Following Jesus to discover joy, share faith and grow in love.

Play Policy

Our Mission

"Following Jesus to discover joy, share faith and grow in love."

Our Lady and St Brendan's Catholic Primary School
Play Policy 2025–2026
Approved by: Academy Council – November 2025
Next Review: November 2026

Our School Vision

To strive for excellence in the discovery of joy in learning. With Christ at the centre, we will share our faith together and grow in love as we journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

Our School Mission

Following Jesus to discover joy, share faith and grow in love.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." (Matthew 4:19)

Our School Aims

To grow closer to God through high quality Worship, Religious Education and our responsibilities in Catholic Social Teaching.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

To ensure pupils are nurtured to flourish and achieve their academic potential.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

To work in partnership with families and the parish to create a welcoming learning community.

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)

1. Commitment

Our Lady and St. Brendan's Catholic Primary school is committed to providing high-quality play opportunities for every child. Our vision reflects Jesus' promise of "life to the full" (John 10:10), ensuring play enriches every child's wellbeing, development, and joy. Our school will refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect children's play. Play will be considered in all decisions that affect children's wellbeing, development, and learning.

2. Rationale

Play is a vital part of every child's life and learning. It helps children explore, take risks, build relationships, and develop confidence and independence. Modern life offers fewer opportunities for free play, making school playtimes especially important. High-quality play leads to happier children, better behaviour, and improved learning outcomes.

We recognise Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – the right to play – and ensure that all children, regardless of background, ability, or circumstance, have equal access to play.

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play – equivalent to 1 day a week. 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. With better quality play opportunities there are fewer behaviour issues, and a more positive attitude to learning in school, improved social skills and more opportunities for physical development. As children improve their quality of play and experience more enriching play times, there are fewer incidents. Classroom learning is enhanced as children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Through our involvement in the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme, we aim to make playtimes active, creative, and inclusive.

3. Definition and Value of Play

Play is any freely chosen, self-directed activity that a child finds enjoyable and meaningful. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

Play supports:

- Play helps children explore the world around them, try new ideas, and understand how things work.
- It builds self-esteem and understanding of others through social interaction with different ages, abilities, and backgrounds.
- Play develops communication and cooperation skills, helping children balance freedom with responsibility.
- It allows children to experience and manage a wide range of emotions such as joy, frustration, confidence, and fear.
- Play encourages creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- It helps children stay open to learning, build confidence, and discover what they can achieve.
- Play promotes teamwork, self-advocacy, and respect for others.
- Through play, children also learn to care for and respect the environment.

Our play provision aims to:

- Offer varied, challenging, and stimulating environments.
- Encourage creativity, imagination, and exploration.
- Allow children to take managed risks safely.
- Promote teamwork, respect, and independence.
- Support outdoor learning across the curriculum.

4. Rights

Our school recognises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes every child's right to play (Article 31) and to have their views heard on matters important to them (Article 12). We acknowledge that we have a duty take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play.

5. Equality and Inclusion

Our play provision is inclusive of all children, regardless of age, ability, gender, or background. We promote fairness, respect, and equal access for all. We remember Christ's words: "Let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:14), ensuring every child is valued and welcomed into play. Children live out these virtues everyday within our school to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the essential role these virtues play in the education of the whole person towards human flourishing.

6. Risk and Benefit

> *'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 (2012)*

Research shows that when children take managed risks, they become more confident, resilient, and willing to try new things. They learn from both success and failure, developing independence and problem-solving skills. Risk and challenge are not just physical - they also include social and emotional risks, such as making new friends, trying unfamiliar games, or coping with setbacks. Without opportunities to take acceptable risks, children may struggle to handle challenges in the wider world.

Our Lady and St. Brendan's follows the Health and Safety Executive's guidance, "Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach" and adopts a risk–benefit approach. This means we balance safety with the developmental benefits of play, offering exciting and challenging environments that remain safe and supervised. Staff also use dynamic risk management, encouraging children to think about safety for themselves and make sensible decisions with adult support.

Striking the right balance of risk and benefit 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 injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed.
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full.

7. Supervision

By law, children must be supervised during school hours, but there are no set adult-to-child ratios for playtimes. At Our Lady and St. Brendan's, there will always be one or more adults outdoors during every breaktime. We follow the OPAL supervision models – Direct, Remote, and Ranging. Reception children receive direct supervision, as they are new to school routines. For older pupils, we use remote and ranging supervision, allowing children freedom to explore while adults remain visible and accessible. All staff on duty wear high-visibility jackets so children can easily find help when needed. Adults use walkie-talkies for quick communication and carry first aid bum bags so minor injuries can be dealt with promptly.

8. The adults' role in play

Staff support self-directed play using the Playwork Principles (see appendix 3).
Their role is to create safe, engaging spaces, encourage exploration, and step in only when necessary. Adults enable play, rather than control it.

9. Environment

Our outdoor spaces are central to our play provision. We:

- Use outdoor areas as natural spaces for learning and play
- Involve children in planning and caring for these areas
- Encourage creativity, exploration, and respect for nature
- Continually improve the variety and quality of play spaces

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. Play is every child's right. At Our Lady and St. Brendan's Catholic Primary, we ensure it remains a joyful, safe, and meaningful part of school life. As Psalm 24:1 reminds us, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." Through play, children learn to explore, respect, and care for God's creation.

Appendix 1 – Types of Play

1. **Symbolic Play** – Using one thing to represent another, such as pretending a stick is a sword or a string is a ring.
2. **Rough and Tumble Play** – Physical play like chasing, wrestling, or tickling, where children test strength and coordination safely.
3. **Socio-Dramatic Play** – Acting out real-life situations, such as shopping, cooking, or playing families.
4. **Social Play** – Playing with others, learning to share, cooperate, and follow rules.
5. **Creative Play** – Making, building, or designing things using imagination and materials.
6. **Communication Play** – Using language, sounds, or gestures in fun ways — singing, joking, rhyming, or storytelling.
7. **Dramatic Play** – Acting out events not personally experienced, such as being in a show or festival.
8. **Locomotor Play** – Moving for fun — running, jumping, climbing, or skipping.
9. **Deep Play** – Testing limits and overcoming fears through adventurous activities like climbing or balancing.
10. **Exploratory Play** – Finding out how things work by handling, stacking, or experimenting.
11. **Fantasy Play** – Entering a make-believe world where anything is possible, such as pretending to fly or be a superhero.
12. **Imaginative Play** – Pretending to be something else, like an animal, tree, or vehicle.
13. **Mastery Play** – Controlling the environment, such as digging, building, or redirecting water.
14. **Object Play** – Exploring and manipulating objects through touch and movement.
15. **Role Play** – Copying familiar roles or activities, such as driving a car or using a phone.
16. **Recapitulative Play** – Exploring stories, rituals, fire, darkness, and the natural world.

Appendix 2 – Managing Risk in Play

Our Lady and St. Brendan's follows national guidance from the **Health & Safety Executive (HSE)**: **"Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach" (2012)**
https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/assets/docs/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf

This guidance supports play that allows children to explore and take acceptable levels of risk while maintaining appropriate safety standards.

Appendix 3 – Principles of Playwork

Our approach is guided by the Playwork Principles, which state:

1. All children need to play – it is essential to healthy development.
2. Play is freely chosen, self-directed, and internally motivated.
3. Adults support play by creating safe, engaging environments.
4. The play process takes priority over adult-led agendas.
5. Staff act as advocates for play and balance safety with freedom.
6. Adults reflect on their role and impact on children's play.
7. Skilled intervention helps extend and enrich children's play experiences.

Appendix 4 – Types of Supervision

1. **Direct Supervision** – Adults are within sight and close to children, mainly used in Reception.
2. **Remote Supervision** – Adults are nearby and available to respond quickly if needed.
3. **Ranging Supervision** – Adults move around the play area, observing and supporting children across different zones.

These models allow children freedom and independence while maintaining safety and awareness.

Definitions

- **Free Play:** Play that is freely chosen, directed, and controlled by the child.
- **Risk–Benefit Assessment:** Balancing the developmental benefits of play against potential risks.
- **Supervisor:** A trained adult responsible for children's safety and wellbeing during play. Also known as a 'Playworker'.
- **Play Environment:** The physical and social space where play occurs, including outdoor and natural areas.
- **Play Value:** The variety and quality of opportunities for exploration, creativity, and interaction in a play space.