BURLINGTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

OPAL Play Policy

Written By	**Senior Staff, Governors**
Frequency of Review	**Every 2 years**
Date reviewed and approved by Governing Body	**Autumn 2026**
Date of next review	**Autumn 2028**
Display on Website	**Yes**
Purpose	**We recognize that play is a vital part of a child's health, well-being and development.**
Consultation	**Governors** √
	Parents √
	Pupils x
	Staff √
Links with other policies/ documents	Pupil Safety Policy

Burlington Junior School Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Policy

1. Policy Statement & Vision

At Burlington Junior School we recognize that play is a vital part of a child's health, well-being and development. In line with Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this policy ensures that high-quality, free play is integrated into our school day.

Our junior school accommodates children aged 7–11 from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This policy aims to build an outdoor environment where all children—regardless of age, language, or culture—can collaborate, take managed risks, and feel a deep sense of belonging through the universal language of play.

2. Scope and Rationale

This policy applies to all children, staff, volunteers, and visitors during play times, lunchtime breaks, and wrap-around care.

High-quality play contributes to:

- Physical Health: Building gross motor skills, stamina, and agility.
- Social Cohesion: Bypassing language barriers through cooperative tasks, reducing isolation for English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils.
- Emotional Resilience: Learning to manage risk, resolve conflicts independently, and build self-regulation.

3. The Play Environment & Loose Parts

To support open-ended, inclusive play, the school grounds will be managed as a dynamic, resource-rich environment.

- Loose Parts: The school will provide high quantities of non-prescriptive, movable materials (e.g., tyres, crates, pipes, cardboard, fabric, wooden planks).
- Zoning: The outdoor area will be zoned into distinct spaces (e.g., active building, quiet/reflective, performance, mud kitchen, sports) to accommodate different sensory needs and play styles.
- Access to All Areas: Children will have access to the full school site (grass, tarmac, woodland) throughout the year, rather than being restricted by year group or weather conditions. The school starts the year by having a space for Y3 children to build their independence before this area is used for all children in wheeled play particularly.

4. Risk-Benefit Management

Our school adopts a Risk-Benefit Assessment approach, moving away from a culture of absolute risk elimination to one of risk management.

- Healthy Risk-Taking: Children aged 7–11 require physical and emotional challenges (e.g., tree climbing, loose-parts construction, rough-and-tumble play). Staff will evaluate the *benefits* of an activity against the *real hazards* before intervening.

- Dynamic Risk Assessments: The Play Coordinator and OPAL teams will inspect the grounds weekly to complete their check on the different OPAL areas. The site manager will also complete their normal daily checks. All staff are responsible for identifying and removing any immediate hazards (e.g., broken glass, sharp nails) while manageable risks (e.g., a slippery log) will monitored but be left for children to navigate.

5. Adult Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Core Responsibility under OPAL
Headteacher & Governors	Ensure adequate budget for play resources, maintenance, and ongoing staff training.
Play Coordinator (Lead)	Oversee the play environment, audit loose parts, and update risk-benefit documentation.
Teaching & Support Staff	Protect play times from being cut short whilst understanding that there may be a need to complete work or reflect on behaviours which have hurt other emotionally or physically.
Lunchtime Play Teams (SMSAs)	Shift from "policing" behaviour to facilitating play. Facilitators observe closely, intervene only when safety or consent is breached, and actively support children in resolving conflicts themselves.

6. Clothing, Weather, and Community Partnership

- The "All-Weather" Rule: Play takes place outdoors in rain, snow, or sunshine. Parents are expected to provide appropriate outdoor clothing (waterproof coats and wellies/trainers).
- Equity of Access: The school will maintain an open site in all weathers but allow periods of time to allow grass sowing/ growing or rewilding growth.
- Community Sourcing: The school will regularly host community donation drives, inviting families to contribute clean scrap materials, pallets, or household items that enrich our loose-parts stock.

7. Implementation, Monitoring, and Review

The Play Coordinator will report to the Governing Body via the Headteacher report or as a subject leader. This policy will be reviewed annually to incorporate behavioural data, pupil feedback via the School Council, and changes to the physical landscape.

Date Approved: September 2026
Next Review Date: September 2028