ACRE PLAY

Risk-Benefit Assessment

Protecting children from serious harm while preserving the benefits of adventurous play



IMPORTANT

This draft must be checked against the current site, equipment, staffing and individual pupil needs before it is approved for operational use.

Acre Heads uses a balanced risk-benefit approach. Written controls, inspections, play assemblies and dynamic decisions work together so that challenge, creativity and freedom remain possible without ignoring foreseeable risks of significant harm.

Assessment control

Assessment completed by	Mrs Winfield	Version 1.0
Date completed	September 2026	
Reviewed and accepted by	Mr Sitch	
Review date	within 12 months, or sooner if required	
Consulted	Acre Play Lead; site staff; DSL; SENDCo/medical lead; play team; pupil representatives	
Applies to	Acre Play zones, routes, storage and supervised play sessions across the school grounds	

Assessment principles

- Focus on real risks of harm and use controls that are proportionate to the likelihood and severity.
- Record the benefits as well as the hazards so that valuable play is not removed without good reason.
- Treat this assessment as a living document supported by inspections, incident review and dynamic risk management.
- Consider disability, SEND, medical need, age, development and communication; add an individual assessment where generic controls are insufficient.
- Stop or adapt an activity when conditions make the residual risk unacceptable.

DYNAMIC RISK MANAGEMENT

Adults continually observe the environment, children and emerging play. They support children to judge manageable challenge and intervene when conditions indicate a foreseeable risk of significant harm.

Risk scoring

Risk score = likelihood x severity. The score supports professional judgement; it does not replace the need to understand the activity, people and site.

Severity / likelihood	Remote 1	Unlikely 2	Possible 3	Likely 4	Highly likely 5
Slight 1	1	2	3	4	5
Minor 2	2	4	6	8	10
Serious 3	3	6	9	12	15
Major 4	4	8	12	16	20
Fatal 5	5	10	15	20	25

Risk band	Required response
1-4 Low	Proceed with controls and monitor.
5-9 Moderate	Maintain controls and complete additional action within a defined timescale where needed.
10-15 High	Do not proceed until further controls reduce risk and an authorised leader agrees the activity can operate.
16-25 Very high	Stop. The activity must not proceed until the risk is reduced to an acceptable level.

Using this assessment

1. Confirm that every listed control reflects the equipment, routes, staffing and pupil needs in place on the day of approval.
2. Brief staff and children on zone rules, closed areas, individual adjustments and emergency arrangements.
3. Record any missing control in the local-actions table; do not open an activity carrying a high or very-high residual risk.
4. Review after significant change, a serious incident or concerning pattern, and at least annually.

Operational check rhythm

When	Minimum check
Before each session	Check surfaces, boundaries, equipment, storage, weather, first-aid points and staffing; open, adapt or close zones accordingly. Check equipment for seasonal deterioration, wear, loose fixings and broken or damaged parts. Any unsafe item or area must be removed from use or securely cordoned off, clearly labelled 'OUT OF USE - DO NOT USE', recorded and kept inaccessible until repaired, replaced or formally confirmed safe.
During play	Use direct, remote or ranging supervision; respond to changing conditions, distress, exclusion, crowding, damage and unsafe behaviour.
At the end	Account for pupils, tidy and store equipment, identify defects, restore routes and record incidents or emerging concerns.
Periodic review	Review inspections, incidents, near misses, pupil voice and access for disabled pupils and pupils with SEND or medical needs.

ACRE PLAY

Risk-benefit working schedule

Validate each control against the site before approval. Add local actions where a control is not yet fully in place.

Activity / hazard	Who might be harmed and how	Benefits	Initial risk	Controls and maintenance	Owner / frequency	Residual risk
General surfaces and changing ground conditions Paths, grass, mud, slopes, edging and fixed routes	Pupils, staff and visitors Slips, trips, falls, collision and minor-to-serious injury	Movement, balance, coordination, access to varied terrain and confidence outdoors	**3 x 3 = 9 Moderate**	Daily visual check before use. Staff report defects and cordon or close affected areas. Clear main routes and exits. Adapt footwear and zone access for mud, ice, standing water or poor visibility. Ranging adults monitor changing conditions during play.	Acre Play Lead / site staff Daily and dynamic	**2 x 3 = 6 Moderate**
Fixed climbing and Adventure Land equipment	Pupils and staff Falls from height, impact, entrapment, splinters or broken limbs	Strength, balance, coordination, confidence, judgement and resilience	**3 x 4 = 12 High**	Defined climbing limits introduced in play assemblies. Suitable landing zones kept clear. No use when wet, icy, damaged or closed. Pre-use visual checks, recorded routine inspections and competent-person inspection within the school's premises schedule. Three points of contact where appropriate. Adults monitor crowding and emerging play.	Site staff / Acre Play Lead Daily, recorded schedule and dynamic	**2 x 4 = 8 Moderate**
Large loose parts Tyres, crates, planks, cable drums, barrels and construction materials	Pupils and staff Crushing, trapped fingers, strains, splinters, falling structures or struck by items	Cooperation, design, construction, strength, problem-solving and creativity	**3 x 3 = 9 Moderate**	Items checked before introduction and damaged parts removed. Agreed building and stacking limits. Large structures only in designated areas. Team lifting for bulky items; no lone lifting of pallets or drums. Keep routes and exits clear. Adults monitor unstable builds and support safe dismantling.	Acre Play Lead / play team On introduction, daily and dynamic	**2 x 3 = 6 Moderate**
Small loose parts, damaged or sharp objects	Pupils, staff and visitors Cuts, punctures, splinters, choking, trapped fingers or exposure to hazardous discarded items	Fine motor development, invention, sorting, construction and imaginative play	**3 x 3 = 9 Moderate**	Donations checked by a delegated competent adult. Daily sweep and visual check. Broken items placed in a secure defect container. Adults use gloves and approved sharps arrangements for suspect needles or hazardous waste; isolate area and contact SLT/emergency services where needed. Age-appropriate small parts only.	Acre Play Lead / site staff Before introduction and daily	**1 x 3 = 3 Low**
Ropes, string, fabric and tarpaulins	Pupils Strangulation, entrapment, suffocation, friction burns, trips or falls	Den building, creativity, teamwork, knotting, fine motor skills and role play	**3 x 4 = 12 High**	No tying around bodies or necks. No covering faces or fully enclosing children. Ropes and fabric used only in agreed zones and lengths; remove damaged materials. Adults monitor attachment points, loops, crowding and enclosed spaces. Rules taught and revisited through assembly.	Acre Play Lead / play team Daily and dynamic	**1 x 4 = 4 Low**
Acre Speedway and wheeled equipment Scooters, bikes, ride-ons and related items	Pupils and staff Falls, collisions, crushing, trapped fingers or impact with pedestrians	Coordination, fitness, turn-taking, judgement, confidence and spatial awareness	**3 x 3 = 9 Moderate**	Designated route, direction, waiting point and parking area. Equipment checked before use; defects removed. Speed controlled and stopping space maintained. Pedestrian crossings taught. Route surface inspected. Numbers limited to available space and adult judgement. Individual adaptations or restrictions recorded where needed.	Acre Play Lead / allocated ranger Daily and dynamic	**2 x 3 = 6 Moderate**

Activity / hazard	Who might be harmed and how	Benefits	Initial risk	Controls and maintenance	Owner / frequency	Residual risk
Invasion World and active ball games Football, rugby and similar team games	Pupils and staff Collision, ball impact, falls, sprains, disagreement or exclusion	Fitness, teamwork, agility, communication, rules and leadership	**4 x 2 = 8** **Moderate**	Marked areas and suitable goals/equipment. Activities separated from routes and quieter play. Rules on contact, tackles and inclusion reinforced. Adults monitor intensity, numbers, conflict and boundary drift. Surface and goals checked. Age, size, SEND and medical needs considered when organising access.	Play team / sports leaders Daily and dynamic	**3 x 2 = 6** **Moderate**
Throwing, target and bat-and-ball activities	Pupils, staff and visitors Impact to head, face or body; collision with swinging equipment	Coordination, accuracy, strength, cooperation and confidence	**3 x 2 = 6** **Moderate**	Designated throwing direction and activity boundary. Soft or age-appropriate equipment selected. Participants check space before throwing or swinging. Spectators and routes kept outside the activity area. Adult adapts or stops activity if numbers, wind or behaviour increase risk.	Allocated ranger Daily and dynamic	**2 x 2 = 4** **Low**
Sand, mud and water play	Pupils and staff Eye irritation, ingestion, contamination, slips or illness from stagnant water/animal waste	Sensory regulation, imagination, cooperation, fine motor skills and scientific exploration	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	Daily check for contamination, animal waste and unsafe objects. Sand covered when not in use where applicable. Fresh tap water only; containers emptied after play. No drinking play water or throwing materials at faces. Hand cleaning before eating. Slippery areas treated, restricted or closed.	Acre Play Lead / site staff Daily and end of session	**2 x 3 = 6** **Moderate**
Digging, gardening and real tools	Pupils and staff Cuts, puncture, impact, foot injury or use as a weapon	Strength, responsibility, practical skill, nature connection and problem-solving	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	Tools introduced explicitly and used only in the designated area. No garden forks unless separately assessed. Carry tools low with points down. Adequate working space between children. Tools counted, checked and stored securely. Direct or close remote supervision based on tool and pupil need.	Acre Play Lead / allocated ranger Each session	**2 x 3 = 6** **Moderate**
Natural areas, plants, fungi, insects and animal waste	Pupils and staff Poisoning, allergic reaction, stings, bites, cuts, infection or distress	Curiosity, environmental knowledge, nurture, sensory experience and wellbeing	**2 x 4 = 8** **Moderate**	Known hazardous plants removed or access managed. Daily dynamic check for fungi, nests, waste and sharp vegetation. Children taught not to eat unknown plants or berries and to report hazards. Hand hygiene after contact. Medical/allergy plans accessible. Animal waste removed with suitable PPE.	Site staff / play team Daily and seasonal	**1 x 4 = 4** **Low**
Movement between zones and busy crossing points	Pupils, staff and visitors Collision, trip or conflict between pedestrians and wheeled play	Independence, navigation, choice and shared use of the whole site	**3 x 2 = 6** **Moderate**	Marked paths and crossings. Walk-through areas identified. Equipment and constructions kept clear of routes, gates and emergency exits. Adults range across transition points and adjust flow if congested. Speedway users give way at crossings.	Play team Daily and dynamic	**2 x 2 = 4** **Low**
Manual handling and movement of equipment	Pupils and staff Musculoskeletal strain, trapped fingers, foot injury or dropped loads	Strength, teamwork, responsibility and construction skill	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	Staff follow school manual-handling arrangements. Children use team lifting for bulky items and ask for help. Maximum item sizes and stacking limits agreed. Heavy staff-only items identified. Storage reduces awkward lifting. Stop if load cannot be controlled.	Headteacher / Acre Play Lead Training and dynamic	**2 x 3 = 6** **Moderate**
Public boundaries, photography and unauthorised contact	Pupils Safeguarding harm, grooming, distress, verbal abuse, photography or attempted removal	Use of extensive grounds while remaining connected to the local environment	**2 x 4 = 8** **Moderate**	Secure gates and boundaries included in daily checks. Ranging adults pay particular attention to public-facing edges. Children report contact or photography. Staff challenge/report concerns in line with safeguarding procedures and alert DSL/SLT. Missing-child and lockdown procedures remain available.	DSL / play team / site staff Daily and dynamic	**1 x 4 = 4** **Low**

Activity / hazard	Who might be harmed and how	Benefits	Initial risk	Controls and maintenance	Owner / frequency	Residual risk
Toilet access and unauthorised indoor entry	Pupils Reduced supervision, missing pupil, access to unsupervised spaces, slips or safeguarding concern	Dignified access to toilets while maintaining safe oversight of the site	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	Four red toilet bands issued from first-aid points by emergency exits. Agreed toilet route used and bands returned promptly. No classroom or indoor access once play begins unless directed, in an emergency or through an individual adjustment. Adults monitor delays and concerns.	First-aid point staff / play team Each session	**1 x 3 = 3** **Low**
Medical needs, disability, SEND and individual vulnerability	Named pupils and supporting adults Medical emergency, sensory overload, reduced access, fatigue, communication difficulty or unsafe participation	Belonging, independence, regulation, friendship and equitable access to play	**3 x 4 = 12** **High**	Healthcare plans, SEND information and reasonable adjustments shared on a need-to-know basis. Medication and communication available. Individual assessment where generic controls are insufficient. Direct support or alternative access provided when needed. Staff know emergency response and escalation routes.	SENDCo / medical lead / class team Termly, on change and dynamic	**1 x 4 = 4** **Low**
Small-part ingestion and unsuitable resources	Younger pupils or pupils with identified mouthing/choking risk Choking, ingestion or poisoning	Fine motor, sensory, construction and imaginative play	**2 x 4 = 8** **Moderate**	Age and individual need considered before resources are introduced. Known choking hazards kept from pupils at increased risk unless specifically controlled. Batteries, chemicals, treated timber, glass, sharp metal and unknown substances excluded. Staff monitor mouthing and follow choking response procedures.	Acre Play Lead / class teams Before introduction and dynamic	**1 x 4 = 4** **Low**
Hygiene and infection control	Pupils and staff Transmission from shared equipment, mud, water, bodily fluids or animal waste	Shared sensory and social play, outdoor learning and resilience	**3 x 2 = 6** **Moderate**	Hand cleaning before eating and after specified activities. Equipment cleaned according to material and use. Bodily fluids and animal waste managed using school procedures and PPE. Cuts covered. Water emptied after play. Public health advice followed when additional controls are required.	Play team / site staff Daily and as needed	**2 x 2 = 4** **Low**
Weather exposure Heat, sun, cold, ice, heavy rain, wind and poor visibility	Pupils and staff Heat illness, sunburn, cold stress, dehydration, falling branches, slips or reduced supervision	Outdoor experience in varied seasons, resilience, physical activity and nature connection	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	Forecast and site conditions reviewed. Clothing, shade, water and duration adapted. High-wind tree areas, icy equipment or waterlogged zones closed. Outdoor play modified or moved when conditions cannot be controlled. Individual medical vulnerability considered.	Headteacher / Acre Play Lead Daily and dynamic	**1 x 3 = 3** **Low**
Injury, first aid and emergency response	Pupils, staff and visitors Delay in treatment, deterioration, poor emergency access or incomplete accounting for pupils	Prompt, proportionate response allows beneficial play to continue safely	**2 x 5 = 10** **High**	Identified first-aid points, trained staff, communication method and accessible supplies. Emergency routes kept clear. Serious injury and emergency procedures known. Pupils directed to assembly arrangements and accounted for. Incidents recorded; serious events, near misses and patterns reviewed. RIDDOR considered by the responsible person.	Headteacher / first-aid lead Each session and after incidents	**1 x 5 = 5** **Moderate**
Storage, tidy-up and access outside supervised sessions	Pupils, families, staff and visitors Trip, unauthorised use, falling stacks, trapped fingers or misuse without supervision	Children develop responsibility and the school sustains a varied play offer	**3 x 3 = 9** **Moderate**	End-of-session signal and collective tidy routine. Equipment returned to stable, labelled storage; routes and exits checked. Higher-risk tools and unsuitable items secured. Families informed that Acre Play equipment is not for unsupervised use outside school sessions. Defects reported before next use.	Acre Play Lead / play team / site staff End of each session	**1 x 3 = 3** **Low**

Activity / hazard	Who might be harmed and how	Benefits	Initial risk	Controls and maintenance	Owner / frequency	Residual risk
Petting Zone / supervised contact with approved animals, enclosures, bedding, feed and animal-care equipment	Pupils, staff, visitors and animals / Bites, scratches, allergic reaction, zoonotic infection, distress, escape, contamination or compromised animal welfare	Empathy, nurture, responsibility, communication, confidence, knowledge of animals and positive sensory experience	**3 x 4 = 12 High**	Only suitable, healthy animals approved by the Headteacher/Acre Play Lead are used, with a named competent adult responsible for their care and welfare. Contact is supervised and numbers are limited. Children are taught calm handling, must not chase, crowd, lift or feed animals unless specifically directed, and avoid face-to-face contact. Animal behaviour and signs of stress are monitored; animals have secure housing, retreat space, water and appropriate rest. Allergies, asthma, phobias, SEND, medical needs and pregnancy are considered and alternative participation is provided. Cuts are covered; no eating or drinking in the zone; hands are washed with soap and water immediately after contact and before food. Waste, bedding, feed and equipment are managed hygienically using suitable PPE. Bites, scratches, illness, escape, safeguarding concerns or abnormal animal behaviour trigger immediate first aid, isolation/closure, recording and escalation, including veterinary or public-health advice where required.	Headteacher / Acre Play Lead / named animal-care adult / Before opening, each session and dynamic	**1 x 4 = 4 Low**
Challenge Zone / increased physical activity, demanding movement and children testing personal limits	Pupils and staff / Falls, collision, sprains, strains, impact injury, overexertion, fatigue, distress or aggravation of a medical condition	Fitness, strength, coordination, resilience, confidence, self-regulation, perseverance and informed judgement of personal challenge	**3 x 4 = 12 High**	Challenges are introduced progressively with clear boundaries, safe-use expectations and sufficient space between activities. Equipment and landing/surrounding areas are checked before use and adjusted for age, development, competence, SEND and medical need. Children choose their level of challenge and are encouraged to stretch themselves without pressure to exceed a safe personal limit. Adults monitor intensity, crowding, technique, repeated attempts, fatigue, pain, distress and unsafe competition; they coach, adapt or stop activity when needed. Rest points, water and recovery time are available. Relevant healthcare plans and emergency arrangements are known. Higher-risk or novel challenges receive closer supervision and a specific assessment where the generic controls are insufficient.	Acre Play Lead / allocated ranger / Each session and dynamic	**2 x 4 = 8 Moderate**
Equipment condition, seasonal deterioration and defective items / Fixed, wheeled, loose-part, play and storage equipment	Pupils, staff and visitors / Collapse, cuts, splinters, trapping, impact, falls or other injury caused by wear, corrosion, rot, weather damage, loose fixings or breakage	A varied and challenging play offer can be sustained safely throughout the year with clear accountability for maintenance	**3 x 4 = 12 High**	Equipment is checked before use, during routine recorded inspections and through specific seasonal checks, including after severe weather or prolonged storage. Checks consider wear, corrosion, rot, sharp edges, splinters, cracks, stability, moving parts, fixings, protective surfaces and cleanliness. Staff report defects immediately. Unsafe equipment is removed where possible; otherwise the item and an adequate surrounding area are securely cordoned off with clear 'OUT OF USE - DO NOT USE' labels so children cannot gain access. The defect, action, owner and repair/replacement decision are recorded. Temporary repairs are not used unless completed and approved by a competent person. Equipment is returned to use only after repair, replacement or documented confirmation by the authorised person that it is safe.	Site staff / Acre Play Lead / Pre-use, recorded schedule, seasonal and after severe weather	**1 x 4 = 4 Low**

Local actions before approval

No.	Action required	Owner	Due date	Completed	Version
1	Added petting zone to RA	G.Sitch	September 26	Yes	1.0
2	strengthened **Challenge Zone** section	G.Sitch	September 26	Yes	1.0
3	Checks for wear, corrosion, rot, loose fittings, damage and broken components with Clear **"OUT OF USE – DO NOT USE"** labelling.	G.Sitch	September 26	Yes	1.0
4	Recording, repair, authorisation and reopening procedures	A.Winfield	September 26		
5					
6					
7					
8					

Approval and review record

Review date	Reviewed by	Reason	Outcome	Changes / actions
Mon 19 October 2026	Safeguarding Comm	Approve Policy		

Authoritative guidance

- HSE: Children's play and leisure - promoting a balanced approach
- HSE: Managing risks and risk assessment at work
- DfE: Health and safety responsibilities and duties for schools
- DfE: Keeping children safe in education 2026