



St Julian's
Church School

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Play Policy

Reviewed: September 2026

Curriculum Leader for Play: Karen Parker

Play Coordinators: All staff

The school ensures it refers to the play policy in all decisions, which affect children's play, enabling everyone to experience play in a safe, fun and engaging environment.

Rationale

Article 31 of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** states that every child has the right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

At St Julian's Church School, we recognise that play is fundamental to every child's development, wellbeing and happiness. We are committed to providing high quality, inclusive and sustainable play opportunities that encourage children to explore, create, collaborate and take appropriate risks in a safe and stimulating environment. Our carefully designed outdoor spaces, equipment and resources provide a rich variety of play experiences that are accessible to all children. Guided by our vision, **Aim High - Believe - Succeed**, we value play as an essential part of school life, helping children to develop independence, confidence, creativity, resilience and strong social skills. These qualities reflect our core values of **Respect, Kindness, Joy, Creativity, Aspiration and Resilience**, supporting children to flourish both in and beyond the classroom.

Children spend up to 20% of their school day playing. This is valuable time that should be carefully planned to ensure every child benefits from high quality play opportunities. Modern lifestyles, including increased traffic, reduced access to outdoor spaces and fewer opportunities for independent play, mean that many children experience less play outside of school than previous generations. As a result, the opportunities we provide at school are more important than ever.

High quality play has a positive impact on children's wellbeing, behaviour and learning ([Chartered College of Teaching, UK](#)). It helps children build friendships, develop resilience, solve problems, communicate effectively and learn to manage risk in a safe environment. Rich play experiences also encourage creativity, imagination and independence, enabling children to return to the classroom ready to learn.

Research consistently shows that play is fundamental to children's development ([Chartered College of Teaching, UK](#)). It supports language and communication, social and emotional wellbeing, physical development and cognitive growth, while providing valuable opportunities for collaboration and critical thinking. These benefits are particularly significant for children learning English as an additional language and those with speech, language and communication needs. By providing a wide range of play experiences, we help every child develop the confidence, skills and

curiosity they need to thrive both in school and beyond.

Policy Aims

At St Julian's Church School, our aim is to ensure that all children have access to high quality play opportunities that support their happiness, wellbeing, development and learning.

Through our play provision, we aim to:

- Provide a safe, inclusive and stimulating environment where every child can enjoy meaningful play experiences.
- Recognise play as an essential part of childhood and an important contributor to children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Encourage children to develop independence, confidence, creativity, resilience and problem solving skills through exploration and discovery.
- Provide opportunities for children to collaborate, communicate and build positive relationships with others.
- Support children to understand and manage risk appropriately, developing confidence and decision making skills in a safe environment.
- Ensure that play opportunities are accessible and engaging for all children, regardless of age, ability or background.
- Promote our core values of Respect, Kindness, Joy, Creativity, Aspiration and Resilience through play.
- Provide a range of play experiences that encourage imagination, curiosity, physical activity and a lifelong love of learning.
- Ensure that our outdoor spaces, resources and adult support are thoughtfully planned to maximise the benefits of play for all children.

Definition of Play

The UK Government's National Play Strategy (2008) defines play as children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others.

The Benefits of Risk

At St Julian's Church School, we recognise that taking appropriate risks through play is an important part of children's development. We understand that a risk is not the same as a hazard: a hazard is something that could cause serious harm and must be addressed immediately, whereas a risk is a challenge or uncertainty that can be managed through careful planning and appropriate support.

When children are given opportunities to explore, experiment and challenge themselves within a safe and supportive environment, they develop greater confidence, independence and the ability to make informed decisions. These experiences help children to build resilience, solve problems and understand how to assess and manage risks for themselves.

Risky play helps children to develop important life skills, including problem solving, resilience, creativity, perseverance and self-awareness. Through a range of play experiences, including

climbing, balancing, exploring natural environments and trying new activities, children learn to assess situations, understand boundaries and manage challenges with increasing confidence.

We believe that avoiding all risks can limit children's opportunities to learn and grow. Instead, we aim to provide carefully considered play experiences where children can encounter manageable challenges, learn from mistakes and develop a healthy understanding of risk. Adults support children by encouraging thoughtful decision making, modelling safe behaviours and creating environments where children feel confident to explore.

See Appendix 2 for more information about managing the benefits of risk.

The Adults' Role

Adults at St Julian's Church School will:

- Create a safe, inclusive and stimulating environment where children feel confident to explore and play.
- Ensure a balance between providing support and allowing independence, enabling children to develop their own ideas, make choices and solve problems.
- Observe children's play, listen to their ideas and use these observations to enhance and extend play experiences.
- Encourage creativity, imagination, curiosity and exploration.
- Create inviting play opportunities that encourage children to explore, imagine, create and develop their own ideas through play.
- Support children in developing positive relationships, communication skills and the ability to cooperate with others.
- Help children to resolve conflicts, negotiate and develop empathy and respect for others.
- Support children to take appropriate risks by encouraging thoughtful decision making and helping them to understand how to assess and manage challenges safely.
- Provide guidance and encouragement when needed, while allowing children the freedom to lead their own play.
- Ensure all children can access and enjoy play opportunities, adapting environments and resources to meet individual needs.
- Teach children how to use equipment and resources responsibly, supporting them to maintain and improve the quality of their play spaces.
- Model positive behaviours, including kindness, respect, resilience and good communication, reflecting our school values.

The Children's Role

Children at St Julian's Church School will:

- Make the most of the opportunities available to them by engaging positively in play and exploring their own ideas.
- Use their imagination, creativity and curiosity to develop their own play experiences.
- Make choices, solve problems and take increasing responsibility for their own play.
- Take appropriate risks, challenge themselves and learn from their experiences, working with adults when necessary.
- Develop independence, confidence and resilience by trying new things and overcoming challenges.

- Show respect, kindness and consideration towards others, ensuring everyone feels included and valued.
- Work collaboratively with others, sharing ideas, negotiating and resolving disagreements positively.
- Care for the environment, equipment and resources used during play.
- Follow agreed expectations and boundaries to help keep themselves and others safe.
- Recognise and celebrate the achievements, ideas and contributions of others.

The Environment

At St Julian's Church School, we will:

- Provide an engaging, inclusive and stimulating outdoor environment that encourages children to explore, imagine, create and learn through play.
- Use our outdoor spaces and the natural environment as valuable resources for learning, encouraging children to appreciate and make creative use of natural and found materials.
- Involve children in the development and care of their play spaces, valuing their ideas and helping them to feel ownership and pride in their environment.
- Ensure that outdoor areas provide opportunities for all children to investigate, take appropriate risks, solve problems and develop their imagination and creativity.
- Create a range of play opportunities that support different types of play, including physical, imaginative, social, exploratory and reflective experiences.
- Provide children with increasing freedom to manage spaces, make choices and develop independence within a safe and supportive environment.
- Ensure that all areas are accessible and inclusive, enabling children from Reception to Year 6 to play.
- Encourage children to respect the outdoor environment, care for living things and understand their responsibility as stewards of the natural world.
- Continually review and enrich our environment to maximise play value and ensure that it continues to inspire curiosity, creativity and a love of outdoor learning.

See Appendix 1 for more information about the environment and their opportunities for play.

Appendix 1: Play Provision at St Julian's Church School

At St Julian's Church School, we are fortunate to have a range of indoor and outdoor spaces that provide rich opportunities for children to play. Our play provision is designed to support different types of play and to encourage children to develop confidence, creativity, independence and resilience.

Our play spaces include:

- **The Paddock** - our open grass-covered outdoor area provides opportunities for children to engage with the natural environment as well as a wide open space for larger play opportunities. This is where the tyres, crates and sandpit are located.
- **The Adventure Playground** - this area offers opportunities for physical challenge, imaginative play and appropriate risk taking, helping children to develop confidence and coordination. There is also a gardening plot available for children to explore.
- **The Mud Kitchen** - within the Adventure Playground, the mud kitchen provides children with the opportunity to engage with the natural environment as well as explore the resources in an imaginative and creative manner.
- **The Spiritual Garden** - this creates opportunities for children to care for living things, explore nature and develop an understanding of the environment. Our PTA runs a weekly gardening club to nurture this interest further.
- **The Outdoor Classroom** - within this area you will find loose parts and natural resources which allow children to use their imagination, problem solve and create their own play experiences. This area supports investigation, discovery and hands-on experiences that complement classroom learning.
- **The Playground** - this is where our Play Shed and sporting equipment is located, where children have access to a range of materials and resources that enhance their play opportunities.
- **Quiet and Reflective Spaces** - throughout the school site there are many small areas that provide opportunities for children to relax, talk, read and enjoy calmer moments during play. The children often create these areas on the playground using the den making equipment.
- **The EYFS and KS1 Outdoor Areas** - including our purpose-built canopy area with water features, mark-making opportunities, a mud kitchen and role-play spaces, enabling children to access high-quality outdoor learning throughout the year.

Across all areas of our school, we aim to provide a balance of play experiences, including:

- Physical play: supporting movement, coordination and confidence.
- Imaginative play: encouraging creativity, storytelling and role play.
- Exploratory play: allowing children to investigate, experiment and discover.
- Social play: helping children to develop friendships, communication skills and cooperation.
- Constructive play: encouraging children to design, build and solve problems.
- Risky play: supporting children to develop resilience, independence and an understanding of how to manage challenges safely.

We regularly review and develop our play provision to ensure that our environment continues to inspire children, reflect their interests and provide meaningful opportunities for play.

Appendix 2: Risk-Benefit Assessment Approach

At St Julian's Church School, we recognise that appropriate risk taking is an important part of children's development. Our approach is based on balancing the benefits of play experiences with the need to keep children safe.

We understand that:

- A hazard is something that could cause serious harm and requires immediate action to remove or reduce the danger.
- A risk is an element of uncertainty or challenge that can be managed and provides opportunities for children to learn, develop confidence and build resilience.

When planning and reviewing play opportunities, adults consider:

1. The potential benefits of the experience for children's learning, development and wellbeing.
2. Any possible risks and how these can be managed appropriately.
3. The age, ability and individual needs of the children involved.
4. How children can be supported to make safe choices and develop their own understanding of risk.
5. Whether adult involvement is needed to support, guide or intervene.
6. Whether the risk is directly addressed in a formal Risk Assessment plan.
7. Whether SLT or the Play Leaders should be informed.

Adults aim to avoid unnecessary restrictions that limit children's opportunities to explore and learn. Instead, they provide appropriate supervision, encouragement and guidance, enabling children to take manageable risks in a safe and supportive environment.

Our approach to risk reflects our school vision of **Aim High - Believe - Succeed** by encouraging children to challenge themselves, learn from experiences and grow into confident, capable learners.