



# Five Ways Primary School

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Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024

## Introductory Letter - OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning)

Dear Parents,

As a result of parental feedback in the most recent parent questionnaire, we have pleasure in informing you that we will be implementing a programme called 'OPAL' to improve opportunities for pupils' physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play during lunchtimes.

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, 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 of the reasons we are implementing OPAL at Five Ways is that childhood has changed, and many children no longer get their play needs met out of school. Current data shows the following:

- 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.

At Five Ways, we understand that 'play' is crucial in child development. Play enables 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 (*more details to follow*)
- having things to play with
- having a certain amount of freedom.



To enable us to improve play opportunities for children at Five Ways, we need to buy some new resources and ask you to donate some everyday resources (known as loose parts) in preparation for the OPAL programme to be implemented, following the October half term break.

Loose parts are any materials that can be easily moved, combined, and incorporated into children's free play. The items we are looking for will enable our children to enjoy a wider range of play experiences during their lunchtime. Please see below and the poster attached to this letter, for some examples of loose parts:

- Suitcases of any size and type
- Anything on wheels/castors
- Plastic milk crates/supermarket delivery crates/plastic bread trays
- Briefcases, especially hard cased ones
- Road signs and cones
- Kitchen pots, pans, baking trays, work tables, wooden spoons, chopping boards
- Tools like small spades/shovels, trowels and brooms
- Tubes of various sizes and various materials
- Buckets
- Nets and thick ropes
- Keyboards/torches/laptops/calculators/mobile phones/desk phones/webcams/cameras that are no longer working
- Fabric (large sheets/brightly coloured fabric)
- Foam sheets/bodyboards/camping roll mats/yoga mats
- Wooden pallets
- Metal frames
- Cable drums
- Guttering
- Noodles (the type you use in the swimming pool!)
- Hats/scarves/jazzy shirts/elasticated skirts/waistcoats/wedding dresses/character costumes
- Pegs (to help to set up dens).

We will be holding a collection week from **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September to Friday 4<sup>th</sup> October**, to coincide with parent consultation week so that loose parts can be dropped off at school when coming for your appointment with your child's classteacher. Please do not bring your donations in before this date as we will have nowhere to store them. If objects are very large, such as wooden pallets, please contact the office if you require help carrying the objects onto the school site. ***Any loose parts need to be placed under the canopy outside the main school office during the week commencing Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September.***

Once OPAL is implemented fully at Five Ways, children may get a bit messier, be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom, and how they like. (*More details to follow.*) The experiences we will be 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.



Five Ways will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity for parents to come and talk to our OPAL mentor at school in the future. 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 parents will be invited into school during the lunchtime period to come and see for yourselves what is happening and have the opportunity to join in the play with your child.

We are really excited about the OPAL project and hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve lunchtime play for children at Five Ways. We look forward to receiving any 'loose parts' donations during w/c 30<sup>th</sup> September and providing you with further information regarding our OPAL launch date and additional collection dates.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs R Mander  
Headteacher

