



“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Plato

## **Spring Gardens Primary School**

### **Play Policy**

## **Introduction**

Spring Gardens Primary School recognises that play is an important part of a happy and healthy childhood and as a school we should provide high quality, sustainable play opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities. These inclusive opportunities in play are achieved by offering carefully considered outdoor spaces that offer a real choice of accessible play experiences.

## **Commitment**

At Spring Gardens we are committed to using 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 happiness and wellbeing. It creates children who are independent, confident, imaginative, adaptable, social and able to assess risks.

At Spring Gardens we aim to:

- Implement the changes set out in this policy gradually and systematically.
- Be informed by the children and work with the children to create a space that is exciting, engaging and enthuses children. They will feel safe to take risks and explore their world.
- To work in partnership with parents and the community making use of local expertise.
- Build projects collaboratively, respecting existing boundaries.
- Facilitate and encourage play.

## **Rationale**

Children spend up to 20% 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, less areas for play and awareness of risk have led to 'play poverty' for today's children. This makes their play opportunities at school even more vital.

Better play leads to happier children and in turn fewer behaviour problems, a more positive attitude to school, skills development, fewer accidents and more effective learning in the classroom as less staff time is spent resolving issues.

In addition to these reasons to prioritise play in school, 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.'

Play Scotland also drew up 'The Play Strategy for Scotland' (2013) which sets out a vision for play in Scotland and states that:

- Play should be a life-enhancing daily experience all our children can access.
- Play is essential to healthy development from birth to adulthood, contributing to capacity for learning, resilience and the development of physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills.
- Children must have access to play opportunities in a range of different settings which offer variety, adventure and challenge.
- They must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks and make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, ability and preference.

In addition to all the policy guidance on the importance of play, we also surveyed the children about their views on play time. Many were positive about the playground but some children's comments included; 'there is not enough to do', 'we need more things to play with', 'it needs more resources'. These comments by children highlight the need to improve our play resources and opportunities at Spring Gardens.

As a result of implementing this policy within school we believe that children will:

- be happier;
- increase self-awareness and self-esteem;
- improve language and communication skills;
- improve concentration;
- improve their imagination, independence and creativity;
- improve social skills;
- be resilient, confident, good problem solvers;
- be ready for anything as a result of negotiation and independence of thought;
- be better at problem solving;
- develop life skills; and

- improve physical development, co-ordination and fitness.

### **Definition**

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'.

When the children in Spring Gardens were asked to define play the main viewpoint was that play is something you choose to do and that it is fun!

At Spring Gardens we recognise that:

- great play allows children to be creative and co-operative;
- adults' roles in great play is to be responsive to children's invitations and requests;
- great play may be solitary or social;
- great play invites investigation; and
- great play makes children happy and happy children are better learners.

### **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. At Spring Gardens 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)

Our role as play providers is to facilitate opportunities for children to encounter and 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 to manage our duty of care to protect and our duty of care to provide for children's needs. Spring Gardens 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)) and 'The Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision' (Appendix 1) as its principle guiding documents in making decisions relating to risk and play.

### **Adults Role in Play**

We are committed to working with children to provide the play experiences that they want in their school. We will have a continuing dialogue with children about the play provision in the playground. 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 an outside agency called OPAL ([www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)) to help guide a strategic approach to developing play at Spring Gardens. In addition to this the Spring Gardens OPAL Team will work in collaboration with parents, teachers, teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors and the children to implement the changes highlighted in this policy. Staff 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.

Staff will ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way.

### **Environment**

At Spring Gardens we will:

- use the outdoor space as a natural resource for learning and playing
- include the children when planning for playing and learning outdoors
- ensure that the outdoor area offers children the opportunity to investigate and explore and use their imagination and creativity
- encourage 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

***NB:* Governors have adopted the following documents:**

- Charter for Children's Play
- HSE: Children's Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach