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# State of Play Report #1

## June 2013

### Ascot Vale Primary School

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7 June, 2013

## State of Play Report No.1 Ascot Vale Primary School

### 1. Background

As part of its Creating Positive Playgrounds program, Play for Life visited Ascot Vale Primary School in 2013 to carry out a play analysis of the playground and create a "State of Play" report to school leadership and staff on how play is faring in the school. This report is a culmination or a 'snapshot' of various audits, interviews and observations that have been carried out over a number visits to the school.

### 2. Objectives

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The purpose of this report is to provide Ascot Vale Primary School with an overview of the current conditions that support children's ability to play within their school environment. The report aims to provide school staff with a clear understanding of the "state of play" and sets out a series of recommendations for play development in the future. For Ascot Vale Primary School to access the potential that play offers, that is, the benefits to both the individual child and to improving the overall school culture, a recognition and understanding of the broad and complex nature of play, and the conditions that best support play to happen and allow play to thrive is required.

### 3. Overview of Brief

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Ascot Vale Primary School is based in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. The school currently has an enrolment of 225 students with a fairly equal mixture of boys and girls. The majority of student intake are drawn from the local community and the immediate surrounding area of Ascot Vale. With the population of the school reflecting the demographic of the local community with a fairly large diversity in cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. 27% of the population at Ascot Vale Primary School has a non English language background.

Currently at Ascot Vale Primary School there are 28 staff employed, with 15 being full time teaching staff.

The school places strong value on the sense of community within the school and focuses on a multi-age educational



structure within the classrooms. Ascot Vale Primary School mission is for all students to experience success, develop confidence and self-esteem and achieve the highest possible learning and social outcomes.

Focussing on the playground, the school have two teachers on rota for yard duty for each day with each teacher responsible for supervising a particular area of the playground.

From analysing the responses of the Play for Life student survey responses, it is clear to see that the vast majority of students do not tend to worry about their playtimes. The students that did, had two predominant concerns. Firstly for their own safety and secondly feeling like they don't have any friends. The concerns are very similar to many other schools within Victoria, but it is positive that this is only a concern in a minority of children.

Some of the responses stated that children worried about getting hurt either through their own actions or actions of somebody else. Some children expressed concerns at being bullied or falling out with their friends.

When asked what would make playtimes better for children, the responses overwhelmingly indicated that playtimes would be more fun if they had longer to play, had the opportunity to play more sports or had more resources to play on (mainly fixed playground equipment).

## 4. Definitions and Terms

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There are a number of factors to consider when examining the current state of play within the school environment, as the conditions that support children's ability to play are often so wide-ranging. Therefore, Play for Life recognises that the provision of play requires an exploration of the school and the school day holistically, rather than focussing on the isolated provision of play in the singular environment of the playground or only at lunchtimes. However, as playing predominantly occurs within the non-directed periods of the day, recess and lunchtimes, this *State of Play Report* will naturally have more of an emphasis on these designated "play times".

### *Playtime*

The term *playtime* within this report focuses on all parts of the day that are non-directed, that is, have no structured or defined curriculum aims or outcomes.

### *Playground*



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The term *playground* refers to the whole physical environment, that is, the entire school grounds in which children play. This includes fixed play equipment, natural spaces, ovals and concrete spaces.

It is also important to note that nothing contained in this Report abrogates or excludes the school from complying with all Australian Playground Safety Standards or any other regulations put in place by the DEECD or any other regulatory body

## Key Play Considerations

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The State of Play Report is divided into three broad areas of focus that Play for Life believes form the overarching conditions that either support or restrict children's ability to play throughout the school day. All three focus areas contribute to supporting a positive playground, being the:

1. *space* that the children have to play in;
2. *attitude* of the school and school staff towards play, playtimes and play behaviours; and
3. *play behaviours* currently displayed by the children.

### # **Space**

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Although the playground at Ascot Vale Primary School is currently functioning as a playable space and contains a number of positive components providing children with the opportunity to play, it needs to continually develop to meet the various play needs of the students accessing it.

Ascot Vale Primary School playground is an adequate size space that contains a brilliant variety of different components that are considered vital in the make up of a rich play environment for children. The amount of space, just about supports the 225 children enrolled, but with some cheap and innovate introductions onto the playground the space would function on many diverse levels.

Ascot Vale Primary School playground contains some small amount of open spaces such as the synthetic multi use games pitch, the concrete yards on the right of the school and threaded throughout the playground and middle of the school buildings, the basketball court, the fixed equipment play areas and the grassed space at the far left of the playground.

These spaces are all brilliant for promoting children's movement and supporting children to be physically active. They have spaces to run, spaces to climb, spaces to skip, spaces to jump and spaces to play a variety of ball games such as football and basketball. However, only having a limited



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variety of both types of spaces often causes ball games to take over the playground at the detriment of other more subtle play types. This often causes a conflict of space between groups of children and can often causes injuries and incidents. This is something that can be modified within the confines of current space, if the Play Development Team felt this is something that is limiting children's play.

Another positive feature of the space is the large amount of corners and edges that the space contains. Corners and edges are a critical success factor to a space supporting the conditions for play to thrive in. Corners and edges can be found around the school buildings, around the fenced and walled perimeters of the playground, within the hedgerows and at the base of trees at far sides of the playground, around the bushes by the buildings and around the fixed equipment play areas. The corners and edges; are often where most of the play occurs on the playground due to fact that they provide children with adequate shelter from the weather, other more dominant play types and they promote feelings of comfort and protection all whilst still being visible to teachers on yard duty. These areas are where you will observe a number of the traditional playground games taking place and these spaces relate to the innate need for secluded sheltered space that allow children to carry out child-led, independent social interactions with their friends.

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The space contains a number of different surfaces that support different types of play to occur, within the school playgrounds, there is large amounts of grass, concrete, wood-chippings and sand. All contain different properties that support different games and types of play to occur.

Rather than just the corners and edges and the spaces for promoted action of the ball game space, the major positive about Ascot Vale Primary School is that it contains a number of different **spaces**. All of these different spaces are invaluable for supporting children's play. The playground contains playable spaces that are both affective and effective - meaning that the spaces have the potential to be good for playing in but also good for promoting different feelings and emotions whilst they do so.

To be effective and affective all these spaces need to feel and look different and children will naturally seek out these different spaces through play to meet their own play needs as an innate behaviour. Children will often naturally seek out spaces that are close to nature when they play due to their inherent propensity to learn, inquire and explore. Sometimes children will want spaces that allow them to escape and be away from it all. Or sometimes children will look to seek out small amounts of risk, that promote feelings of uncertainty and disequilibrium, such as climbing on the railings or the



trees alongside the back of the playground, which provides them with necessary height and feelings of uncertainty.

On the playground, children have places to hide, places of shelter, secretive spaces, spaces to run. They have spaces that are close to nature where children can interact with the changes in the seasons, weather and the elements, they have some secluded spaces where children can stimulate their senses. Many of the spaces such as the hedgerow behind the concrete yard and the grassed area just off the basketball court feel like playable spaces, they feel inviting and inspiring places where children are naturally drawn to because of the play they afford.

These rich natural areas that feel more secluded promote children to use their creativity and imagination to support their own play needs and you will observe a greater range of play types in these areas.

Like many schools across Victoria, a number of the spaces that are contained on Ascot Vale playground have been designed for pre-determined use. But due to the variety of spaces within the playground, there are still a large amount of spaces that are more open-ended and require children to use more of their imagination and creativity which provides a well balanced playground.

Another positive element of the playgrounds is that there does not appear to be any restrictions on where children can play, understandably some children have preferences on where they choose to play and some spaces suit the needs of different children that encompass ages, abilities and interests. But by allowing children the freedom of space it promotes a culture of children, especially younger children learning through playing with children of various age ranges. As Ascot Vale Primary School is more than aware with the implementation of the multi-age learning environments. Shared use of play spaces leads to increased feeling of well-being and positive peer attachments, from doing so. Which not only impacts on individual children, but on the school as a whole. Increased feelings of well-being and attachment throughout the school will dramatically result in less incidents and more children solving their own problems and resolving their own conflicts. A happier school leads to happier teachers and increased learning.

Additionally, the Play for Life Pod and the contents of loose parts allow the children freedom, choice and independence in their play. Through engaging with the loose parts they can demonstrate and access a wider variety of play types, thus transforming and adapting the current physical environment of the playground - such as attaching material to trees or the fixed playground equipment. Children can construct, demolish



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and enhance the playground in ways to meet their own play needs, therefore promoting and supporting their own well-being and development. The building blocks on the grass at the front of the school, also allow children to construct and adapt the space.

With the exception of the Play for Life Pod, there is a distinct lack of resources and smaller loose parts that would allow children to transform and enhance how children can use and interact with the rich physical environment of the playground. For example, none of the sandpits contain any pots or pans to transfer sand. There are no materials to promote dressing up or to create different effective and affective spaces such as cubbies to add this environment. The introduction of the Play for Life Pod will go some way in address this deficit. However, as mentioned within the student survey, some smaller loose parts that children can play with whilst sitting down would encourage more of a variety of play types to occur.

As previously mentioned, to maximise the value of the space, the playground could adopt a number of cheap and innovative suggestions that would improve the value of the space, with one suggestion being that children could have more opportunity and choice of resources to engage with different concepts such as identity. Using old clothes or different materials will provide children with a chance to explore their own and various other identities. Additionally using smaller loose parts that children can play whilst sitting down such as toy cars and building blocks will provide more engagement of various play types. The school could develop some of the school grounds to contain more playful landscapes, such as creating more natural areas. All of these suggestions and any future developments within the playground would obviously have to audit and observe the children's play behaviours currently as to not impact on types of play currently being displayed.

However, these are suggestions that would add to an already rich space. Whether it is the size of the playground or the attitude of the school leadership and staff towards play, the playground definitely promotes a nurturing sense of freedom and independence within playtime.

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### **Attitude of School**

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It is Play for Life's firm view that it is the attitude and value placed on play by the school often underpins the quality of spaces and dictates how children play within them. So by actually increasing the level of knowledge and understanding of children's play and its displayed behaviours through the school staff, will lead to greater tolerance and acceptance of certain behaviours that are displayed on the playground. Again resulting in increased well-being and the development of

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positive relationships through more understanding.

The length of time that Ascot Vale Primary School allocates for playtime provides a good indication as to the value and importance the school places on play. An hour and fifteen minutes playtime over two separate periods is an adequate amount of time for children to immerse themselves in a variety of play opportunities.

Ascot Vale Primary School clearly supports the holistic growth of the individual. From examining the responses to the Play for Life baseline survey, the teachers overwhelmingly responded that they recognised the value and importance of play not only as an aspect of the school day, but also within the overall lives of children. The majority of teachers believe that play is vital for learning, but many teachers also highlighted its critical role in well being, happiness and social competence. A few teachers stressed the importance of play being independently led, indicating a broad recognition of play and for its benefits.

The school currently does not have a play policy that outlines the importance and value the school places on play. However, the school pride themselves on the multi age learning communities which they create for students, which recognises that a great deal of children's learning occurs from their peers.

The attitude of the school staff during the facilitation of the playground appears to provide a certain sense of freedom and independence that is born out of nurturing values. The school staff clearly value the importance of play. A noticeable theme within the teacher survey was how much the teachers within Ascot Vale Primary School enjoyed playtimes - which is just fabulous! The enjoyment of the teachers on yard duty will definitely be something that the children notice, contributing to a happier playground. This feeling of enjoyment was further echoed whilst observing teachers fully immerse themselves in children's play when the Pod was first opened!

Similarly to many schools across Victoria the majority of responses for the least enjoyable aspect of playtime for teachers was managing conflicts and solving disputes. However, in contrast to many schools there is a sense that staff within Ascot Vale Primary School feel lucky that they only have a small number of incidents to deal with over playtimes.

It needs to be stressed that this is nothing to do with luck, but the fact that the school is facilitating a relatively rich play environment that fosters the sense of independence, freedom and enjoyment!!





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It is important that we recognise that children often fall out and bicker, children often fail to agree and argue; it is not a sign of unhappy relationships between children, but often a part of social development within a child's play experience. It is these moments of unpredictability that children have mild stress, and it is through this stress that children learn and develop skills to manage feelings and emotions - resilience! Therefore we need to as teachers spend time to read and interpret different behaviours and situations in order to allow children to develop skills to manage unpredictable situations. This is not just when dealing with arguments but also when observing risk taking behaviours or play types that make us feel uncomfortable.

If playing is what children choose to do then good play opportunities are central to children's positive perceptions, increased morale, increased motivation and overall connectedness and attachment to their school experience. Not forgetting that positive play experiences are also vital times for children's learning.

However, similarly to a number of schools across Victoria there did seem to be a level of risk aversion in the attitude that was held amongst a few staff members.

Understandably the reasoning behind this attitude is the fear of litigation that looms largely over the teacher's actions and interventions. However, the trend of closing down play behaviours and banning activities that we do not perceive to be positive is something that is very damaging to the students at Ascot Vale Primary School

The school staff where introduced to the approach of risk benefit assessments were if we judge a play opportunity to have a high level of value that it was to be allowed to continue, if the teachers felt comfortable. This attitude is something that I believe the school will keep promoting to develop a culture of play within the school

Furthermore, some of the responses in the surveys did indicate certain behaviours that were deemed unacceptable on the playground such as tiggy and rough and tumble play. Although an appreciation that both of these play opportunities can look boisterous and can sometimes cause accidents, we need to move away from blanket banning play behaviours and rather seek to assess each incident on its own merit more, as blanket banning leaves children with very little to do and causes feelings of frustrations.

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One of the most positive aspects of the schools attitude in supporting children's ability to play, is the connection with the local community. The professional development session had a number of parents involved which is a fabulous way to



increase the connection of what the Primary School are successfully achieving.

There is a perfect opportunity to build on this positive attitude towards play within Ascot Vale Primary School and the local community by really embedding a culture of play within the approach of the School. By forming a Play Development Team issues about how we are supporting and providing for play across all areas of the School can be discussed and examined, even thinking about maybe including members of the community within this team.

### **Play Behaviours**

The initial reaction to state of the playground at Ascot Vale Primary School was the busy and conflicting use of the environment - especially on the synthetic oval. However on closer observation it is clear that children have overcome and learnt to manage the domination of certain play types in certain spaces.

It is still apparent that individual spaces have developed prescribed and predetermined behaviours, which does take a certain amount of space away from other children. However, from observing the children playing at playtime it is very clear to see that the playground is a functioning space, children have adapted and there is a range of different play types occurring.

From various observations within Ascot Vale Primary School, numerous play types and behaviours have been demonstrated. After spending, even small amounts of time on the playground, it quickly becomes evident that all of the children are actively engaged or even totally immersed in playing. There are very few children who are isolated or aimlessly wandering for large periods of time. That is not to suggest that just on singular observations an isolated child is not immersed in play opportunities, but it is clear to see the engagement here.

The behaviour demonstrated by the children spontaneously and rapidly moves from one type of play to another is evidence, on a large scale that the school has successfully supported the conditions that allow play to thrive (space, time and attitude) and that children are regularly and consistently exposed to the relatively rich play environment with the permission to play and therefore are gaining quality experiences.

The most prominent play type evident on the playground to



be different types of loco-motor play. Children throughout playtimes are active by running, jumping, sliding, kicking, pushing and grabbing. A number of children are engaged playing various types of sports such as football on the oval or basketball on the concrete yard and some girls kicking the ball against the wall in the far playground. The playground equipment appears to be very popular and a mixture of boys and girls can be observed climbing, grabbing, balancing and jumping on the equipment.

A number of children were engaged in social play in the more secluded spaces, such as the corners and edges of the playground and the areas in between the building. It was noticeable that children were seeking out these more secluded spaces to get away from it all.

Additionally, the corners and edges seemed to provide a popular space for children around the building, groups of children finding secluded spaces to sit, talk and play traditional playground games, either around the fence, on the grassed areas or around the school building. Added to this I noticed, children walking on the small walls, benches and edges also children hanging upside on railings (brilliant, you can tell from the wear and tear on the railings this is a popular thing to do!) again adapting the environment in a playful manner.

One apparent restriction that impacted on children's play behaviour was the distinct lack of choice on the playground. The lack of choice, relating to resources to play with, restricted children's ability to transform and change the environment to suit their own play needs.

The Play for Life Pod will provide the opportunity for children to construct and transform their play space on a larger scale when they are being active, but to create a rich play environment we need to recognise how children like to play. Many children like to play whilst sitting down with smaller loose parts.

I witnessed two children that had brought in their own toy cars and a number of children that were sitting down on the steps with footie cards demonstrating the need for loose parts. An addition that the School Play Development Team may wish to consider, some smaller loose parts to sit down and play with.

A number of children demonstrated their need to play with loose parts whilst interacting with nature. Children will often naturally seek out spaces that are close to nature when they play due to their inherent propensity to learn,



inquire and explore.

One particular group of children were creating a small garden in the bushes with some leaves and flowers. Other children were playing hide and seek with friends and hiding behind the small bushes and I noticed a group of children making a cubby within the small trees at the far end of the school.

I also noted some children lifting up the rocks at the bottom of the trees and collecting bugs in small sandwich bags to inspect. Even though there is a lack of natural elements and playful landscaping within the playground, it is clear to see that children are adapting the space to try interact with nature. The most popular areas seemed to be at the base of trees on the grass area or the row of bushes next to the concrete playground.

There was plenty of evidence of children playing in the more natural areas, with one group of children using sticks to fish for leaves in the little stream that had been created by the rain. This was a fantastic example of children playing with the elements. This is a type of play that is often considered unacceptable within Primary School, due to the messiness of the water and dirt. However, having the opportunity to engage and experiment with the elements is vital for children and something that we could be promoting more of.

A number of children had adapted the environment without the resources or loose parts, to suit their own play needs. A number of children were playing tiggy throughout the buildings. This fast paced game, demonstrated children's need to seek out risk and uncertainty through their play. It was positive to observe the teachers on yard duty, witness this play behaviour and choosing not to intervene or say anything to the children, allowing the play to continue.

As mentioned children naturally seek out uncertainty and disequilibrium in their play, it is vitally important for children's ability to feel and experience these risks at a low level to be able to keep themselves safe and to manage greater risks into adulthood. Despite the view of some of the teachers, these behaviours were evident. A number of children were engaged in play opportunities that offered them risk and challenge.

One group of children were trying to climb up on the windowsills. The shape and height of the windowsill provided just enough challenge for the boys to attempt to run, jump and grip on to see if they could pull themselves up - a act that required a great deal of timing, strength and skill. Only one boy successfully



managed this but when he did so, decided it wasn't as fun just holding onto the edge of the building and jumped back down to see if he could do it again with. He received a great deal of praise from his friends.

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Due to the school supporting these conditions, it is clear to observe a vast number of children on the playground at Ascot Vale Primary School hold a competence at play. We tend to overlook that, although playing offers children a whole host of future developmental benefits, the fact the most impact of playing is that it makes children more competent at playing. It allows children to understand other play cues and invites, and in this respect it provides a gateway, opening up the possibility for more, complex forms of play to occur and therefore more potential for more future benefits.

This is no more so evidenced than behind the sandpit in the boxed off section of the grassed area. I witnessed two girls talking in the corner of the near empty Pod for approximately ten minutes or so. It is a very important space on the playground and feels very close to nature and removed from the noise of other parts of the playground. These girls were clearly playing sword fighting with sticks that they had found. The girls took it in turns to hit each other's sword, which was greeted with great laughter. Then one girl would run off behind the tree and then jump out as if to surprise the other, then they would continue again. It was a lovely moment.

The competency of this play, was not in the actions of what the girls were doing, but in the body language of how they actually read what each other was doing without having to verbally communicate. Also it was clear that this play had continued from the day before, as when walking around the playground before playtimes I discovered both of these sticks strategically placed next to the tree so they could be used again! Observations of play and types of play could be a task the Play Development Team wish to undertake, to improve how the teachers read different types of play understand what this means.

Another point worthy of noting is that through the observations did not witness any children seeking teachers support in the management of conflicts and problem. There were no whines or whinges and children were perfectly capable of solving any disputes or issues out for themselves. This was clear to see in the child



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organised kick-about of football. The games didn't require any adult interventions or involvement- meaning that children can hold games themselves without any adult support. This is another fine example of children with good competency at playing.

Added to this the teachers seem calm and enjoying playtime - unlike a number of other playgrounds where some teachers seem to be walking around looking for friction as something to do. There is a feeling of permission, tolerance and understanding of play behaviours creating an environment where making mistakes and experimenting is accepted.

Children develop an awareness of the world around them by experiencing a broad range of situations. There is no getting away from the fact that life is unpredictable for all of us. Therefore it is vitally important that we all experience variety, so that we are more prepared to deal with the unexpected things that life will inevitably throw up and be able to 'roll with the punches'. Ultimately, "Play is nature's training for life".

It is vital that school staff at Ascot Vale Primary School build on the many positive within the playground and continue to recognise the inherently broad and complex nature of play and continue to foster and create an environment that supports children with the independence and freedom to engage, experience and experiment with a range of behaviours, situations and emotions.

## Recommendations

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### 1) Establish a Play Development Team

If Ascot Vale Primary School has not already, then a priority is establishing a key group within the School that meets to discuss the issues around play. Establishing a school Play Development Team will ensure that play has a platform to be discussed and will encourage individuals schools to place more value on the importance of play for children to access the many benefits that playing provides.

The group should meet approximately once every term and should consist of individuals who clearly hold a passion and an ability to advocate for children's play across the whole school. The role of the group will be to challenge any issues that impact on or restrict children's ability to play within the school. The team will

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also hold responsibility for developing how the school continue to support and provide for play.

There are various developments that schools could cheaply and effectively utilise to enhance how they support children's play. Through experience, Play for Life found that the more engaged and committed the school Play Development Team is to supporting children's play and the more responsibility that is devolved to the group, the more that the school will witness significant developments and therefore access the maximum potential that play offers. One of the first main tasks of the Play Development Team is to discuss issues and themes from this report.

Therefore, it is vital that the school places effort in selecting and encouraging the passionate, committed individuals to form the school Play Development Team in order to ensure the play agenda within the school is taken forward.

The Play for Life Play Development Advisor will be in attendance for the first four meetings in order to provide experience and expertise of children's play and to establish the meeting agendas.

## **2) Develop a School Play Policy and Implementation Plan**

The development of a whole school play policy will ensure that the importance of play is recognised at Ascot Vale Primary School. It will set out the importance that the school places on the non-directed periods of the school day in which children independently learn, explore and contribute to looking after their own wellbeing. A School Play Policy has the benefit of allowing parents to consider the importance of independent play experiences and can reduce feelings of fear of litigation and blame from the parent community.

Including an implementation plan within your school play policy will provide Ascot Vale Primary School with clear direction on how to best support the conditions that allow children to play independently within the in-directed periods of the school day. This could be a key role of the Play Development Team within the school to provide clear, considered tangible steps to developing a positive playground.

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## **3) Develop a School Risk Management Policy**

As mentioned it is vital that we support teachers in feeling comfortable with children engaging in uncertainty during their play. The development of an effective risk management policy and procedures will ensure that School staff are supported to support risk taking behaviours rather than blanket banning certain play opportunities



that make us feel uncomfortable.

The School Policy should outline the school value of children engaging in uncertainty and understanding that children's play is naturally risky. The policy should provide a coherent, consistent and **balanced** approach to the management of risk with the school.

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**4) Ensure the Play for Life Pod does not become too restricted and structured**

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It can often be difficult in maintaining independence and freedom with the different types of play children engage in. We as teachers obviously have a duty of care for the children in our care, but more than that human nature is to protect 'vulnerable' children from harm. We can often see things that may happen and injuries that may occur. However we need to remind ourselves that it is vital that children sometimes learn from their own mistakes (if the consequences are not too severe!). Children will invariably seek out uncertainty in their play, it is critical for building resilience.

Rather than structuring or blanket banning certain behaviours, we need to continue to involve children in the thought process of any intervention that we choose to make. If we are uncomfortable with children who have made a tyre swing, rather than telling children they may hurt themselves, maybe simply asking do they think it is safe enough, how could it be made safer. Children will rarely injure themselves on purpose and are very clever at risk assessing what they do. Play is about children often pushing their limits, invariably they will miscalculate sometimes, but that is an important learning. It is about how we can minimise the severity of any injury without losing this vital learning.

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**5) Increase knowledge and understand of play to better observe play behaviours.**

Using tools provided by Play for Life to observe children's play will allow staff at Ascot Vale Primary School to gain greater understanding of play, play behaviours and the playground. Through standing back and observing the behaviours and reading the play of the students at Ascot Vale Primary School we can then as a whole school better support the conditions that play thrives in. Observations allow teachers to identify what is currently working on the playground and areas for improvement and development.





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We can keep up to date of children's play needs and further identify children's holistic development. Importantly it allows us to understand our children more and to develop and foster positive attachment and relationships with the students. Again promoting happier teachers and happier students, that leads to increased learning. Using bespoke professional development sessions provided by Play for Life will allow staff at Ascot Vale Primary School will also further cement knowledge gained from observations and allow staff to understand the fundamental theories of play.

On top of this, it is also important to audit the loose parts, examine what is being used? How it is being used? What is being left in the Pod? What would children want more of? More risk and challenge? It all works towards helping us understand our playground more.

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#### **6) Development of Parent Play Session**

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The overriding reason behind teachers stopping certain behaviours on the playground is due to fear of litigation - the fear of blame from the parent community in the event of an accident. As a school that places great ethos on its partnership with the community and building on the positive relationship the school has with the community then advocating for children's ability to play both inside and outside of school hours is vital.

As well as just advocating for children's independence to play, a parents session will also help share the knowledge and understanding of the unique approach that Ascot Vale Primary School takes in supporting play. The school can become a community hub for play. This will provide greater recognition and importance placed on play from parents. Leading to, teachers feeling more comfortable of children engaging with some risk and uncertainty through play and children feeling more connected to their school

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#### **7) Develop spaces to avoid conflicting use of space**

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By increasing the amount of observations that we carry out on the playground, which includes auditing and monitoring our incidents and accidents (Play for Life will provide tools through the Play Development Team for this). We can establish how children are using different spaces and if there are any developments to the physical environment required. This may include providing certain spaces for specific more dominant play types to increase a range of play opportunities that can occur at Ascot

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Vale Primary School. This can also include more loose parts #  
that promote different types of play and spaces for children  
to explore or sit and talk.

There are numerous cheap and innovative developments that  
could enhance the space and add novelty to the playground all  
that can be discussed once audits and observations have been  
carried out.

If you have any questions in relation to this State of Play  
Report, please do not hesitate to call us on 0477 111 929.

Kind Regards,

Mike Dessington  
Play Development Adviser  
Play for Life Australia

June 2013

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