

Growing responsible global citizens

Benchill Primary School
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Monday 20th January 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Your child's school is about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, co-operation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through the provision of improved play experiences every day.

The OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning Programme is the result of 17 years testing and development in over 400 schools and is now used in Canada, France, Australia and New Zealand as well as across the UK.

In 2018 OPAL won first prize in an EU funded award for the best *active school programme* in Europe, beating 31 entries from 20 countries.

The OPAL Programme 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 is as educational, healthy and enjoyable as possible.

One reason this school is carrying out this programme is that childhood has changed and many children no longer get their *play needs* met outside of school,

e.g.

- Average screen time per day 5 hours
- Average outdoor play time per week 5 hours
- Percentage of UK children who *only get to play outdoors with other children* when at school = 56%

There are many proven benefits for schools which carry out the OPAL Programme. They usually include: more enjoyment of school, an end to teaching time lost to disputes between children, fewer accidents and greatly improved behaviour.

Playtime is not wasted time. Play is the process evolution has come up with to enable children to learn all of the things that cannot be taught in a classroom, in an enjoyable way. 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 place to play in
- Having a certain amount of freedom



Headteacher: Mrs H Eken
Heads of School: Mrs F Davies & Miss A Holt
Chair of Governors: Mr Ian Madley



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 will be fostering are essential for children's physical and mental well-being, are healthy and are in line with all current good practice advice on health & safety, well-being and development. Ofsted has now placed almost 50% of an inspection on the areas influenced by this programme!

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 at this web address – www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk

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!

As part of the introduction to OPAL, all staff are required to attend training. The training is going to take place on the afternoon of Friday 14th February.

School will be closing at 12pm on Friday 14th February. All children will need to be collected by 12pm so staff can start training at 12.30pm. This is the Friday we finish for half term.

School will re-open on Monday 24th February at 8.45am.

Kindest regards,

Mrs H Eken
Headteacher

