Explain why it is important to take a balanced approach to risk management.

Balance is an important aspect of risk management, and it should be remembered that often children need to learn through experience in order to be able to make good decisions about difficult situations. The cry of 'health and safety gone mad' means that in the public eye, aspects of health and safety have been devalued by assuming that people have no common sense at all.

A sense of risk is something that children are not born with, and their experiences in the world will dictate how they understand it. If decisions around safety are always made on their behalf without their input, children are less likely to be able to make good independent choices about risks that they are presented with when they are without an adult.

This means that when we assess and manage risk at school, we must also take into account the wishes of parents to ensure that their children are looked after and are safe from harm, and also the need of the children to be able to learn how to evaluate risk for themselves in order to be safe into the future.

Walking that line is a real balance.
A balanced approach to health and safety.

Although school should be a safe environment, it is not an entirely risk-free place to be. Pointing out hazards and risks in certain situations, and then asking the children to monitor the safety of what they are doing, means that they take a certain amount of ownership in their own safety. The more engaged they are in ensuring their own and others’ safety, the more likely they are to be safe.
Just talking to them in a direct way about certain risks that are present while they play or while they conduct classroom activities can ensure that safety remains in the forefront of their thinking while they enjoy the task at hand. For example, stopping a child running with scissors, or with scissors or a knife pointed upwards, and asking the class why scissors should always be held downwards and why someone holding scissors should not run with them, can spark a short discussion which is likely to be reasonably memorable for everyone, not just the child who was stopped.

The aspects of a balanced approach to risk management that are most important when it comes to children and young people are:

- To take into account how old the person is, what their specific needs are, and what their abilities are;
- To avoid taking any kind of excessive risk in a situation, e.g. trying to cross a swollen river instead of walking further downstream to a more shallow area with a bridge;
- To avoid being too averse to risk, because that tends to remove opportunities for a child to learn about risk and danger;
- To recognise that risk and challenges are important to the way in which a child develops.