



Courage, Forgiveness, Service, Kindness

Dear Parents / Carers,

I am writing to you to inform you about a very important part of our day at Sissinghurst which is OPAL. OPAL stands for Outdoor Play and Learning and happens every lunch time for the whole school. This is something that we introduced a few years ago in order to provide every child with rich opportunities to be creative, collaborative and active in their outdoor play. We have created an environment that is safe enough for 'health and safety' but also challenging enough for children's ongoing development.

Statistics show that children in British primary schools spend 20% or 1.4 years of their school attendance in play, yet most schools have no strategic or values-based approach to playtimes. Play is the process through which children learn everything that they need to know that cannot be taught. It is what wires the brain, builds capable bodies and is the foundation for building relationships, the reason why we chose to embrace OPAL play and make playtimes as active, engaging and exciting as they could be.

OPAL play involves all children being able to access a variety of resources and equipment every day, such as: the mud kitchen, sand pit, den building, tyres, crates, scooters, bikes and trikes, reading books, pirate ship play, sports activities, water play, small world, dressing up, climbing frames etc. The list goes on! By having access to all of these things, children are able to make choices in their play, they are able to be imaginative, adventurous, resilient, confident and cooperative and it allows them to have opportunities to explore all 16 types of play, as shown in the image below.



An important aspect of OPAL includes our termly play assemblies. These involve us coming together as a whole school to talk about our play; always involving the children and their ideas. We often share new resources and discuss how we might play with them, introduce play projects linked to areas of the curriculum and have discussions about 'risk-benefits' so that we can explore how to manage possible risks. We talk about the Golden Welly Award too and how each class can win this.

We take the Dynamic Risk Benefit Management approach through OPAL, which means that staff support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but are also vigilant and take action, if they think that risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely. It involves a balance of reducing the likelihood of harm whilst also preserving as much of the benefit of play as possible and empowering children to manage their own risks.

We recommend watching this video if you would like to see what a playtime may look like in a school <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm7IfAEsjqI> and of course follow us on Instagram or X to see how Opal works in our school. Remember also there is a chance for you to sign up to our weekly Opal sessions for parents where you can join your child for lunchtime (including dinner if you wish) and see for yourself the wonderful things going on in school. Look out for the termly invite from the office so you can sign up.

We enjoy a termly non-uniform day where we ask families to donate items to keep our Opal stock replenished (and give you the chance to have a sort out!). There are so many things we can use in our play, do check with us before you throw anything out – it is likely we can play with it!

If you would like to find out more about OPAL play, please follow this link to find our OPAL page on our school website <https://www.sissinghurst.kent.sch.uk/page/?title=Opal+Play&pid=7>.

If you ever have any questions about OPAL or you have resources that you would like to donate, please send over a study bugs and we will respond to you as soon as we can. We really value your input with OPAL so we also often send out parent surveys to get your feedback.

Kind regards,

The OPAL Team