

Developing deep roots to grow the strongest trees.

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Dear parents / carers,

We are so excited to start an exciting new programme in conjunction with OPAL.

(<http://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>) to make our play times even better. OPAL has won the best active schools' programme in Europe award and been cited in two Parliamentary Reports as outstanding practice. OPAL is working closely with Sport England to promote more active childhoods. Through the OPAL programme, we are hoping to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, co-operation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play in our school.

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.

We strongly believe that: **"Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child. Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community"** (Play Council 2001).

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. For example, research shows that now:

- Average screen time per day 5 hours
- Average outdoor play time per week 5 hours.
- Percentage of UK children who only play outdoors 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, 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 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

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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. 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 project will start on **Tuesday 22nd June 2021** and our hopes are that this project will change the way we think and how we play together. To facilitate this project, we will need to buy some new resources, move some things around on the playground and we will also require some loose parts. These will all take time and we will introduce over the next 18 months. To get started we are going to begin with 'Loose parts'. Loose parts are any materials that can be easily moved, combined, and incorporated into children's free play. **The items we are looking for at the moment will enable us to enjoy a wider range of play experiences during playtime:**

- Suitcases of any size and type
- Anything on wheels/castors
- Plastic milk crates
- Briefcases, especially hard cased ones
- kitchen pots, pans, baking trays, worktables, wooden spoons, chopping boards
- Tools like spades, trowels and brooms
- tubes of various sizes and various materials
- Buckets
- Fabric (large sheets/brightly coloured fabric)
- Pegs (to help to set up dens)

We will be holding ongoing collection times but our first is on **Friday 18th June 2021** and **Monday 21st June 2021** to begin our journey. The sooner we do this, the sooner the children will be able to play with the items!

There will be more information to follow at a parent's session later in the year when you will hopefully be invited to come and play with your children. We are really excited about this project and hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtime for all children.

Yours sincerely,

Katie Mason
Curricular lead for play