

East Hunsbury Primary School

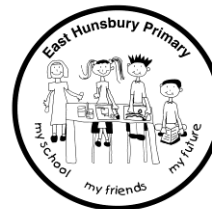
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Exciting News About Playtimes



Dear Families

East Hunsbury Primary School is about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play at break and lunchtimes called OPAL.

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme 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 it can possibly be!

OPAL is tried and tested and we have seen firsthand the results it can have. OPAL 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 play work awards.

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.

Research About Children's Outdoor Play, Screen Time & Wellbeing

- **Less than half of children spend time outdoors daily.** National survey data (Children's People and Nature Survey, 2024) shows that only **45%** of children spend time in outdoor spaces every day or most days.
- **A third of children don't play outdoors after school.** A 2025 University of Exeter study found that **34%** of children do not play outside after school, and **1 in 5** do not play outdoors at all at weekends.
- **Young children are spending more time on screens than recommended.** Research suggests that children aged 2–4 typically spend **around 1.5–2 hours a day** on screens, even though guidance recommends **no more than one hour** for this age group.
- **Older children spend significantly longer online.** Ofcom's latest report shows that children aged 8–11 spend **around 3 hours a day online**, rising to **4+ hours daily** for 12–15-year-olds.

Headteacher: Mrs K Pennington



- **Outdoor time supports wellbeing and behaviour.** Studies show that even **60 minutes of outdoor time per day**—especially in natural spaces—can support mental health, lower stress and build social skills and resilience.

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.

There are certain things children must have 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.
- Understanding how to play safely.

As the school improves play opportunities for your children, you may find we ask you for resources to make changes about how the children use the school grounds. We may 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 the school aims to foster 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. ***If you have a company that can donate resources OR help build something e.g. a shed, sandpit (anything!) please let us know!***

The school will be supported by OPAL for 18 months to make sure we do this properly and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to the OPAL mentor at your child's school.

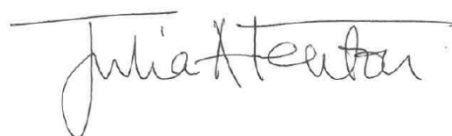
In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please have a look at the OPAL website (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk), where you will find lots of useful information and several videos about the programme.

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.

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



Kathryn Pennington (Headteacher)



Julia Fenton (Assistant Headteacher)