

THE HESSLE ACADEMY

Primary Phase – Penshurst Primary School



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Outdoor Play And Learning (OPAL) Policy

Effective Date: July 2026

Date of minuted approval by the Local Governing Board: July 2026

Review Committee: LGB

Review Date: July 2028

Owner: Headteacher

Rationale

Children today face limited opportunities for free, outdoor play - something that previous generations enjoyed far more. Play is a central part of childhood. It is a self-chosen activity that brings joy and satisfaction, and supports emotional, physical, social, and intellectual growth.

At Penshurst, we are committed to embedding play as a core part of the school day.

With outdoor play accounting for around 20% of children's time in school, we believe it deserves the same level of planning and investment as any curriculum subject.

Our approach reflects our commitment to **Work Hard, Be Kind and Dream Big**, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to develop holistically, flourish through play, and build the skills they need for a happy and successful future.

The OPAL programme's philosophy supports our belief that high-quality, creative, and active play improves children's health, happiness, and readiness to learn. Through play, children learn to take ownership of their environment and their choices, developing independence, perseverance, and a positive attitude towards challenges. These experiences encourage children to **Work Hard**, embracing opportunities to learn, practise new skills, and overcome difficulties.

Our play spaces encourage cooperation, empathy, and kindness, teaching children to support one another, resolve conflicts, and include others. Through these everyday interactions, children learn the importance of **Being Kind**, showing care and consideration for their friends, celebrating differences, and building positive relationships. Kindness is at the heart of our play provision and is reflected in the way children and adults work together as a community.

At Penshurst Primary, we have developed a play curriculum that encourages children to **Dream Big** by exploring their imaginations, pursuing their interests, and discovering what they are capable of achieving. Whether building dens, solving problems, or inventing new games, children develop creativity, curiosity, and confidence. Play empowers them to set their own goals, think independently, and believe in their potential.

Our staff and Play Makers are dedicated to modelling these values and enabling children to demonstrate them through self-directed exploration. Every playtime is an opportunity to practise **working hard, being kind and dreaming big**. Through purposeful, engaging, and inclusive play, we are creating a school environment where children can thrive, develop lifelong skills, and live out the values that make Penshurst a community built on ambition, effort, and care.

Benefits of play include:

- Fostering imagination, creativity, and independence
- Supporting physical activity and health
- Teaching risk assessment and management
- Encouraging emotional resilience and wellbeing
- Building community awareness and empathy
- Supporting identity development and self-worth
- Nurturing friendships and social skills

Our Vision for Play

At Penshurst, we want children to experience the freedom of play in an environment that encourages them to assess and manage risk, be creative, and develop their own ideas. We provide varied play spaces that include physical, imaginative, and exploratory opportunities to meet a wide range of needs and interests.

Aims of our Play Provision

We aim to:

- Provide safe yet challenging environments
- Promote calculated risk-taking and decision-making
- Encourage social development and mutual respect
- Develop emotional and physical resilience
- Inspire creativity and imaginative thinking
- Support curricular and wider learning
- Build independence and teamwork

Rights and Responsibilities

We are committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly:

- **Article 31:** The right to play, rest, and recreation
- **Article 12:** The right to be listened to
We will actively seek children's input on the types of play and environments they want, and ensure that their voices shape our provision.

Risk and Challenge

Following guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and Play Safety Forum, we take a balanced approach to risk. Our aim is to support healthy risk-taking and allow children to explore boundaries safely.

We use both structured and dynamic risk assessments, and all staff are trained in applying risk-benefit analysis during play.

Supervision Models

We follow OPAL's supervision principles:

- **Remote Supervision:** Supervisors monitor from a distance to allow freedom while remaining available for incidents.
- **Ranging Supervision:** Staff move through zones to maintain awareness and assist as needed.

Reception children will initially receive closer supervision to assess their needs and orient them to the space.

Children may use OPAL resources during supervised school sessions. Following handover at the end of the school day, parents/carers are responsible for supervising their children, subject to the school's site access and use arrangements.

Parental Considerations

We acknowledge that outdoor play, especially in all weathers, may increase laundry and clothing needs. We encourage parents to send waterproof coats and optional outdoor gear (wellies, spare trousers) to help children enjoy the outdoors fully.

Inclusion and Equity

We ensure our play provision is inclusive, reflecting the diverse needs, backgrounds, and abilities of all children. Play at Penshurst is a space for everyone to feel welcome and supported.