



St Edmund's and St Joseph's Catholic Primary Schools

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"We learn together in God's love by encouraging and supporting one another."

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[Odrive/admin/letters/letters23-24/stedmunds/OPALParentLaunch250124](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1aBcDeFgHijKlMnOpQrStUvWxYz)

25th January 2024

Dear parents,

Many thanks for the views that you submitted recently in response to the Play questionnaire that we sent out. It was really interesting to read your responses, to see the suggestions you made for how we could further enhance the play provision and we were really grateful that some of you were able to offer your help too. 96% of the parental responses considered play to be very or extremely important for children. This high percentage reflects how we feel as a staff team too.

We have just commenced our exciting new project to make our playtimes at St Edmunds even better for our children, in conjunction with Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC. The project will improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play.

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is the result of over 20 years of testing and development in over 800 schools worldwide. In 2018, OPAL won the best active schools' programme in Europe award and has been cited in two parliamentary reports as delivering outstanding practice. OPAL has also won two UK national playwork awards and 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.

As a Rights Respecting School, we already acknowledge that all children have the right to play as stated in the UN convention on the rights of the child and recognise the significant impact that play can have on our wellbeing and mental health.

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. The accidental loss of play from childhood will not accidentally reappear, especially given:

- the average screen time per day is six hours.
- the average outdoor play time per week is five hours.



- the 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 improved behaviour.

Play is not just 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 great fun. OPAL defines play as, “What I do when everyone else has stopped telling me what to do.” This highlights that play should be self-directed, intrinsically motivated and freely chosen. 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.

As our school improves play opportunities for your children, you may find that we are asking you for donations of resources and making changes about how the children use the school grounds. We will be aiming to use more of the grounds, for more of the year. Your children may get a bit messier (which 74% of the play questionnaire responses positively supported), be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like. The experiences the 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.

There will be more information that we’re sharing with you over the coming months as the project evolves and when we’re needing your help with specific donations of items. In the coming 18 months we’re hoping there will be opportunities for you to come in and play with your child so you can see for yourselves what is happening and have the chance to join in too.

Along with this introductory letter I have also included OPAL’s ‘The Power of Playtime’ booklet for your information. It captures a little bit of information about OPAL and also some lovely play ideas which you could make use of outside of 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.

We are really excited about this project and hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtime for all of our children.

Kind regards



Katie Copeman
Head of School