



Friday 1st October 2021

OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning Programme

Dear Parents and Carers,

Your children's school is about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, co-operation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play.

The OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning Programme is the result of 17 years testing and development in over 500 schools and is now used in Canada, France and New Zealand as well as across the UK. Work has started to adapt the programme for schools in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Austria. In 2018 OPAL won first prize in an EU funded award for the best active school's programme in Europe and two UK national play work awards.

OPAL is based on the idea that as well as learning through good teaching, your children also learn when they play, and 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 the school is 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 5 hours

Average outdoor play time per week 5 hours

Percentage of UK children who only play outdoor with other children at school 56%

There are many proven benefits for schools which carry out the OPAL Programme. They usually include: more enjoyment of school, less teaching time lost to disputes between children, less 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 feeling like it is fun. There are certain things children **must** have in order to be able to play. These include:

Having clothes that you can play in

Having things to play with

Having a certain amount of freedom

As the school improves play opportunities for your children, you may find the school is asking you for resources and is making changes about 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 the school is fostering are essential for children's physical and mental well-being and healthy and in line with all current good practice advice on health safety, well-being and development.

The school will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to someone from OPAL. If you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please have a look at the OPAL website.

You will be able to learn all about OPAL and watch several videos about the programme on our website outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk. You will also be invited to come to a talk to find out more about why play is so important and why your child's school is seeking to improve it.

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

Best wishes,

Ana Ardalean OPAL Mentor

Michael Follett BA Hons, PGCE
OPAL Director