

# Witton Gilbert Primary School



## Outdoor Play and Learning Policy

<b>Policy Agreed</b>	May 2022
<b>Review Due</b>	May 2023
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Paula Nelson
<b>Chair of Governors</b>	Mrs Michelle Harrison

# **Contents**

<b>1. Commitment</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Rationale</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Definition of Play</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. Risk and Benefit</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Adults' Role in Play</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6. Children's Role in Play</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>7. Environment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>8. Links with other policies</b>	
<b>Appendix 1: WGPS Ethos and Values</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Appendix 2: HSE Guidance</b>	<b>8-10</b>
<b>Appendix 3: WGPS OPAL Risk assessment</b>	<b>11-?</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Play Team Structure Map</b>	<b>?</b>
<b>Appendix 5: WGPS Pupil Play Policy and Play team posters</b>	<b>?</b>

## **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.’**

Within our Witton Gilbert Primary School ethos and values, we recognise that play is an essential part of a happy and healthy childhood (See Appendix 1). 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 Witton Gilbert 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. These skills link closely to those of our behaviour policy and the directives that are promoted in all of our learning environments

## **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 feeling positive 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.

When reviewing Parent and Pupil voice with respect to the previous two years, most pupils and parents were positive about the outdoor environment but some of the feedback included comments like; *‘because we only had our class equipment and zone we could not choose what to play as often,’ ‘it’s harder to share now as people are used to having their own class kit and now we have to make sure the little ones can have a turn too,’ ‘there was not enough to do in bubble playtime when I was on the yard’, ‘we need more things to play with’, ‘my child misses playing in the mud kitchen and with the dress-up things’ and ‘there is mainly sports equipment and my child isn’t as sporty’.* These comments by children highlighted the need to re-establish our previously extensive range of play resources and opportunities at Witton Gilbert Primary School now that pupils can safely mix and re-learn how to share 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).

At Witton Gilbert the children and staff think that:

- play should allow children to be creative and co-operative
- appropriate play may be solitary or social; both offer learning and can be enjoyable for the individual
- play can offer investigation and exploration opportunities which may test boundaries

- play makes children happy; happy children are healthier children which can be beneficial to their school attendance and therefore enable learning
- children have a right to play with anything they choose from the playground resources and as long as it is safe to do so; this is regardless of age, gender, social or cultural background
- play is something you choose to do and that it should be fun!
- a wide range of play opportunities enables children to better process their experiences of the world
- the adult role in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests; to carry out dynamic risk assessments to weigh up the risk and benefits of play activities and to develop the children's risk awareness.

#### **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)*

At Witton Gilbert 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)**

Witton Gilbert will use the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on Managing Risk in Play and Leisure ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) (Appendix 2) 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. The children need to learn the life skill of managing 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. To do this we will adopt a risk-benefit approach and use dynamic risk assessments (Appendix 3) to manage our duty of care to protect and provide for children's needs.

#### **5. Adults' Role in Play**

We, as a school community, 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 platforms.

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](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)) and OASES (<https://oasesnortheast.org.uk/>) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Witton Gilbert. In addition to this the Witton Gilbert Play Team (Appendix 4) will work in collaboration with all school stakeholders – including the pupils - to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. The Play Team staff will be the Play Makers during lunchtimes, supporting and enabling play opportunities for all. They will ensure that the broadest possible range of play opportunities are available on a daily basis for the children; they will observe, reflect upon and analyse the play that is happening and select a mode of intervention or work with the Play Leader and Senior Leadership Team 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 5). This has been written with the pupil representatives on the School Council and is based around the school values and includes the play rules of 'Ready, Responsible, Safe' as core guidance. It also addresses 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 the School Council.

## **7. Environment**

At Witton Gilbert 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 Reception 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.

## **Appendix 1**

### **WGPS Ethos & Values**

*Documents from the school website: <https://www.wittongilbert.durham.sch.uk/our-school/ethos-values/>*

#### **Ethos**

At Witton Gilbert Primary School, we are committed to providing a caring, inclusive and safe environment for all our children so they can learn and thrive. We are proud of the positive, purposeful atmosphere in school, which is often commented on by visitors in school. We are committed to high quality teaching and learning, as well as providing a wide range of rich opportunities to support children's personal, social and academic development.

Our school culture is built on mutual respect and an understanding of the needs of others. Our focus on respectful relationships permeates all areas of school and can be seen in the interactions between children and adults. Adults in school will always take the time to listen to the ideas and opinions of children and there are many ways that children contribute to the life of the school; through for example, School Council, Eco Group or SNAG group.

We have a strong 'play' ethos during lunch and break times, as we recognise that the skills children learn through quality play are not just invaluable but also crucial to their whole development. Children collaborate, negotiate, solve problems and show resilience – all of which are transferable into a classroom situation and are important life skills. During play, children increase their social competence and emotional maturity. As such, we place high value on the opportunities children have to engage with play and the outdoors.

#### **Values**

- **Childhood and Play**

We value childhood and the importance of play. The following definition of childhood from Unicef.org encompasses our beliefs about the importance of nurturing each child in a safe and secure environment. Childhood is the time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and an extended community of caring adults. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. As such, childhood means much more than just the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of a child's life, to the quality of those years.' Our approach to play is embedded through OPAL and is well established, to ensure children have daily opportunities to engage with nature and quality play.

- **Respect for each other and our environment**

Respectful relationships are promoted in all areas of school life and with all members of our school community. Good manners and polite, respectful behaviour is celebrated. We value kindness and friendship which is demonstrated by both children and adults. We seek to develop respect for our environment through our bespoke curriculum and planned activities. Children are encouraged to value and care for the world around them.

- **Equality and Diversity**

At Witton Gilbert, we ensure that everyone is treated fairly and respectfully, whilst recognising that people have different needs; understanding that treating people equally does not always involve treating them the same. For example, we may make adjustments for individuals to ensure equal access to opportunities and experiences. We challenge prejudice and promote understanding in relation to people with disabilities and those of differing races, beliefs or religions, sexual orientation or gender. We seek to promote respect and tolerance for difference and value diversity.

- **Perseverance and Resilience**

We adopt a 'growth mindset' approach to school life, supporting children to understand that it's important to work hard, persevere and demonstrate resilience to overcome problems. This can be classroom based, where children may go into the 'Learning Pit' and develop strategies to solve the problem. It can also be seen during outdoor play, where children assess risk, trial ideas and work together to create play environments and games. Children need to understand the importance of failure and the ability to learn from this, which can help to develop their resilience in a wide range of situations. This in turn, encourages children to develop creativity and curiosity.

- **Collaboration and Co-operation**

There are many opportunities throughout the school day to co-operate and collaborate, in both formal and informal situations. Talk partners and group work are regular features of lessons, with children sharing ideas, listening to the views of others and working together towards a common goal.

We emphasise the importance of team work in the classroom, on the sports field and in play.

Our community links help us to further collaborate and increase skills, knowledge and opportunities.

## **Our Aims**

At Witton Gilbert Primary School, we aim to enable children to grow in confidence, curiosity and independence, with a positive mindset that enables them to try new things and reach for their goals.

### **We aim:**

- To provide the highest possible standard of education through a focus on developing basic skills and an inspiring broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to each individual.
- To encourage an understanding of and a respect for the rights of others.
- To develop an understanding of the world in which we live and respect for individuals, groups, cultures and nations.
- To promote and encourage healthy lifestyles, both physically and mentally, enabling individuals to make informed choices.
- To promote sustainability and demonstrate understanding and care for the environment.
- To develop co-operation, independence and resilience in order to provide children with the skills they need to live and work together, solve problems and be successful.
- To encourage pupils to become actively involved in their learning; taking initiatives, thinking creatively, solving problems and making decisions.
- To develop strong partnerships between home and school
- To provide quality opportunities for play so that children can learn



## 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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>The Courts have made clear that when health and safety law refers to 'risks', it is not contemplating risks that are trivial or fanciful. It is not the purpose to impose duties on employers that are wholly unreasonable (R v Chagot (2009) 2 All ER 680 [27])

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 bench marks 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<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup>Play providers include those managing or providing play facilities or activities in parks, green spaces, adventure playgrounds, holiday schemes, schools, youth clubs, family entertainment centres and childcare provision.

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.

**September 2012**

## Appendix 3 – WGPS OPAL Risk Assessment

### OPAL Risk Assessment – Witton Gilbert Primary School

The purpose of **Benefit-Risk Assessments** are to enable you to provide challenge, progression, excitement, creativity and fun in your play environment. They cannot and will not provide complete 'safety' and this is not their purpose. They can help you to think about, predict, and manage the most serious and most likely potential causes of harm. You will need two approaches to managing risk Standing Benefit-Risk Assessments and Dynamic Risk Management

**Standing Benefit-Risk Assessments** means you should, look at your usual environment and practices at least annually, and also when significant changes take place, keep a written record of the areas in the table below.

**Dynamic Risk Management** means that staff should be aware of changing nature of the play taking place. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action, if they think that risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. Actions taken by staff when required should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm with preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible, and empowering the children to manage future risk as much as possible.

Common areas that need standing assessment.

Boundaries to dangerous areas, trees management and tree climbing, fixed equipment and inspection, broken loose parts, rope tying especially at height, water use and water features.

Risk Assessment carried out by – P Nelson	Job title - Headteacher	Date of assessment – 3/9/2018
Review interval - Annually	Date reviews/updates carried out – September 2019, September 2020, September 2021	

<b>Staff covered by this assessment – All staff and pupils in playground</b>	<b>Activities involved – Outdoor Play and Learning</b>
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RISK RATING		Likelihood		
		Probable Occurs repeatedly, to be expected or could affect large number of people	Possible Could occur sometime or effect a few people	Remote Unlikely to occur or not many people to be affected
Impact	Major Major injury, permanent disability or ill-health	High	High	Medium
	Severe Injury requiring medical treatment	High	Medium	Low
	Minor First aid treatment	Medium	Low	Low

Please see Appendix 3 attachment on the website for the full risk assessment content.

## **Appendix 4 - 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 Witton Gilbert. It consists of:

The Head Teacher – Mrs P. Nelson  
Curricular Lead – Mrs K. Curry  
Play Coordinator – Mrs A. Hart  
Caretaker – Mr. G. Cummings  
School Council Pupil Voice Co-ordinator – Mrs J. Dubre  
OPAL Associate Governor –  
OPAL Parent Representatives -

### **Witton Gilbert 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:

#### **Curricular Lead**

(Leads and manages strategy)  
Mrs. P. Nelson / Mrs. K. Curry

#### **Play Coordinator/Leader**

(Leads and manages playtimes)  
Mrs A. Hart

#### **Assistant Play Leader**

(Supports play leader and steps up in their absence)  
Mr E. Graham – Sports Coach

#### **Play Makers**

(Support children's' play as describe in section 5)  
Mrs F Mudd - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs J Holmes - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs S Alvi - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs K Bell - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs D Walker - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs Gemma Scott - Supervisory Assistant  
Mrs Rachel McNeill - Supervisory Assistant  
Miss Jade Taylor - Supervisory Assistant

#### **Junior Play Makers**

Democratically voted KS2 pupils - as suggested during the Pupil View consultation  
*Pupils subject to change due to time in office and not named in policy for GDPR reasons.*

## Witton Gilbert Primary School – Pupil Play Policy

When we play, we will be **READY**, **RESPECTFUL** and **SAFE!**

**READY** – right clothing, right space, right people to play with.

**RESPECTFUL** – of the equipment, the environment and throughout our talk and play.

**SAFE** - have we checked the risks and are they okay today?



Remember:

We all have the right to have fun at playtimes.

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

We all have the right to make our own decisions about our play and choose what we do.

We also have the responsibility to make sure our decisions don't affect others in a negative way.

We all have the right to choose who we play with.

We also have the responsibility that no one is left out of play or forced to do something they don't want to.

We all have the right play with lots of different toys and have a well looked after environment.

We also have the responsibility to take pride in, respect and look after our environment and toys.

We all have the right to explore be creative and take thoughtful risks.

We also 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 to.



# WGPS School Play Team



The people who help us to be

**READY, RESPECTFUL and SAFE**

	<b>Play Leader</b> Mrs Hart			<b>Sports Coach</b> Mr Graham	
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## Play Makers

Mrs Mudd	Mrs Holmes	Mrs <del>Ami</del>	Mrs Bell
Mrs Walker	Mrs Scott	Mrs McNeill	Miss Taylor

## Junior Play Makers


*(Photographs of staff and voted pupils to be added into each box, then gridlines of tables to be hidden.)*