WHITCHURCH COMBINED SCHOOL

WOLF (Whitchurch Outdoor Learning Fun)

Outdoor Play Policy

Promoting independence, managed risk, inclusion and wellbeing

School	Whitchurch Combined School
Policy owner	V.Brown
Applies to	All pupils, staff, volunteers and visitors involved in outdoor play
Review cycle	Annually, or sooner where required
Date adopted / review date	To be reviewed September 2027

1. Policy statement

Whitchurch Combined School recognises outdoor play as an essential part of children's development, learning, health and wellbeing. We aim to provide an engaging, inclusive and varied outdoor environment where every child can play, explore, create, move, socialise and rest.

Our approach is informed by the principle that children benefit from having meaningful choices, opportunities to develop independence and agency, and the chance to experience manageable challenge within a safe and supportive environment. Safety is important, but it will be balanced with the developmental value of exploration, uncertainty, problem-solving and managed risk.

2. Aims and objectives

- Promote children's independence, decision-making and agency through genuine choices about how, where and with whom they play.
- Encourage managed risk and challenge so that children develop confidence, resilience, judgement and problem-solving skills.
- Provide a diverse range of outdoor play zones and resources that support physical, creative, imaginative, social and quiet play.
- Ensure all-round access so that every child can participate meaningfully, regardless of age, ability, need, confidence or circumstance.
- Foster inclusion, positive relationships, emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging.
- Support children to care for the outdoor environment, resources and one another.
- Ensure that staff supervise thoughtfully, intervene proportionately and use observations to improve the play offer.
- Develop a shared understanding among staff, children and families about the value and purpose of outdoor play.

3. Guiding principles

Principle	What this means in practice
Children are active participants	Children's ideas, preferences and feedback will inform the development of outdoor play.
Choice and agency	Children will be offered meaningful choices within clear boundaries and agreed expectations.
Safety with freedom	The school will manage hazards and foreseeable risks while avoiding unnecessary restrictions on worthwhile play.
Inclusive by design	Outdoor play areas, resources and routines will be planned to enable participation for all.
Play has many forms	Active, imaginative, social, exploratory, creative and restorative play are all valued.
Relationships matter	Adults will support respectful interactions, cooperation, negotiation and conflict resolution.
Wellbeing first	Children will have opportunities to move, connect, regulate emotions, find calm and enjoy being outdoors.

4. Independence and agency

Staff will support children to become increasingly independent and confident in managing their own play. This includes:

- Providing accessible resources that children can select, carry, combine, adapt and return independently where appropriate.
- Allowing children to decide between different play opportunities rather than directing all activity.
- Encouraging children to plan, organise and develop their own games, projects and imaginative scenarios.
- Supporting children to resolve minor disagreements through listening, negotiation and restorative conversations.
- Teaching children how to assess situations, recognise boundaries and make sensible decisions.
- Inviting children to contribute ideas for new resources, play zones and improvements.
- Using adult support as a scaffold: stepping in when needed, while avoiding unnecessary interruption or taking over.

5. Managed risk and challenge

The school recognises that appropriate risk and challenge are important for learning. Managed risk is not the same as exposing children to avoidable danger. Staff will distinguish between a worthwhile challenge that children can approach with support and a hazard that must be removed, controlled or clearly managed.

In practice, the school will:

- Use proportionate risk-benefit assessment when introducing activities, equipment or play opportunities.
- Consider the age, development, confidence, needs and experience of the children involved.
- Teach children to identify hazards, consider consequences and make safer choices.
- Allow appropriate opportunities for climbing, balancing, building, carrying, digging, den-making, running and physical exploration, subject to site-specific controls.
- Use clear boundaries and expectations without eliminating all uncertainty or challenge.

- Monitor changing conditions such as weather, surfaces, equipment condition, crowding and children's behaviour.
- Review incidents and near misses constructively to improve practice rather than automatically removing valuable play opportunities.

Examples of managed challenge may include:

- Balancing and navigating varied surfaces.
- Moving and transporting loose parts safely.
- Constructing dens, shelters or imaginative structures.
- Using natural materials for digging, sorting, collecting and creating.
- Trying new physical skills with appropriate space, supervision and encouragement.

6. Diversity of outdoor play zones

The school will aim to provide a varied outdoor environment rather than a single type of play space. Zones may be permanent or flexible and will be adapted according to the needs of the children, available space, weather and resources.

Play zone	Possible provision
Active and physical zone	Running, chasing games, ball games, movement, tyre chasing, agility and energetic play.
Creative and imaginative zone	Role play, storytelling, performance, music and open-ended creativity.
Engineering zone	Crates, planks, tyres, fabric, tubes and other suitable materials for building, balancing and problem-solving.
Nature and exploration zone	Plants, natural materials, minibeasts, digging, mud, and sensory exploration.
Quiet and restorative zone	Calm spaces for reading, talking, observing, resting or regulating emotions.
Social and cooperative zone	Group games, collaborative projects, turn-taking, communication and relationship-building such as giant Jenga, connect 4, outdoor bowling, snakes and ladders.
Sensory zone	Small-world play, tactile resources, sandpits, water and other appropriately supervised sensory experiences.

7. All-round access and inclusion

Outdoor play must be accessible and welcoming to all children. Inclusion means more than allowing children to be present: it means enabling meaningful participation, choice, enjoyment and belonging.

- Plan routes, surfaces, entrances and activity areas to support physical access wherever reasonably practicable.
- Provide adapted or alternative resources and ways to participate when required.
- Consider sensory needs, communication preferences, mobility, neurodiversity, medical needs and emotional regulation.
- Avoid assumptions about what a child can or cannot do; focus on removing barriers and offering appropriate support.
- Use visual prompts, clear language, modelling and predictable routines where helpful.
- Provide spaces for children who need reduced noise, lower stimulation or time away from busy play.

- Ensure games and activities can be modified so that children with different skills and confidence levels can join in.
- Challenge exclusionary language, discriminatory behaviour and unfair gatekeeping of resources or spaces.
- Work with families and relevant professionals when adjustments or individual plans are needed.

8. Wellbeing and positive relationships

- Create outdoor spaces that support enjoyment, connection, movement and emotional regulation.
- Encourage kindness, cooperation, empathy, fairness and respect for different play preferences.
- Recognise that children may need different levels of social interaction, challenge and quiet time.
- Support children to recognise and communicate feelings, ask for help and repair relationships.
- Ensure children have access to drinking water, appropriate clothing and protection from adverse weather conditions.
- Monitor signs of distress, fatigue, overheating, cold, sensory overload or unsafe behaviour.
- Use outdoor play as an opportunity to build confidence, resilience and a positive sense of self.

9. Supervision and the role of adults

Adults supervising outdoor play will:

- Position themselves to maintain effective oversight of the whole play area, while moving and interacting as needed.
- Observe before intervening, allowing children time to solve problems and develop their own play.
- Intervene promptly where there is a serious or immediate risk of harm, bullying, discrimination or unsafe conduct.
- Use calm, respectful language and explain the reasons for boundaries or changes.
- Encourage children to think through problems rather than providing immediate solutions.
- Know the school's first aid, safeguarding, behaviour, emergency and weather procedures.
- Check equipment and areas before use and report defects or hazards promptly.
- Record and communicate significant incidents, injuries, concerns and emerging patterns.

10. Environment, equipment and resources

- Outdoor areas and equipment will be checked regularly and maintained in line with school procedures.
- Resources will be suitable for the intended age range, activity and context.
- Loose parts will be selected, stored and monitored to reduce foreseeable hazards while preserving open-ended play value.
- Children will be taught how to use, move and store resources responsibly.
- The school will consider sustainability, reuse, repair and environmentally responsible choices.
- Weather and ground conditions will inform decisions about access, equipment and activity.

11. Expectations for children

Children will be supported to understand that outdoor play involves freedom alongside responsibility. They will be encouraged to:

- Respect people, boundaries, equipment, plants, animals and the environment.
- Make choices that consider their own safety and the safety of others.
- Use resources in agreed and imaginative ways without deliberately causing harm.
- Include others and seek adult help when a problem cannot be resolved safely.
- Look after equipment and help return resources to appropriate places.
- Speak up if they feel unsafe, excluded, worried or unable to join in.

12. Risk assessment and review

Risk assessments will be proportionate, activity-specific where necessary and reviewed following significant changes, incidents, near misses or concerns. The school will consider both risks and benefits, including the developmental value of challenge and independence.

- Identify hazards and who may be affected.
- Consider existing controls and whether additional measures are necessary.
- Ensure staff understand supervision arrangements and emergency procedures.
- Review arrangements for pupils with individual needs or specific risk considerations.
- Involve children's views where appropriate when reviewing play provision.
- Use evidence from observations, incidents, pupil voice and staff feedback to improve practice.

13. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Governing body	Provide oversight and ensure the policy supports the school's wider safeguarding, inclusion and wellbeing duties.
Headteacher / SLT	Implement the policy, allocate resources, ensure staff understanding and monitor its effectiveness.
Play leaders / supervising staff	Provide active, proportionate supervision; support inclusion, independence and managed risk; report concerns.
All staff and volunteers	Follow procedures, model respectful behaviour, identify hazards and promote children's agency.
Children	Make responsible choices, respect others and the environment, and seek help when needed.
Families	Support the school's approach, share relevant information and raise questions or concerns constructively.

14. Monitoring and evaluation

The impact of this policy will be reviewed through:

- Pupil voice and feedback.
- Staff observations and reflective discussions.
- Monitoring of participation, inclusion and access.
- Review of accidents, incidents and near misses.
- Feedback from families and relevant professionals.
- Regular checks of the variety, condition and accessibility of play zones and resources.

15. Related policies and documents

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid and Medical Needs Procedures
- Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Accessibility Plan
- Educational Visits / Outdoor Learning Risk Assessments
- Adverse Weather and Emergency Procedures

16. Policy review record

Review date	Reviewed by	Summary of changes	Next review

Approval: _____ **Date:** _____