

Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

This policy is effective in Djanogly Northgate Academy, part of the Djanogly Learning Trust.

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Version	Date	Author	Changes
V1.0	November 2024	JT	Play policy created and shared with all stakeholders. Ratified by Governors
V2	July 2025	SB	Play policy shared on school website and changes made to section 8 (hiring process to include OPAL in the job description).

1. Commitment

Djanogly Northgate Academy recognises that play is an essential part of a happy, healthy childhood. We are committed to providing and maintaining an inclusive, quality play provision for all our children every day. At Djanogly Northgate Academy, our Academy culture is centred around the values of Discover, Nurture and Aspire. We aim to develop these values through play opportunities whilst igniting curiosity and a passion for learning using a wide variety of open-ended equipment, resources and outdoor spaces to enrich and promote imagination in every child. This is because we believe that play has a vital role in creating confident, social, independent, healthy, happy children.

2. Rationale

Djanogly Northgate Academy emphasises the importance of play, noting it comprises 20% of a child's primary school life—about 1.4 years. With societal shifts reducing children's opportunities for active, outdoor play, the Academy integrates play into its core vision to support exploration, social development, and future aspirations. Play is seen as vital to early education, fostering skills like problem-solving, communication, confidence, and independence. A stronger focus on play is expected to lead to more creative and engaging playtimes, contributing to happier, healthier children, fewer behavioural issues, and better classroom learning outcomes. A pupil survey conducted in September 2024 revealed that children wanted more building resources, social spaces, and wider access to school grounds, including lunchtime use of the field.

3. Definition and Value of Play

Play is defined as a process that is 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages a child.' Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

At Djanogly Northgate Academy we believe that:

- 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.
- 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 encourages self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative.
- Play enables children to process their experiences of the world.
- Play helps to promote independence, teamwork and build emotional and physical resilience.
- Play maintains children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Play is something you choose to do and is fun!

4. Rights

Our Academy recognises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes *the right to play, recreation and leisure* (Article 31) and the *right of children to be listened to on matters important to them* (Article 12). We acknowledge that we have a duty to take these rights seriously and listen to children's views on their play. We aim to support all pupils to develop their unique identities and confidence to ask questions; valuing every voice.

5. Equality and Diversity

Through providing a rich play offer meeting every child's needs we will ensure all children, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy Academy. Northgate is a place where everyone is valued.

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)

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision. 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 and building emotional resilience through trying out new experiences with the possibility of failure.

Our 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*'.

Djanogly Northgate Academy will use the Health and Safety Executive guidance document *Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach* (September 2012) (**Appendix 1**) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, the Academy will adopt a risk-benefit approach as detailed in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide* (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

In addition to written risk-benefit assessments, the Academy will use dynamic risk management in order to respond to the fluid nature of risk and challenge in the play environment. The Academy will also manage risk by building children's skills in identifying and managing appropriate risk themselves.

7. Supervision Styles

The law requires that children in Academies have supervision but for primary school playtimes there are no stated ratios. During the Academy day there should be one or more adults present outdoors. Northgate recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: Direct, Remote and Ranging. Except for new children in reception, whose skills and orientation in the Academy environment need to be assessed, the Academy does not believe direct supervision is possible or beneficial. Supervisors will use a ranging model, 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 Adults' Role in Play

At Djanogly Northgate Academy we are fully committed to providing a high-quality play experience in collaboration with the children. The adults' role will be to maximise the benefits children can gain through play by working in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Members of the play team will be hired with an understanding of a commitment to these principles.

(Appendix 2).

Staff will aim to create a rich environment that will stimulate children's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences whilst encouraging children to assess the risks and benefits of individual activities. Adults will have a positive attitude towards all play types in order to create and foster a culture of celebration, imagination and exploration of play. Adults will be there to support, promote and guide with relationships and teamwork whilst participating in child-led play when invited.

9. Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play.

We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our Academy's grounds to enhance play.

At Djanogly Northgate Academy 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.
- Continually evaluate the outdoor environment and look for further opportunities and resources to enrich play.
- Include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors.
- Expect the children to respect the outdoor environment and care for living things.
- Ensure the play space is integrated where all children can explore and 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.
- Help children develop confidence in team building and working together.
- Be respectful, resilient and ready to learn.

Appendix 1: Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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. 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.'

6. 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.

7. 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 whilst ensuring that they are not exposed to unnecessary risk. In making these judgements, industry standards such as EN 1176 offer benchmarks that can help.

8. 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

9. 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'.

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

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

12. 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

13. To help with controlling risks sensibly and proportionately, the play sector has produced the publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* which provides guidance on managing the risks in play. 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.'

14. 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.

15. 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.

Appendix 2: Playwork Principles

