



Ashbrook School

The High St, Two Mile Ash,
Milton Keynes MK8 8NA
Tel: 01908 561366

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OPAL – Our Exciting Outdoor Adventure for Learning

Dear Parents and Carers

Ashbrook school is delighted to share news of a new initiative 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 do not 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



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As we improve play opportunities we will need to collect resources. We will share a wish list which we will begin fundraising for, we will also add items that you may have at home and no longer need. We are very keen to hear from any local companies that might be able to source items for us to, so please spread the word with your friends, families and contacts.

The children will 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 Ashbrook 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.

We 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), where you will find lots of useful information and several videos about the programme.

The first step on our journey is to ensure all children have a pair of named wellies in school, so that we can protect wear and tear on their school shoes. The second step is to build somewhere for the wellies to live (if you know any handy people that might be interested in donating their skills, please let us know). If your child does not have a pair of wellies in school already, please send them in as soon as possible. We will be setting up a welly swap shop and will send more details on this very soon!

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. If you are interested in being part of the team to drive this project forward with us, please speak to us. We would love the community involvement.

We are very excited about this project and hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtimes for all children. If you have any questions, fundraising ideas or potential donations please come and chat with me or OPAL Curricular Lead Mrs Cobley.

With kindest regards,

Jamie Ainscow
Headteacher

Hayley Cobley
Foundation Lead