracts can be found in appendix 1) the UN Convention on the Rights of the child and our own ethos, which promotes the development of the spiritual, social, physical and emotional in our children, as well as the academic.

## **Benefits of Play**

We believe that the benefits of play are:

- the development of a problem solving mind-set
- increasing opportunities for physical exercise and development
- improving resilience, developing communication and concentration skills
- better engagement with education and learning
- developing problem-solving skills
- developing social interaction
- allowing children to take risks in a 'safe' environment.

## **Principles of Play**

At St. Francis' we follow the following 5 principles of play. They are:

- children need to play and we will promote play in our school.
- play at St. Francis' should be primarily freely chosen and self-directed by the children.
- children need to test and increasingly understand boundaries and themselves in a challenging yet managed environment.
- we will strive to maximise the range of play opportunities available.
- we believe that play is for all children, and that all children have the right to choose and have a range of choice. We will strive to promote this.

## **Play Supervisors**

Play supervisors at St Francis' school will make the minimum interventions in children's play consistent with keeping them free from serious harm.

Play Workers will promote our principles of play in the following ways:

- know and understand the play policy
- know the reason for, and how to do, dynamic risk assessments
- be hands off as much as possible promoting freely chosen and self-directed play
- where intervention is needed, use the 'language of choice', and help them understand risks through using questions such as "what am I worried about here?"
- permit as much of the school site and equipment to be used as practical.

## **Risk Benefit Assessments**

Children's play should be as unencumbered as possible to allow the full benefits of play to be experienced. St Francis' School aims to manage risk or potential danger rather than eliminate it, as doing this would create a sterile play environment that would lack challenge and prevent children from expanding their learning and abilities. We use risk benefit assessments to focus on reducing or eliminating serious risks and risks that are not reasonably foreseeable by the children.

We will also use dynamic risk assessments to further reduce risks. The following systems will be used to record risks as they emerge and to maintain the risk benefit assessments:

- when incidents, near misses or accidents occur, the incident will be reported to the head or deputy, who will record and look for emerging patterns which may indicate a policy change is needed
- risk benefit assessments will be reviewed in the autumn term, then as necessary
- if a serious risk suddenly emerges, and a risk benefit analysis is either changed or introduced, all staff will be informed by email.

## Extracts from CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH (HSE 2012)

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, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger. HSE wants to make sure that 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. HSE wants to encourage a focus on the sensible and proportionate control of real risks and not on unnecessary paperwork.

*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.

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 whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. Striking the right balance *does* mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities
- Focussing 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

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

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. 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.