

# Play Policy

## Bushmead Primary School

### March 2026



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## **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.’**

Bushmead Primary 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. 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. These skills link closely to our THRIVE values of working together as a community, a growth mindset, aspiration, inspiration, achievement and a pride in our environment.

## **2. Rationale**

Children spend up to 20% or 1.4 years of their time in primary 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.

## **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).

#### **At Bushmead we think that:**

- play allows children to be creative and co-operative
- adults’ roles in great play is to be responsive to children’s invitations and requests, and 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 anything they choose from the playground resources and 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. Roles and responsibilities**

### **4.1 The head teacher**

The head teacher will:

- Work with staff, parents and governors to determine the strategic development of the policy and provision in the school.
- Have overall responsibility for the provision and progress of learners with SEND and/or a disability.

### **4.2 The Governor/s**

They will:

- Work with the head teacher to determine the strategic development of the policy and provision in the school.

The Governing Body will review this policy in line with the Policy review schedule at the FGB committee meetings

**Bushmead 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.**

Bushmead staff will 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](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Bushmead. In addition to this the Bushmead Play Project Team will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, lunchtime assistants 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.

#### **4.3 Children’s Role in Play**

The children will all have access to their own version of the play policy. (Appendix1) 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.

### **5.Environment**

At Bushmead 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 be an integrated area where all children from nursery to

Year 6 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.

## 6. 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)*

At Bushmead we are committed to providing these experiences for our children in a managed way.

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.

## 7. Monitoring arrangements

This policy and information report will be reviewed by the play lead annually. It will also be updated if any changes to the information are made during the year.

It will be approved by the governing board.

<b>Version:</b>	5	
<b>Written by:</b>	S Down	<b>Date:</b> 26.02.26
<b>Last reviewed by governors:</b>	Spring 2 202	
<b>Next review due by:</b>	Spring 2 2026 and when new equipment is added/needed.	

## Appendix 1

### 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 play maker about the risks we are taking if they ask us too.

## **Appendix 2**

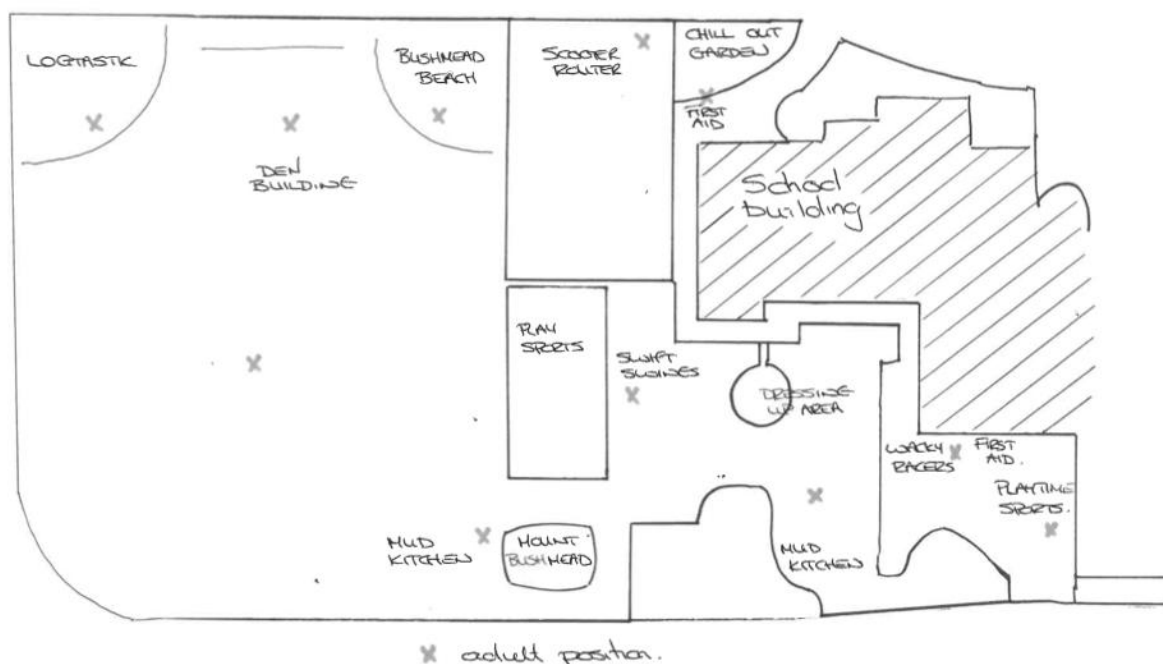
### **Benefit-Risk Assessment Record Sheet**

**Please see separate risk assessment document.**

## Appendix 3

### Supervision responsibilities

The areas identified on the below map show the key zones within the Bushmead OPAL environment. Supervision stations are marked with an 'X'. All zones are to be supervised in order for them to be open. All zones have a clear open and closed marker which children will be aware of. Adults are to mark the zones open or closed as appropriate when they arrive or leave.



All staff are to adhere to the following guidelines when on duty at play and lunch times.

1. No children are to enter the playground unless supervised by an adult
2. Zones to be opened as an adult arrives in the zone
3. Adults to remain vigilant in the zone they are supervising reinforcing the risk assessment process to children throughout their play e.g. "is that safe", "it's not safe enough for the adults yet, how can we make it safer"
4. Scooters are to remain specifically within the scooter zone and walked if they are taken anywhere outside this area.
5. All zones are to be marked as closed unless an adult is present. If an adult needs to leave temporarily then they must be covered by another adult or the zone is to be closed.
6. Zone title boards have a clear area for children to write the games, activities, role play ideas they are currently engaged in so as to share ideas with other children. Adults to encourage this sharing of ideas.
7. Adults to report "near misses" to the lead lunchtime supervisors
8. Whistle to be blown 5 minutes before the end of play or lunch break to enable children to clear up the zone
9. Equipment to be left out neatly at the end of break time ready for lunchtime

10. Identified group of children to have a timetabled session to complete the clearing up process at the end of lunchtime. This could be timetabled for children accessing alternative provision.
11. At the end of breaktime the following needs to be completed
  - a. All shed equipment to be returned to the correct shed or neatly stacked in front eg. Scooter in the rack, sandpit tools to be brought to the front of the pit, clothes to be returned to the shed
  - b. Table football / table tennis equipment to be returned to the relevant box
12. At the end of lunchtime the following needs to be completed
  - a. All shed equipment to be returned to the correct shed. eg buckets and spades, scooters, dressing up clothes.
  - b. Sand pit net to be put across whole area
  - c. Table football / table tennis tables to be securely covered up with bungie ropes and equipment to be returned to the relevant box
  - d. General tidy up of playground and activity areas.