

Developing deep roots to grow the strongest trees.

Head teacher Mrs. Helen Morrall
Deputy Head teacher Mr Jamie Pell
Business Manager Mrs. Allison Munns
Bursar Mrs Denise Cable

Chair of Governors
Vice Chair
Family Support Worker

Mr Stewart Miller
Mrs Emma Russell
Mrs Nina Fowle

The Avenue, Wellingborough
Northamptonshire, NN8 4ET

Telephone No 01933 276366

Email address: head@theavenue-inf.northants-ecl.gov.uk

Friday 17th September 2021

Dear parents / carers,

I am so excited to write to you and tell you about our playtimes. We follow a play programme in conjunction with OPAL (<http://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>) that we launched last year 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.

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