

20th January 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

### LAUNCHING PLAY AT LUNCHTIMES - 30.01.23



Alexandra Park Junior 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 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 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 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 wellbeing and are in line with all current good practice advice on health and safety, wellbeing and development.

The school will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to the OPAL mentor at your child's school. If you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please have a look at the OPAL website ([www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://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 hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtime for all children.

**To see an example of play in action (video) please visit this website:**

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=opaL+PLY+YOUTUBE&docid=608053613190794617&mid=7F36A6913E-F190DA1EC67F36A6913EF190DA1EC6&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Attached to this newsletter is our first OPAL play newsletter, these will be sent every half term to update families of the new developments in the project.

**We also ask families if they would kindly take part in a small questionnaire. This is attached to this newsletter and a paper copy of this will be sent home with the children today. If we could ask that these are sent back Wednesday 25th January next week.**

### Importance of Sleep

Please see attached information about a free resource that can help parents and children to learn more about their sleep and develop better bedtime routines. Sleep is essential to brain function, by helping children to sleep better, we can help them to succeed in school.

### Let's get reading - BOOM Reader



*"If you are going to get anywhere in life you have to read a lot of books." - Roald Dahl*

Well done to all the children and families who have logged onto Boom reader. We are pleased to announce the most home reading logs recorded on Boom reader this week.

Position	Name	Reads at home
First Place	Haseeb Hussain Class 6	22 home reads
Second place	Husayn Siddiq Class 5	14 home reads
Third Place	Raja Ahmed Class 4 Fiza Zahra Class 10	10 home reads



### Spelling Shed Winners

Place	Total points awarded for correct spellings	Child
1st	58,261,584	Anus Khan Class 11
2nd	56,356,202	Saif Iqbal Class 10
3rd	41,169,824	Saad Raza Class 10



### TT Rockstars - CELEBRATIONS!

The most accurate Class	Class 3
The most active class	Class 6
The most improved speed	Ismaeel Shakir Class 7
The most active player	Zoya Muhammad Class 6

### Word Aware

This week's word is 'seething'. Please encourage your child to use this word when out and about and complete the activities, which Miss Varley will share on Class Dojo.



### Attendance

Well done to classes 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 10 for achieving 95% attendance last week.

A reminder that school begins promptly at 8.40am.



### Dates for next week:

**Monday 23rd January** - Class 6 Sound workshop/10am Parents Coffee morning

**Tuesday 24th January** - Class 5 Sound workshop

**Wednesday 25th January** - Class 4 Sound workshop/Yr 4 RE workshop

**Friday 27th January** - Whole school Choral Speaking Competition



## PRACTICAL SLEEP TIPS FOR CHILDREN

**Everybody can benefit from having a good sleep routine – even grown-ups! A good sleep routine needs to be planned well in advance. Consistency and firmness are also key.**

Firstly you need to consider what time bedtime will be and then work backwards, planning the hour leading up to it in some detail. If your child isn't settling until late you may need to gradually move their bedtime as previously described, the routine will need to be gradually moved too.

- Make sure bedtime is realistic, if your child isn't falling asleep until 11pm there is no point starting a routine at 6pm.
- Create a calm, sleep-friendly bedroom. It needs to promote relaxation so decorate in calming colours, remove gadgets from the room (including the TV) and put toys away. Keep the room dark to block out external light and never have it too warm, 16-18 degrees is ideal.
- Don't send children to their bedroom/bed if they've been challenging. Their bedrooms should be a safe haven and not one where they feel anxious, stressed or worried.
- Dim the lights in the hour before bedtime, close the curtains if needs be and create some darkness to help to promote melatonin (sleep hormone) production.
- Turn all screens off in the hour before bedtime to help calm your child and to support the production of melatonin (the sleep hormone).
- Offer quiet activities that are motivating to your child. Fine motor skill activities are perfect to aid relaxation eg jigsaws, colouring in, threading, building with bricks etc.
- Consider introducing supper time. Slow releasing carbohydrates are great for keeping little tummies full. Dairy products are also very calming at night time. Avoid anything sugar loaded or containing caffeine.
- Baths are great if your child finds them relaxing. If however they are fearful of them or get overexcited they may not help in the bedtime routine. Ideally a bath should take place 30 minutes before bedtime as this aids relaxation by increasing the body temperature. It is the slow decrease in body temperature that helps us to feel more relaxed and nod off more easily.
- Get ready for bed in the same order – for example, pyjamas on, tooth brushing, toilet etc.
- Once in bed spend some time reading a bedtime story with your child.
- Give hugs and kisses and tell your child 'it's night time, go to sleep'.
- Wake them up at the same time each morning to help to strengthen their body clock.

For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at [thesleepcharity.org.uk](https://thesleepcharity.org.uk) or contact us on [info@thesleepcharity.org.uk](mailto:info@thesleepcharity.org.uk)

## Opal launch

### WHATS NEW

- Music in the playground
- More sports equipment, tyres, creative space.
- Water wall
- More areas to play
- Mixed years play together

## WELCOME TO OPAL PLAYTIMES AT ALEXANDRA PARK

### OUR VISION

Opal's vision is that every child in every school has an amazing hour of high quality play every day – with no exceptions. We completely endorse this vision - our aim is to ensure that all of our children experience at least an hour of high quality play every day.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to expand and develop our playtimes. We will include spaces and resources to enable our children to immerse themselves in all 16 play types, we will explain these in more detail in our upcoming newsletters.

In order for us to not overwhelm the children, and to be able to teach them the skills they require to manage their own risks, we need to take small steps.

The resources we provide will grow week on week. We are being guided by our fantastic Opal Mentor, Julie.



### PLAY ASSEMBLIES

One of the first changes the children will encounter will be our new Play Assemblies. These will take place weekly, and this is where each new item or area of play will be introduced to the children. We will ask them:

*How could we play with this?*

*What risks could there be?*

*Is this something you would enjoy playing with?*

We will then let the children know when these items, will be available for them to use. This gives the children an opportunity to process the change, absorb this information and self-evaluate any potential risks for themselves.





Dear Parent,

**1. How important do you think playtime is for your child? (Please tick)**

- Very important  
 Quite important  
 Not very important

**2. Currently, how much does your child enjoy their school playtimes? (Feel free to ask them!) (Please tick)**

- Playtime is good  
 Playtime is a bit boring  
 My child does not like playtime  
 They would like to do more things at playtime  
 Playtime is too short  
 Playtime is too long

**3. Thinking about your own childhood, what type of things do you remember playing as a child both at school and in and around your home environment?**

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**4. Did you benefit as a child from your play experiences? (Please tick)**

- Yes  
 No  
 If yes, please tell us how (for example what skills did you gain or how did it help you develop as a child)

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**5. Do you feel your own child has the same play opportunities to play outdoors as you did?**

- Yes  
 No  
 If No, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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**6. If you could do something to address this, would you?**

- Yes  
 No

**7. If school could improve the play opportunities they offer, what types of things would you like to see and why?**

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Thanks for completing this survey. It'll help us to make playtimes better at the school.



*Alexandra Park Junior School*

*To Learn, Be Happy and Achieve Our Best*



Ideas and information for parents and carers of children aged between 4 and 11 years



# The Power of Playtime!

Outdoor play, every day, will change your child's life

**Step inside to find out:**

Why it's important for children to play outside every day  
How your child's school is changing playtime  
3 key ways you can help

**Plus a pull out  
and keep sheet**

including **8 top tips** for more  
outdoor play at home and  
**3 sure-fire outdoor  
play starters**

**Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC**

*Supporting school improvement through play*

[www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)



## Dear parents, carers and guardians

This booklet will give you some easy ideas to help your children be happier, healthier and (even) more physically active than they are now. All this, we promise, with much less effort from you! A big claim for a small book, but we know the Power of Playtime!

What we think of as 'childhood' may seem very different now to your experiences growing up. But although the world may have changed, children are still exactly the same – they want time to play and be with their friends.

All the research says time playing outdoors is time well spent. Children who play outdoors move more, sleep more, eat better, are happier and care about the planet more. They are even less likely to need glasses! However, with busy lives, busy schools, busy roads and busy neighbourhoods, most children don't get to play out anywhere near as much as you, your parents or grandparents did. This booklet will go through how you and your child's school can help turn that around for not just your children, but all their friends too.

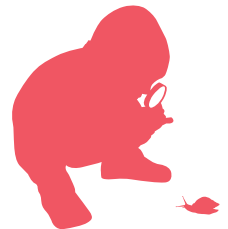
Michael Follett

Director of Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC.



**Michael Follett**

*is author of Creating Excellence in Primary School Playtimes and is the UK's leading expert on school playtimes.*



## What are your play memories?

Take a moment to think about your own childhood play. What did you enjoy most? Were there adults around, or just other children? What did you learn from those experiences? How would your play memories compare with your parents', or grandparents'? What are the differences to your children's everyday play experiences?

Making dens, throwing snowballs, dressing up, building and dismantling things, getting muddy, play fighting, playing cricket in the street and chasing games are not frivolous pastimes; they are a necessary part of childhood, the experiences that help make us who we are.

Having time, space and permission to play is essential for mental health, physical strength and creating the friendships that will support your child for life – as they probably did for you, your mum or dad, aunts or grandparents.



Are children losing

## The Power of Playtime

In a global survey, 97% of teachers said playtime is critical for children to reach their full potential, but in the UK children have lost over 45 minutes of playtime at school every week since the 1990s.

In England 1 in 5 children get to a 'green space' like a local park less than once a month, and in 2020, under coronavirus restrictions, 60% of children said they had even less time outdoors than they usually do.

*Sources: Dr W Russell et al, 2021 OPAL Literature review; The People and Nature Survey for England: Children's survey, 2020, Natural England.*





About the

## OPAL Primary Programme

You may have been given this leaflet because your child's school is becoming an OPAL school. If so, you'll want to know what that means.

The award-winning OPAL Primary Programme helps schools improve children's play experiences. It has been developed over the last 20 years by Michael Follett, previously a teacher, a playworker and a school advisor.

In short, the programme helps schools plan for and invest in play in the same way they plan for literacy, maths or safeguarding.

**As part of the programme, the headteacher will be introducing:**

- more space to play
- more stuff to play with
- a risk-benefit approach so children are safe to take the risks they need
- training for the staff that look after children's play.

There are now over 500 OPAL schools worldwide, and all these schools have told us their children are more active, more resilient and more creative. Children in OPAL schools make deeper friendships, concentrate and behave better in class, and have less time off sick. Finally, most importantly, they are happier. And so are the teachers!

Schools work best as a community – the school staff and school governors are all supporting the OPAL Primary Programme, and they need your help to truly transform children's play.

Turn to  
page 5  
to see what  
you can do



*Supporting school improvement through play*

# When I play outdoors ...

**Pull out  
and keep  
sheet**

**I'm really active**

**I sleep better**

**I make friends**

**I fly!**

**I learn to trust myself  
and feel trusted by you**

**I fall ... and I get up**

**I explore**

**I learn about nature ...  
and learn to care for the planet**

**I work out my problems**

**I try out 'real life'**

**I get to know how my body  
moves and where it ends**

**I am LOUD**

**I am quiet**

**I build GRIT**

**I get dirty**

**I have lots to talk about**

**I'm sick less often**



Play is what I do  
when grown-ups  
stop telling me  
what to do.

**I am happy ... and when I'm  
happy, I want to keep playing**

# 3

## Sure-fire

# outdoor play starters

## 1

### Den making

Make a place to store sticks, boxes, material, rope, solar powered lights, pegs ... stuff to build dens of all sizes that can be pulled out and played with.



Can grown-ups please give me more time and space to play?

#### Can you ...

- Add soft toys/farm animals/cars/plastic plates and cups etc?
- leave the den up all week - or longer - to see how it grows?

How about planning a garden or living room camp out? It might be as good as a holiday!





## 2 Mud kitchens and imagination laboratories

Mud kitchens and imagination laboratories are fantastic for role play and experimenting for all ages. This could be the best way to encourage a budding interest in medicine – or baking! You can buy kits, but children will love an old table and a few old saucepans just as much.

### Can you ...

- provide old pots, pans, forks, wooden spoons and chopsticks?
- add water, leaves and twigs to make perfumes and potions?
- make the play colourful and bubbly with food colouring, washing up liquid or washable paint?

If you can't use mud, then try sand, sawdust, pea gravel, rice or just water. Be warned... you may be invited to dinner for mud pie and gravy!

## 3 Outdoor chalking

Chalk is fantastic for 'pop-up' play. It washes off with water, so one rainstorm and you're back to a blank canvas!



### Things to try out

- Use as much space as possible - a car park, pavement or a car-free road is perfect.
- Encourage experiments – as well as drawing with chalk, you can crush it, grind it up, make powder, add water, etc.
- Introduce classic games like hopscotch, noughts and crosses or hangman, or suggest they write a long story or poem on the ground. Photograph it to share.

# 9 Top tips

## for more outdoor play at home



- 1 Explore the outdoor places near home where your children can play every day – a garden, balcony, park or street.
- 2 See if you can arrange for your child's friends to join in ... it's more fun with more children.
- 3 Let the children decide how they play and be there to support them when needed.
- 4 Check the weather, and make sure everyone is dressed to play outdoors. If you are going out with your children, take additional warm clothing, snacks and a hot drink if it is cold.
- 5 See what happens if you step back and just watch ... or try letting them lead you in their play.
- 6 Introduce stuff to play with to build/make/create. If they build a den or structure, can they leave it up for a while?
- 7 Let them take some risks and make mistakes!
- 8 As soon as you think you can trust them, leave them to it ... and enjoy some well-deserved time to yourself.
- 9 Children love physical play with friends and you. Tickling, wrestling, play fights, chase and horseplay build bonds and emotional intelligence.

**For more ideas, ask your child's teacher or the school's play lead.**



# 3 ways

## to help your child's school to increase play across the day

1

### Dress for success!

Your child's school will be trying to reduce wet play times. When children aren't allowed out to play they tend to be less able to concentrate, and less well-behaved ... meaning they will learn less in the afternoon. To make sure children play outdoors **every day** they need to be warm, dry and comfortable, with the right clothing for all kinds of weather.



#### In winter:

- wellies or waterproof shoes/boots
- a waterproof (not 'showerproof') coat
- waterproof trousers if at all possible
- layers of clothes – so extra leggings and socks; thin and thick jumpers
- hats/scarves
- spare shoes and clothes (just in case they get wet).



#### In summer:

- a hat that will stay on
- light long sleeve T-shirts
- sun cream
- spare shoes and clothes (just in case they get wet)
- swimming kit (optional).

These are the same clothes your children need to play outdoors at weekends and in the holidays, so it is worth making sure they have them.

Talk to the school if you need support. Outdoor clothing is usually tough so you can get good-quality raincoats and wellies in second-hand stores, through local community groups, on Freecycle, or by asking friends and family. There are lots of helpful blogs and support groups online if you are new to getting outdoors. It will take some experimenting to get it just right, but it's definitely worth it.

In addition, make sure **you** are comfy, warm and dry too so when you go out to play as a family, you don't want to come home first!



2

## Clear out the junk and bring it to school

Your school will be asking you to bring in stuff for children to play with, including old junk, bric-a-brac or business waste (in case you know a builder, plumber, gardener or office manager). Don't worry, the school will check everything before it goes in the playground and make sure it is safe enough to play with!

### Things you can bring:

- old suitcases, attaché cases, handbags or toolboxes of any type
- kitchen pots, pans, baking trays, worktables, wooden spoons, chopping boards
- fabric (large sheets/brightly coloured material) or tarpaulins
- wooden or plastic pallets, boxes, trays or crates
- pegs (for holding stuff together)
- old clothes for dressing up
- tyres from cars, scooters, motorbikes and bikes
- child car seats, buggies or pushchairs.

3

## Support your school's plans for a play-filled future

Your child's school will be planning some big changes – they may create a huge sandpit, plant lots of trees and bushes, or introduce many more objects to play with. If you can help with time, skills (carpentry, gardening, fundraising) or money, please do let the school know.

It's also important to talk to other parents about the difference more play is making; about what you did when you played at school and at home; and discuss what else needs to change.

It may be that people in the community can help make it easier to walk to school, create play spaces around the school, or help to make nearby nature trails.

Make sure you tell the teachers how important playtime is to your child, or share how great it is on social media. You'll make their day!



# Be aware, you go outdoors to play at your own risk ... but you'll open the door to some amazing new experiences!

## Inspiration for outdoor play at home

### Websites:

- Backyard Nature  
[www.backyardnature.org](http://www.backyardnature.org)
- National Trust 50 things to do before you're 11¼  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/children-and-nature](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/children-and-nature)
- NSPCC, Is my child ready to go out alone?  
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/leaflets/out-alone>
- Ordnance Survey Greenspaces map  
<https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/greenspaces/>
- Play England  
[www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)
- Playing Out  
[www.playingout.net](http://www.playingout.net)



### Books:

- Linda McGurk, There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather: A Scandinavian Mom's secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Confident Kids. 2017, Simon and Schuster.
- Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield, The Wild Weather Book: Loads of things to do Outdoors in Rain, Wind and Snow. 2013, Frances Lincoln.
- Michael Rosen, Michael Rosen's Book of Play: Why Play Really Matters, and 101 ways to Get More of it in Your Life. 2019. Wellcome Collection.
- Michael Follett, Creating Excellence in Primary School Playtimes, 2017 JKP.



## About OPAL

OPAL is the UK's leading not-for-profit organisation working with primary schools to transform children's play through the OPAL Primary Programme. Hundreds of schools and tens of thousands of children are benefiting from the changes OPAL helps schools to make.

Thanks to Sport England for funding the publication of this booklet.



Ask your child's teacher or the school's play lead if you want more ideas.

## Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC

*Supporting school improvement through play*

Get in touch and share about outdoor play!

[www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)



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@OpalOutdoorplay

