



East Bergholt
CEVC Primary School

'I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full' John 10:10

East Bergholt CEVC Primary School

Play Policy

2026-2027

Prepared by:	Clare Sampson Headteacher
Approved by:	Full Governing Body
Signature of Chair of Governors:	Chris Burns
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1. Commitment

East Bergholt CEVC Primary School undertakes to refer to this Play Policy in decisions that affect children's play. We are committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to develop, provide and maintain high-quality play provision for all children.

Our approach to play reflects our Christian vision: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10). We want children to experience joyful, purposeful and inclusive play that enables them to flourish.

2. Rationale

East Bergholt CEVC Primary School believes that all children need opportunities to play that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and influence their environment. Play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, regardless of background, circumstance or individual need.

We are developing our play provision through the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Primary Programme. Our aim is to create richer, more active and more creative playtimes that contribute positively to children's health, happiness, relationships, behaviour and readiness to learn.

3. Definition and value of play

Play is a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. It has value and purpose in its own right and may or may not involve equipment or other people.

- Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing and supports physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- Play enables children to explore the physical and social environment and to investigate ideas and possibilities.
- Play supports self-esteem and understanding of others through freely chosen social interaction with children of different ages, abilities, interests and backgrounds.
- Play develops communication and negotiation, helping children balance their own freedom with responsibility towards others.
- Play enables children to experience and manage a wide range of emotions, including frustration, achievement, uncertainty, excitement and confidence.
- Play encourages independence, creativity, problem-solving, decision-making and resilience.
- Play keeps children open to learning and enables them to test and extend what they can do.

Our play provision also supports our school rules: Be Safe, Be Kind and Be Respectful.

4. Aims

In relation to play, East Bergholt CEVC Primary School aims to:

- provide varied, challenging and stimulating play environments;
- enable children to experience appropriate risk and challenge, using a balanced risk-benefit approach;

- provide opportunities for children to develop positive relationships with one another;
- enable children to show respect for themselves, others, equipment and the environment;
- support children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development;
- provide environments that encourage exploration, imagination, creativity and curiosity;
- promote independence, cooperation and teamwork;
- build emotional and physical resilience;
- ensure that play is inclusive and that every child can participate meaningfully;
- listen to children and involve them in the continuing development of play.

5. Rights

East Bergholt CEVC Primary School recognises the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Article 31, which recognises the child's right to rest, leisure and play, and Article 12, which recognises children's right to express their views in matters affecting them. We will take these rights seriously and listen to children's views about their play.

6. Benefit and risk

The school recognises that risk-taking is an important feature of play and of children's development. Our aim is not to remove all risk, but to manage the balance between providing challenge and protecting children from unacceptable harm.

We will use a risk-benefit approach to play, informed by the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on children's play and leisure and by established play-sector guidance. Children will be supported to notice, assess and manage appropriate risks for themselves, with adults using professional judgement and dynamic risk management.

This approach links directly to our school rules. Children are supported to Be Safe by making thoughtful choices and learning to manage appropriate challenge; to Be Kind by considering how their play affects others; and to Be Respectful by caring for people, resources and the environment.

7. Supervision

Children will be appropriately supervised during playtimes. The level and style of supervision will take account of children's age, needs, the environment and the nature of the play taking place.

Adults will position themselves so that children can access support when needed while still having the freedom and independence required for self-directed play. Children who require additional support will be supervised in accordance with their individual plans and identified needs.

8. The adult's role in play

The school will support children to gain the greatest possible benefit from play by developing staff knowledge and practice in line with the Playwork Principles. The adult's role is to help create and

maintain an environment that stimulates self-directed play, rather than unnecessarily directing or controlling children's play.

- protect children's time and opportunity to play;
- provide and maintain a rich range of play resources and environments;
- support children to manage appropriate risks rather than automatically saying 'no' to play that looks difficult, messy or challenging;
- listen to children's ideas and involve them in developing play opportunities;
- intervene when necessary for safety, safeguarding, inclusion or the rights of others, while avoiding unnecessary interruption of play;
- model our school rules of Be Safe, Be Kind and Be Respectful.

9. Equality, diversity and inclusion

We are committed to providing a rich and inclusive play offer in which every child can participate, belong and thrive. We will consider children's differing ages, abilities, disabilities, communication needs, sensory needs, interests, backgrounds and experiences when developing play provision.

Reasonable adjustments and appropriate support will be used where needed so that barriers to play are reduced and children can access meaningful play opportunities alongside their peers.

10. Environment and resources

We will continue to develop the quality and diversity of our school grounds so that children have access to stimulating environments for freely chosen play. As our OPAL journey develops, this may include a wider range of spaces, loose parts, creative and imaginative resources, opportunities for movement, quieter play and contact with natural materials.

Resources and spaces will be reviewed and maintained so that significant hazards are addressed without removing the challenge, experimentation and freedom that are important features of play.

11. Weather and clothing

We aim to enable outdoor play in a wide range of weather conditions where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Families will be encouraged to provide suitable clothing and footwear so that children can play comfortably throughout the year. Play arrangements may be adapted when weather conditions create unacceptable risks.

12. Children's voice and participation

Children's views are central to the development of our play provision. We will create regular opportunities for children to share what is working well, suggest improvements, discuss new resources and spaces, and contribute to decisions about safe and respectful play.

13. Partnership with parents, carers and the community

We will keep parents and carers informed as our OPAL provision develops and will explain the principles behind our approach to play, including outdoor play, loose parts and risk-benefit assessment. We will also seek opportunities for families and the wider community to contribute ideas, resources and support.

14. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher and OPAL working group will monitor the implementation and development of this policy. The governing body will receive appropriate updates on the school's OPAL journey and play provision. This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if there are significant changes to guidance, practice or provision.

Appendix A - HSE approach to managing risk in play

The school's approach is informed by the Health and Safety Executive's position that play is important for children's wellbeing and development and that the goal in planning play opportunities is not to eliminate all risk, but to weigh risks against benefits. Risk management should focus on real and significant risks while preserving the developmental benefits of challenge and exploration.

The school will therefore use proportionate risk-benefit assessment and dynamic risk management, recognising that appropriate challenge is part of good play provision.

Appendix B - Playwork Principles

Our play practice is informed by the Playwork Principles. In summary, these recognise children's need and capacity for freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated play; place the play process at the centre of adult practice; and require adults to support, advocate for and reflect on play while choosing interventions carefully.

- Understand children's need to play.
- Understand play as freely chosen and personally directed.
- Support and facilitate the play process.
- Advocate for play.
- Create and maintain spaces that support play.
- Learn from and reflect on children's play.
- Recognise the adult's impact on the play space and play process.
- Choose intervention styles carefully, balancing risk with children's development, wellbeing and freedom to play.