



The Cottage School Inc.

OUTDOOR LEARNING AND ADVENTUROUS PLAY

Approved by Committee September 2019

1 Policy

We encourage adventurous independent and social play in the outdoors. We encourage exploration and taking risks; we also take care and support children to make wise decisions in relation to their safety.

The Cottage School is committed to:

- providing a rich and inspiring outdoor learning environment which engages and challenges student learning on our Bellerive campus, on Bike and Environment Days and on camps
- nurturing student connection to, and understanding of, the natural outdoor environment
- developing a sense of stewardship and responsibility for our natural environment
- providing opportunities for children to run, climb, slide, ride, swing, build, dig, stack, walk, swim, socialise, rest, play and generally explore and create in the outdoor environment
- providing natural and loose parts to stimulate physical challenges as well as social play and learning
- providing natural elements such as boulders, gardens, large and small spaces, suitable trees for climbing, as well as a fire pit and other natural elements for children to incorporate into their outdoor play
- empowering students to manage risk by developing their capacities for effective personal and group risk assessment and management by teaching risk management as a life skill
- a culture of effective risk management and continuous improvement in relation to outdoor learning and adventurous play

Many of these experiences incorporate an element of risk and the School acknowledges that risk is part of the human experience. The School does, however, take reasonable steps to eliminate and/or reduce *unacceptable* risks, where these are identified, through the management of materials, education of students and planning and monitoring by staff.

2 Rationale

Play and exploration is a fundamental human right for all children, regardless of age, sex, gender, culture, social class or disability. This needs to be reflected in the range of play environments and outdoor learning opportunities we offer children to ensure that all are able to engage in experiences that help improve their quality of life. Play is essential for children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Play promotes the development of the following attributes: inquiry, thinking, communicating, caring, risk-taking, being knowledgeable, principled, open-minded, balanced and reflective. Play promotes the development of the Cottage School values of curiosity, respect, empathy, equity, creativity, enterprise, stewardship and integrity as well as promoting resilience. Using of a play-based approach helps us to achieve our mission of 'pioneering a curriculum that educates, inspires and nurtures the whole child to create aware, engaged, curious and compassionate people.'

'Not all play involves risk taking, but there are positive benefits of risky play. Paradoxically, there is a possibility that children exposed to too little challenge may take inappropriate risks, where the chance of injury is high, because they lack the ability to judge risk levels and lack skills to tackle it. A 2015 systematic review of 18 separate studies on risky outdoor play (ie thrilling, exciting and with the possibility of injury) found this type of play to be associated with positive effects on a range of health indicators, including social health and behaviours, injuries and lower aggression..... The best way to enhance children's safety is to teach skills to deal with the situations they will need to face, and to ensure they have a high-quality range of play opportunities to enhance their health, wellbeing, learning and development.' (Mary Jeavons, *Education Matters* Primary Oct 2018)

'Play is great for children's well-being 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 risks if they are wrapped in cotton wool.' Play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child's risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives. (*Risk and Adventure Learning, Executive Summary for Catholic Education Tasmania*, January 2013)

There are many arguments in support of children engaging in activities that involve risk. Tim Gill identifies four in his 2007 publication *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society*, Calouste, Gulbenkian Foundation, London:

- I. *Helping children to learn to manage risk (understanding safety)*
- II. *Feeding children's innate need for risk with reasonable risks in order to prevent them finding greater un-managed risks for themselves*
- III. *Health and developmental benefits*
- IV. *Developmental benefits including the building of character and personality traits such as resilience and self-reliance*

Through play and outdoor experiences children are given the opportunity to:

- Take informed and reasonable risks and make mistakes
- Make informed and reasonable choices that involve challenge
- Use a range of tools and equipment safely
- Experience a range of activities which will encourage interest and curiosity
- Be assisted to build the confidence to take manageable and controllable risks
- Develop an understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges
- Learn to assess risks for themselves with help from adults.

3 Definitions specific to outdoor learning and play –

see Risk Management Framework for further definitions relating to risk.

Outdoor learning

Learning experiences which take place outside of the current or future classrooms or school buildings. These outdoor learning experiences may be onsite, offsite, play or planned experiences; they include Bike Days, camps, Environment Days.

Play

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Children determine and control the content and intent of their play by following their instincts, ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons. (*Playwork Principles* Scrutiny Group 2005)

Environment Days

Environment Days provide the opportunity for our students to go out into the community to learn through direct experience, usually for the whole day, and often travelling in our school bus. Environment Days provide valuable opportunities for play and stimulate children's imagination and appreciation of the natural world.

Camps

Camps are a central component of learning at Cottage School. All students from Prep/Littlies to grade 6 Biggies attend at least one camp ranging from the less challenging comfort of Orana to more challenging camping in tents and cooking their own food over the camp fire by the time they are in Biggies. Children are gradually taught the skills required for summer/spring camping, while the winter camps for the Middlies and Biggies are held at places where there are indoor facilities and sleeping accommodation.

Bike Days

Bike Days are another opportunity provided for children to challenge themselves and support each other while riding their own bikes a distance and over terrain commensurate with their skills, experience and strength.

4 Roles and requirements

All people involved with the Cottage School have a duty to be informed and committed to effective risk management and continuous improvement in relation to outdoor learning and adventurous play. The school will ensure that all students and staff have access to first aid trained personnel and adequate first aid equipment while under the school's duty of care.

Cottage School Committee seeks to comply with our common law duty of care and do all that is reasonably practicable to:

- Manage or control the risks in children's playing and outdoor learning but not allow unreasonable and/or overly pedantic risk management processes to be the guiding principle when creating play spaces and facilities and planning excursions, Environment Days, Bike Days, or camps.
- Ensure that policy development, planning and decision making and documentation of these supports children's play and quality outdoor learning experiences.
- Develop and provide to parents through this policy a clear statement of beliefs around play and outdoor learning provision which includes a statement outlining how we ensure risks are assessed and unacceptable risks removed while acceptable risk is managed or controlled appropriately – see the Risk Management Framework (RMF) for further information.

The School Leader has the responsibility to ensure they have current knowledge and awareness of age appropriate safety management practices for outdoor learning and be aware of the type of experiences being offered by the school.

- Furthermore, they shall use appropriate resources and processes to eliminate unacceptable risks and appropriately manage or control suitable learning experiences.
- They shall review and monitor the impact of this Policy on learning opportunities and Work Health and Safety (WHS) outcomes.
- **The School Leader** shall exercise due diligence and ensure:
 - that educators and parents are aware of the conditions that require a risk-benefit analysis to be carried out
 - that learning opportunities are not being unnecessarily restricted by fear of litigation around Work Health and Safety concerns
 - Ensure all staff understand the importance of play and outdoor experiences in children's lives and how to reconcile the Work Health and Safety requirements and the learning needs of children.
 - Ensure that staff understand the school Risk Management Framework
 - Risk management processes will be conducted according to the Risk Management Framework

Teachers

- Teachers have a duty of care and shall take reasonable care in relation to outdoor learning and adventurous play
- Duty teachers will be responsible for scanning for loose parts which may be creating a hazard and then acting to reduce the risk.
- Teachers have the responsibility of conducting or up-dating previous risk-benefit analysis and risk assessments before engaging students in outdoor or risky play activities.
- Educators taking our students outdoors are uniquely placed to manage this process. They should adopt an **enabling** attitude towards outdoor learning that identifies exciting, creative opportunities for learning. Where appropriate they should use published guidance and the advice of qualified staff and specialists to reduce risk to an acceptable level.
- Our students should not be denied an experience simply because a hazard could not be completely eliminated.
- Learners should be at the centre of the risk management process from the outset so that they learn more about managing risks for themselves. Risk has both positive and negative aspects. With careful thought and planning it is possible to remove unreasonable risks and manage or control hazards arising out of a venture without extinguishing the possibility of personal adventure at the heart of outdoor learning.
- In planning and considering risks and benefits it is important to consider:
 - Is the level of challenge appropriate to the learner group?
 - How will risks be assessed and balanced against the benefits that can be expected?
 - Can the rationale for this experience be justified even if events don't go according to plan?
 - Are the management arrangements appropriate to the location selected?
 - Are the leadership and supervisory staff appropriately skilled, qualified and experienced?
 - Are there any relevant examples of good practice that we can draw on?

Teacher assistants

- Teacher assistants shall take reasonable care in relation to outdoor learning and risky play
- The staff planning for outdoor learning and play have the responsibility for providing quality learning experiences and this is supported by managing risks by eliminating health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable, and if it is not reasonably practicable to do so, to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.
- For offsite excursions involving outdoor play and adventure staff will use appropriate risk assessment information. This risk assessment will include the identified risks and the management strategies to be employed by all staff, students and volunteers.
- For onsite outdoor play, the risk management process will be ongoing and require periodic planned as well as timely reviews of control measures to ensure the safety of our students. Teacher assistants must stay aware of these developments.

The Administration Coordinator shall

- take reasonable care in relation to outdoor learning and risky play
- shall check and file all risk management forms prior to the off-site activity

Volunteers

All volunteers at the school shall take reasonable care in relation to outdoor learning and risky play

Students

Students shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and ensure that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others. Students shall follow any reasonable instruction given by the School and its staff to comply with this policy.

Parents/Guardians

Parents shall take reasonable care of their health and safety and the health and safety of their children. Parents/guardians shall ensure that their actions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others in the school community. Parents shall follow any reasonable instruction given by the School in relation to work health and safety. Parents/guardians shall participate in consultation, co-operation and co-ordination of activities guided by this policy. Parents/guardians involved in the building and maintenance of outdoor play equipment on-site will be guided by those delegated by the School to plan and oversee such work to ensure that it at least meets the minimum standard required in the risk/benefit analysis to ensure the benefits outweigh the risks involved in use of the equipment.