



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

# Do we know it works?

OPAL is a UK and world leader in supporting schools to improve the quality of children's play.

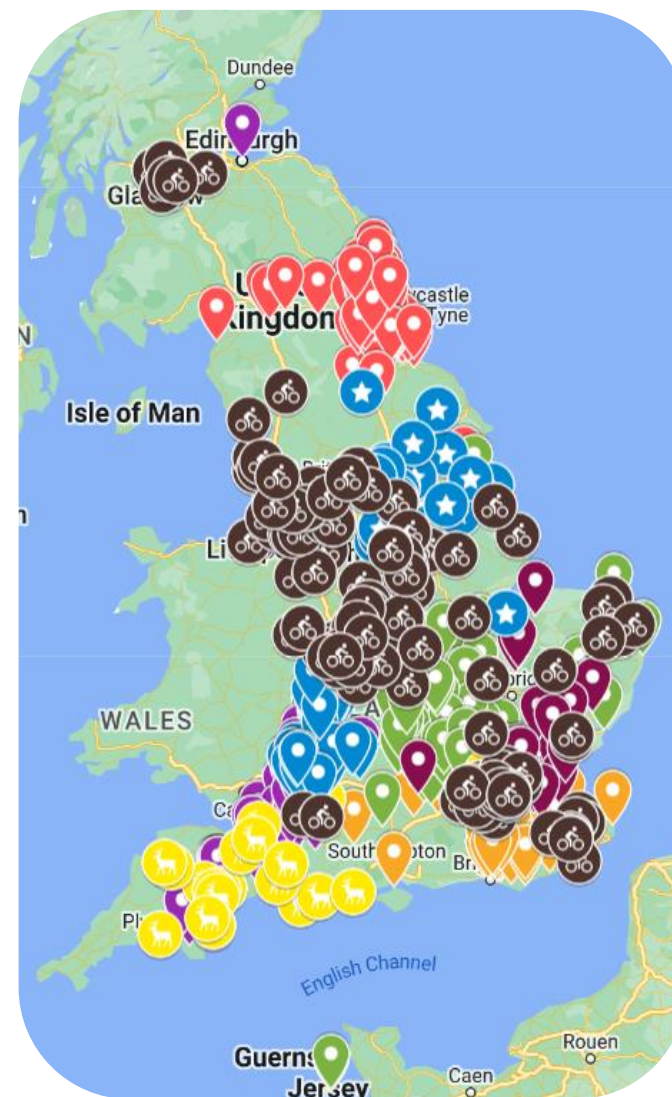
**Our mission is for every primary school child to have an amazing playtime, every day, with no exceptions!**

## Our delivery

- Over 2,000 schools and over 1 million children have benefited;
- Projects in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, France, Malaysia, the USA and Poland.



Citations: National Children's Bureau; Public Health England; All Party Parliamentary Group on Childhood; Cambridge University PEDAL (Play Education Development and Learning); Sport England.



# Outdoor play in primary schools



Erasmus+





**Amazing playtimes, for every child, every day**



# Childhood has changed – children have not!

Let's think about play.

At 10 years old...

Where were you, who were you  
with, what were you up to?



# How does this enclosure meet the needs of the great apes?



# How does this meet the needs of children?



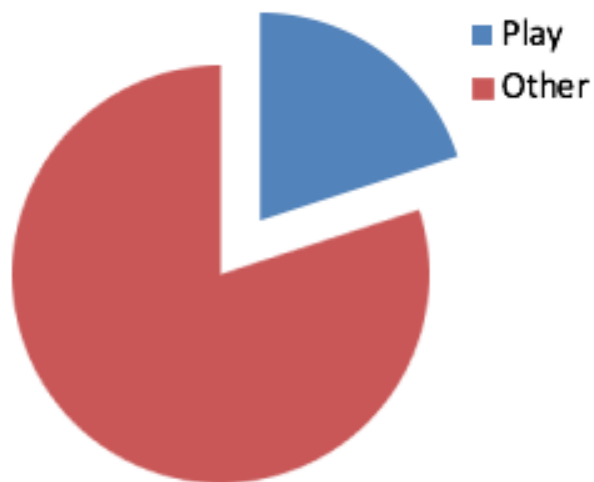
## A London School Playground

For a good quality of life ... what do children need?

**We are the gatekeepers of children's experience: we can control, restrict or provide access, permission, time, space, and opportunities**



# Play makes up 20% of school life



**Per year**  
231 hours  
37 days  
7.4 weeks

**Primary years**  
1.4 years



# Outstanding playtime every day, with no exceptions





# Integration

- New friendships
- Inclusion
- Social skills
- Non-judgemental
- No age restrictions
- No gender bias



# Inclusion – access for all



# The unteachable curriculum

We don't have to choose  
between play and learning.

Children need to **PLAY** to  
**BE ADAPTABLE** **CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE**  
**PROBLEM SOLVE** **LEARN** **CREATE**  
**PROCESS EMOTIONS**  
**INTERNALISE EXPERIENCES**  
**DISCOVER** **CHALLENGE**  
**BE HEALTHY THEMSELVES**  
**LAUGH & HAVE FUN**  
**LEARN TO WORK TOGETHER** **IMAGINE**  
**LEARN TO LEAD**  
**EXPRESS** **EXPLORE** **SPEAK**  
**IDEAS** **DEVELOP** **READ**  
**AN INQUIRING**  
**MANAGE** **MIND** **WRITE**  
**STRESS** **COUNT**  
Because **PLAY** matters.



# Changes to childhood



Traffic



No ball games

Culture of fear

Obesity

Mental health problems

Lack of resilience

Structured lives



Working parents



Technology



# Childhood has changed, children have not

*UK children's screen time is an average six hours per day.*



*“By the age of seven the average child will have spent a **full year of 24-hour days** watching recreational screen media.” Dr Aric Sigman*



# Resilience and emotional regulation

*Children build resilience by overcoming challenges and fear.*



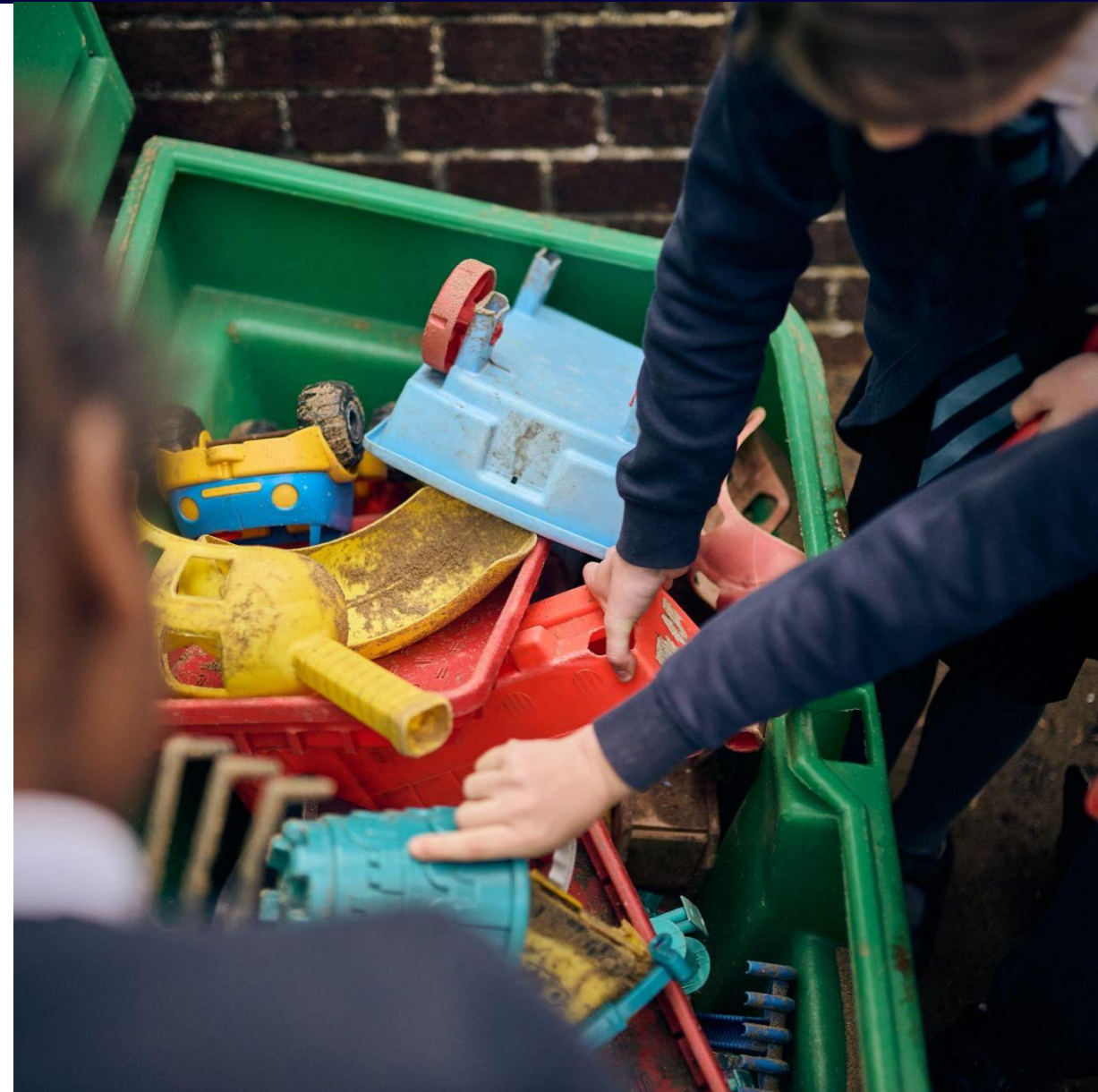
*Resilience isn't a biological gift from great parents... it is something we need to gain through experience.*



# What is play?

Play is a process that is:

- Freely chosen
- Intrinsically motivated
- Self-directed



# The benefits of play

- Strength and endurance
- Whole body coordination
- Emotional attachment
- Emotional and social skills
- Hand-eye coordination
- Thinking, reasoning, problem solving
- Early language development

- Communication skills
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Artistic creativity
- Narrative skills
- Social and group work skills
- Understanding rules
- Discussion skills
- Mental representation

**Self-regulation:** The ability to be aware of and regulate one's own cognitive and emotional mental states and behaviour.



# Health benefits for all the family

- Exercise
- Family time
- Fun
- Improved mental health
- Fresh air
- Relaxation
- Feel good factor

Parent's booklet... it's **free and full of great ideas!**



# Adult intervention... playwork style

## Hinders

- Be careful
- You're going to hurt yourself
- That's too big for you
- Passes on own anxiety
- Distracts child from engaging in certain play types
- Adulterates play - gets over involved/excited
- Over competitive
- Allows child to always win



## Helpful

- Supportive
- Models behaviour
- Follows child's direction
- Provides resources
- Thinks about when to intervene
- Waits to be invited
- Observes
- Learns and reflects

We don't always get it right!

# The importance of risk in children's play

Risk means going beyond what is already known and easily accomplished.



# Children's play and leisure - promoting a balanced approach (Sep 2012)

In 2012 the HSE worked with the UK's Play Safety forum to agree this guidance.

Source:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/chlds-play-statement.htm>

“Play is great for children's wellbeing and development.”

“When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and the benefits.”

“No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.”

**Striking the right balance** means:

- Weighing up risks and benefits.
- Focusing on and controlling the most serious risk.
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity.
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk.
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full.



# How do we develop play in school?

## Policy and planning

They are making sure improving play is always part of their planning.

## Improving space and access

Children will be able to access a great environment all year.

## Risk-benefit approach

They will balance challenge and exploration with sensible care.

## Knowledge

Their staff will use playwork skills to improve their practice and the environment.

## Communication

They will keep talking to children, parents and staff about play.



# The impact of OPAL

- More physically active more of the year.
- Developing life skills – resilience, competencies.
- Risk management skills, improved decision making.
- Social skills, team building, negotiation.
- Improved mental health and wellbeing.
- 100% girls more active.

- Huge core skills improvement.
- Improved behaviour.
- Less accidents, incidents and whinging.
- More inclusive. No child bored or feeling left out.
- Increased learning time. More settled and ready to learn.
- Cost saving – SLT and teachers' time.



# Creating a playful environment – outdoor loose parts



# Imagination, creativity and teamwork



# Natural loose parts



# We still need your upcycled loose parts



Thank you – please keep sending in resources for playtime!



# The essentials

**A waterproof coat**



**A pair of wellies**



**Tolerance of dirt and mud**



Outdoor play is essential to your child's health and wellbeing.



# No age restriction on a mud kitchen





# Time to play

- Staff are outside if you have any questions.
- Let the children show you around.
- Let the children lead.
- Help yourself to resources.
- Join in if invited!
- Have fun!



# Thank you for listening and for your contributions



Your OPAL journey is about to begin!

