

The **GALLERY TRUST**



A community of special schools



Bloxham Grove
ACADEMY

Play Policy in conjunction with the Outdoor
Play and Learning (OPAL) initiative



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Introduction

Bloxham Grove Academy is a special academy for children and young people, up to the age of 18, with complex special educational needs and disabilities. All of our students are individuals and we pride ourselves on taking a personalised approach to their provision. Students have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and our area of expertise supports students with Moderate Cognition and Learning Difficulties, Autism and/or Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. All of our students have some form of cognition and learning needs.

Our students also have a wide range of secondary special educational needs including;

- Social Emotional and Mental Health needs
- Communication and Interaction needs
- Sensory and/or Physical needs

We are situated in Bloxham Village, approximately 3 miles outside Banbury and our vision is to support the needs of students who live in North Oxfordshire.

The Academy currently has 77 students on roll and we will gradually increase our student numbers over the coming years. When full, Bloxham Grove Academy will have approximately 120 students on roll between the ages of 7 to 18, with students in Key Stages 2, 3, 4 and 5.

All our students are encouraged to fulfil their academic potential through a creative and engaging curriculum. This ensures that all our students are encouraged, valued and respected.

We are a member of The Gallery Trust, a special multi-academy trust based in Oxfordshire. The Gallery Trust is dedicated to providing outstanding education and support for children and young people with SEND.

Commitment

Bloxham Grove Academy undertakes to refer to this play policy in all decisions that affect our students' play. Our school is committed to providing the strategic and operational leadership needed to provide and maintain quality play provision for all of our students.

Rationale

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) declared that the right to play was a critical human right. Specifically Article 31 states, '*every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.*'

Through questionnaires with staff, parents and children we recognise that there are barriers to play, including traffic, crime, time spent on screens and indoors, social segregation and the busy, structured lives of children and parents. We recognise that children's opportunities to play have greatly reduced, contributing to unhealthy lifestyles and an increase in mental health problems.

Due to the nature of their SEND, our children will often have decisions made on their behalf; reducing decision-making, risk-taking and self advocacy opportunities. We seek to enhance the opportunities for student empowerment and recognise the importance of play times as a vehicle for our students to experience risk, challenge and decision making.

At Bloxham Grove Academy we recognise our responsibilities in offering our students maximum opportunities to play times that allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment. We believe play provision should be welcoming and accessible to every child, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin, or individual abilities.

The OPAL Programme rationale is that, *"... better, more active and creative play times can mean happier and healthier children, and having happier, healthier, more active children usually results in a more positive attitude to learning in school, with more effective classroom lessons, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary behavioural problems, fewer playtime accidents, happier staff and a healthier attitude to life."*

At school our students contribute to and learn about our six core values – kindness, respect, resilience, honesty, trust and welcoming so that they all feel safe and supported. We create a warm and nurturing environment that provides for the needs of everyone in our community. We value every child equally and welcome all, believing that everyone is capable of great things, when nurtured with learning and love.

Playtimes offer opportunities for the school community to demonstrate, understand and embed our school values across the whole school day, with children demonstrating the following values: welcoming, kindness, respect, trust, honesty and resilience.

The importance of play

Play is different from adult-led or sports-based activities. When they play, children follow their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way. Play is essential for happy, healthy, resilient and capable children.

Play is defined as a process that is intrinsically motivated, directed by the child and freely chosen by the child. Play has its own value and provides its own purpose. It may or may not involve equipment or other people.

We believe play has many benefits, including:

- bringing diverse people together
- improving the social and natural environment
- promoting health and wellbeing, and essential for their physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development
- opportunity to explore the physical and social environment, as well as different concepts and ideas
- enhancing self-esteem and their understanding of other through freely chosen social interactions, within peers groups, with individuals and within group of different ages, abilities, interests, genders, ethnicities and cultures
- ongoing communication and negotiation skills, enabling children to develop a balance between their right to act freely and their responsibilities to others
- chance to experience a wide range of emotions and develop their ability to cope with these, including sadness and happiness, rejection and acceptance, frustration and achievement, boredom and fascination, fear and confidence
- encouraging self-confidence and the ability to make choices, problem solve and to be creative
- maintaining children's openness to learning, develops their capabilities and allows them to push the boundaries of what they can achieve

Aims

Bloxham Grove Academy aims to:

- ensure play settings provide a varied, challenging and stimulating environment
- allow students to take risks and use a common-sense approach to the management of these risks and their benefits
- provide opportunities for students to develop and nurture their relationships with each other
- enable students to develop respect and kindness for their surroundings and each other
- aid student's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development.
- provide a range of environments that will encourage students to explore and play imaginatively
- provide a range of environments that will support student's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them
- promote independence and teamwork within students
- build emotional and physical resilience and perseverance
- create a greater empathy and respect for nature by offering nature-based play
- develop opportunities for peer mentoring and increased responsibility for our KS4 and KS5 students through the OPAL play worker training sessions

Benefit and risk

“Play is great for children’s wellbeing 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.” Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012).

Bloxham Grove Academy uses the Health and Safety Executive guidance document Children’s Play and Leisure – Promoting a Balanced Approach (September 2012) as the principal value statement informing its approach to managing risk in play. In doing so, Bloxham Grove Academy adopts a risk-benefit approach as detailed in Managing Risk in Play Provision: An Implementation Guide (Play Safety Forum, 2012). Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which students legitimately spend time at play.

Play provision aims to offer students the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and managed play environment. As outlined in the play sector publication, ‘Best Play’, play provision should aim to *‘manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm’*. *In addition to standard risk-benefit assessments the school will practise dynamic risk management with children, encouraging them to identify and manage risks in an environment where adults are present to support them.’*

Individual student’s risk assessments are also considered when supporting playtimes and appropriate staff are identified to support these students in ensuring that they engage safely whilst enjoying their free time and their positive interactions with their peers.

All students are present during assemblies that are linked to play. Resources that are initiated outside are talked about during play assemblies with risks and worries playing a key feature. Follow-up discussions take place in class groups and school council meetings.

Play assemblies are every half term as a minimum and the play co-ordinator supervises or manages these.

Health and safety

All activities, play areas and equipment are subject to standard checks on a daily and/or periodic basis. These checks are carried out as part of the Play Coordinator’s normal daily checks. Where equipment is found to be ‘not fit for play’ it will be taken from the playground space and recycled where possible. Risk-benefit assessments for areas, equipment and activities are held on file for inspection.

All new activities which involve potential significant risk will be subject to individual or generic assessment as part of the planning process. All previous assessments will be reviewed as and when appropriate.

All new equipment placed in the play spaces is introduced to the students in an assembly prior to them using it. The Play Coordinators are responsible for the site, equipment and resources in general, which are intended to be open access. They are also responsible for any activities which are directly led by the duty staff. It is the responsibility of all staff to work within agreed policy and procedures and to adhere to all control measures imposed as a result of assessments. It is the responsibility of the member of staff / Play Coordinator on duty to act upon any concerns and to ensure that any deficiencies are rectified immediately and to report to the Senior Staff member as soon as possible.

Roles and Responsibilities

Play at Bloxham Grove Academy needs to have leadership, both during the transition period of the OPAL programme and in the long term, otherwise the benefits of the programme will be lost.

At Bloxham Grove Academy the core of the working group will comprise the following members:

- **Leadership**, Lynne Smith , Deputy Head Teacher
- **Curricular Lead for Play**, Julie Atkinson, Class teacher and Learning Outside of the Classroom Lead
- **Play Coordinator/s**, Del Conroy-Smith, Pastoral Support Worker and Sapna Oram, Pastoral Support Worker
- **Play Governor**, Michael Punter, Parent Governor
- **Parent Play Champion**, TBC

These roles are essential in ensuring lasting change is made within the school, in addition to ensuring that safeguarding and wellbeing is continually monitored and evaluated. The working party attends 8 x yearly OPAL meetings and members are key in the decision making of the OPAL programme. In addition, the school council will also support the working party in the decision making process.

Supervision

The law requires that children in school have supervision and there is an increased staffing ratio at Bloxham Grove Academy in recognition of our students' SEND. Bloxham Grove Academy recognises OPAL's three models of supervision: **Direct, Remote** and **Ranging**. Whilst we do not believe that direct supervision is always possible or

beneficial, all staff undertake dynamic risk assessments to ensure that each child has a safe and secure environment in which to play.

All staff wear a green high visibility jacket to ensure that they are easily identifiable and accessible. Most staff use ranging and remote supervision models, so that they can patrol large sites to gain an awareness of the kinds of play and levels of risk likely to be emerging.

Where members of staff are assigned to support a specific student, we ensure that the adult is familiar with the student's Individual Risk Assessment of the student and is well known to them.

The adult's role in play - the playworker

Bloxham Grove Academy will help our students maximise the benefits they can gain from play by the provision of trained staff who are informed by and work in accordance with the Playwork Principles. Staff will use and refer to these principles when appropriate interventions are needed, and ultimately will strive for facilitating an environment that nurtures students' self-directed play. When outside our staff are known as playworkers and their core function is to create an environment that will stimulate student's play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences. A skilled and experienced OPAL trained playworker is capable of enriching the student's play experience both in terms of the design and resources of the physical environment and in terms of the attitudes and culture fostered within the play setting. Playworkers are a channel of access to new materials and tools and they can act as a stimulus to students to explore and learn. They are also available to participate in the play if invited.

Equality and diversity

Through providing a rich play offer and meeting every student's needs, we will ensure all students, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs, can develop and thrive, build strong relationships and enjoy school.

Environment

We believe that a rich play setting should ensure that all children have access to stimulating environments that are free from unacceptable or unnecessary risks and thereby offer children the opportunity to explore for themselves through their freely chosen play. We will strive to continually improve the quality and diversity of our school's grounds to enhance play. We will use the document 'Best Play' to guide us on what a quality play environment should contain. www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/bestplay.pdf