

15th October 2024

AN INTRODUCTION TO OPAL

Dear Parent and Carers,

Our school is about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play.

In what ways, if any, do you think you benefited from playtime? Thinking about your own childhood, what did you like playing at school or at home? Children today don't have the same freedoms we once did, so we want to give children back time to really enjoy and learn from play. After all, it's a child's basic human right.

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is the result of over 20 years of testing and development in over 800 schools and has been used in Spain, Canada, France and New Zealand. The programme has also been adapted and used in schools in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Austria under the Play Friendly Schools project. In 2018, OPAL won first prize in an EU-funded award for the best active school's programme in Europe and two UK national playwork awards. In 2019, OPAL was awarded a quarter of a million pounds by Sport England to bring the programme to many more schools.

OPAL is based on the idea that, as well as learning through good teaching, your children also learn when they play. As 20% of their time in school is playtime, we want to make sure that this amount of time (equivalent to 1.4 years of primary school) is as good as possible.

One reason we are carrying out this programme is that childhood has changed, and many children no longer get their play needs met out of school:

- average screen time per day is six hours
- average outdoor play time per week is five hours
- percentage of UK children who only play outdoors with other children at school is 56%

There are many proven benefits for schools that carry out the OPAL Primary Programme. They usually include:

- more enjoyment of school
- less teaching time lost to disputes between children
- fewer accidents and greatly improved behaviour

Play is not messing about. It is the process evolution has come up with to enable children to learn all of the things that cannot be taught, while also having so much fun. There are certain things children **must** have in order to be able to play. These include:

- having clothes that they can play in
- having things to play with

- having a certain amount of freedom

As we improve play opportunities for your children, you may find that we ask you to help us find resources and we make changes to how the children use the school grounds - they may use more of the grounds, for more of the year. Your children may get a bit messier, be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like. The experiences we will be fostering are essential for children's physical and mental wellbeing and are in line with all current good practice advice on health and safety, wellbeing and development.

We will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to the OPAL mentor, should you wish to do so. If you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please have a look at the OPAL website (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk), where you will find lots of useful information and several videos about the programme.

In the coming 18 months, you will be invited to events where you can come and see for yourselves what is happening and have the opportunity to join in too.

We are really excited about this project and we hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtime for all children.

Kind regards

Mrs Brown, Mr Jordan & Lori-Ann Wainwright
The OPAL Team

