Bierton CE Combined School

Play Policy

Date: **September 2026**

Date of Review: **July 2028**

Every Individual Child Achieves

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.'

Bierton CE Combined School recognises that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood. As a school, we provide consistently high quality, sustainable play opportunities for all children. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces, equipment and toys that offer a rich choice of accessible play experiences for every child. At Bierton we are committed to using our school vision and this play policy to guide our planning and actions in providing play opportunities for children. We believe play has a vital role in children's health, happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks**.**

2. Rationale

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in school at play. 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 problems, a more positive attitude to school and improved skills development and learning. As the children improve their quality of play and have more enriching play times, there are fewer accidents and classroom learning is enhanced as the children come in from play happy and ready to learn.

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning; a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development which is vital for all are children and in particular for EAL learners and those children with deprived speech and language. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries in a safe environment.
We surveyed the children in October 2021 for their views on play time, they highlight the need for improvement. Many were positive about the playground, but some

children's comments included; '*there is not enough to do'*, '*sometimes it is boring because there isn't much to do'*, '*the playground needs an more equipment', 'it needs more resources'*.

3. Definition of Play

The Government's Play Strategy defines play as:
'*encompassing children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live'.*

This activity meets the four components of a child's development:

- Physical (direct impact on physical development, co-ordination and fitness);
- Intellectual (cognitive development, imagination);
- Educational (the knowledge and understanding of academic outcomes); and
- Social (the development of values, beliefs and self-perception and the parallel communication skills, leadership and teamwork this enhances).

Bierton the children and staff think that:

- play allows children to be creative and co-operative
- adults' roles in high quality play is to support children during play and to be responsive to children's invitations and requests. Further to it is important to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and develop the children's risk awareness.
- play may be solitary or social
- play invites investigation and exploration which may test boundaries
- play makes children happy and happy children are healthier children who in turn can learn better
- children have a right to play with a wider range of resources as long as it is safe regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- play is something you choose to do and that it is fun!
- enables children to process their experiences of the world

4. Risk and Benefit

Many research studies have found that the social, physical and mental benefits to children of managed risks are vast. Children become more resilient, adaptable and are keen to try new experiences. Children should be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and also to experience successes and failures. Risk and challenge is not limited to physical risk – it includes the uncertainties involved in making new friends, playing with children from different backgrounds and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

'Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk, children's development is inhibited, undermining their capability to deal with the wider unsupervised world'. (DCFS 2019)

At Bierton we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way. The Health and Safety Executive offer guidance on the provision of play in educational settings and state that:

'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 dangers'. (HSE, 2013)

Bierton will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure (www.hse.gov.uk) **(Appendix 1)** as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

Our role as play providers is to facilitate the maximum amount of enriching opportunities for children to encounter. They need to learn to manage risk for themselves in an environment that is as safe as it needs to be, rather than completely devoid of risk. The benefit to children of challenging play opportunities should be balanced with any potential risk when carrying out risk assessments. We will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments **(Appendix 2)** to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

5. Adults' Role in Play

We, as an entire staff, are fully committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want and need in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground which will include regular play assemblies, School Council involvement, surveys and other pupil voice outlets.

The adult's role will also be to facilitate play and encourage children to assess the risks and benefits of activities within the play setting. The school is working with OPAL (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Bierton. In addition to this the Bierton Play Team (Appendix 3) will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, MDSAs and all other staff as well as the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Teaching assistants and MDSAs will take on the role of Play Makers. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available to children: to observe, reflect and analyse the play that is happening and select a

mode of intervention or make a change to the play space if needed. Play Makers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

6. Children's Role in Play

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy. (Appendix 4) In it will also include the rights and responsibilities of the children to

- Have ownership of their play and outdoor learning experiences
- Respect and look after each other, their environment, equipment and toys.
- To be aware of sanctions surrounding purposely dangerous or unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that playtimes are fun for everybody

This children's policy will be shared and explained to all children regularly as part of ongoing assemblies, discussions and dialogue in class and with School Council.

7. Environment

At Bierton we will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing, encouraging the children to value natural or found objects for play
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- ensure that the outdoor area offers all children the opportunity to investigate, take risks and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things
- give children the opportunity to manage the space and freedom afforded by the outdoors
- enrich the quality of the environment to maximise variety of play types and increase play value
- ensure that the playground is an integrated area where children can play safely.
- Teach the children their responsibilities with regard to maintaining the quality of their outdoor space, and the equipment available and ensure they take an active part in doing this.
- Promote children's pride for the outdoor space that belongs to them.

Appendix 1

CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH

https://playwork.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide-1.pdf

Appendix 2

Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet

Risk Assessment Date…… Assessed by……

	Description of Activity, Principle or Object, who might be at risk and what kind of harm.	Benefit or Utility Or Related Policy	Description of risk management and maintenance agreed	Nominated person	Action Date

Appendix 3

Structure of adult roles in practice

OPAL Team

This is the team working directly with OPAL to ensure policy is in place and develop play and outdoor learning at Bierton CE Combined School. It consists of:

The Head Teacher
Play Leader
Site Manager
Pupil Voice Co-ordinator
Parent Representative/ Associate Governor

Bierton Play Team

All adults working at the school are part of the play team and have a responsibility to follow this policy. When on the playground at playtimes staff all should act as Play Makers.

However more specifically at lunch times the following structure exists:

Headteacher / Play Co-ordinator
(Leads and manages strategy)

Play Leader
(Leads and manages playtimes)

Play Makers
(Support children's' play as describe in paragraph 5)

Appendix 4

Children's Play Policy

We have the right to have fun at playtimes. We have the responsibility to make sure that everyone has fun and our play does not stop this.

We have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do. We have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.

We have the right to choose who we play with. We have the responsibility that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.

We have the right play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment. We have the responsibility to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.

We have the right to explore be creative and take thoughtful risks. We have the responsibility to think about what we are doing and talk to a adults about the risks we are taking if they ask us too.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be regularly monitored and will be reviewed in July 2028.