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Friday 6th March 2026

Dear parents and carers,

As you may be aware from talking to your child, we are about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play at lunch time.

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is the result of over 20 years of testing and development in over 2000 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, 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 enjoyable and purposeful as it can.

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 child we will be asking you for resources as we change the way in which the children use the school grounds. This will include using more of the grounds, for more of the year. Inevitably the children will get a bit messier, they will also be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like. These experiences 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.

As a school, we will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to our OPAL mentor at school. Date to be confirmed. In the meantime, 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.

Having shared a video of what an OPAL school looks like, the children are extremely excited by this project and very keen for it to start. Children's safety however is paramount to everything that we do so unfortunately they will need to be patient as we get things in place before we launch the programme. The project is being lead by Mrs Jones along with a steering group of people representing all stakeholders, including the children.

As parents and carers, the idea of your child getting messy may be causing some concern but please be reassured that systems will be in place to manage this. We will keep you updated as the programme launches and include regular OPAL updates in the school newsletter.

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

Best wishes,
Mrs Flowerdew
Mrs Jones OPAL lead