

A key area of our school improvement plan is to develop our play offer for all of our pupils at lunchtimes.  We have embarked on an incredibly exciting project with play experts **OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning),** who will support us as we transform play at Mill Hill Primary School.  <https://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/>

Our **OPAL**journey began in May 2022 and since this time, we have started to transform our outdoor environment. Our children love the new outdoor opportunities and the **OPAL**approach offers so much more for them to do!

At Mill Hill Primary School we believe play and learning go hand-in-hand. Playtime takes up 20% of a child's day in school and provides opportunities for children to learn all the things that cannot be taught: socialisation, co-operation, co-ordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and negotiation.

Childhood has changed drastically during the last 25 years. Children haven't. Lives are busier and technology has changed the way that we all live our lives. With more restrictions on our time and access to space, research has shown that only 56% of UK children play outside with other children and that many are averaging up to 5 hours of screen time a day. Unfortunately, this means that children sometimes miss out on the creative and physical side of play that is so crucial to their development. This is one of our key motivators for embarking on this project.

The **OPAL**programme is the only programme of its kind that has been independently proven to sustainably improve the quality of play in primary schools. It is a mentor supported school improvement programme which will help us to make long term plans to improve the quality of our play opportunities. The programme has many proven benefits that include: more enjoyment of school, less teaching time lost to disputes between children, less accidents and greatly improved behaviour.

Through this approach to play, children are not only more active at lunch or break times, but they are also having the opportunity to further develop life skills such as co-operation, team work and problem solving. They are becoming motivated and enthusiastic builders, engineers, explorers & designers.

**Q: What are the benefits of the OPAL Primary Programme?**

**More teaching time** - most schools report ten minutes more teaching time per teacher with happier, more creative, and well exercised children who settle to classes much more quickly.

**Improved behaviour** - OPAL schools report up to 80% decreases in use of behaviour policies and 90% drops in time spent in resolving playtime issues.

**Faster core skills development** - Children at OPAL schools rapidly develop creativity, imagination, co-operation, resilience, stamina and confidence.

**Inclusion**- OPAL's approach makes play better for every child, every day....no exceptions!

**Happines and wellbeing** - Play is a human need and a human right.  Children and staff at OPAL's schools report feeling less stressed and happier, and more excited about school.

**UN Convention on the rights of the child - Article 31**

"All Children have the right to relax and play and join in with a wide range of cultural & artistic activities"