



# An introduction to Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) CIC

*Supporting school improvement through play*



[www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)



**OPAL Mentor**  
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Suffolk, Essex and  
West Kent



## Qualifications:

**MA Play and Playwork**  
**BA (HONS) Playwork and Youth Studies**  
**P.G.C.E**  
**Diploma in Nursery Nursing**

## Experience:

**21 years as a playworker**  
**16 year as a Lecturer in Play and Playwork**  
**8 years as a Manager of Inclusive Adventure Playground**  
**Academic writer – Play and Disability, Play and Neurodiversity, Play during WWII**

# Welcome to OPAL

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

## Our delivery

- 22 Mentors provide advice and support across England
- Over 800 UK schools and over quarter of a million children have benefited
- Projects in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, France and Poland
- International Award Winning programme
- Expansion to many more schools funded by a £250,000 grant from Sport England and the National Lottery



# Introduction: What is OPAL?

**We combine:  
School Improvement - Teaching - Playwork**

A strategic school improvement programme supporting school improvement through play

OPAL supports senior managers to create sustainable change in culture and practice

OPAL provides support through regular meetings spread over 12-24 months and over 100 resources



Ofsted

and



**OFSTED want to know  
how your school plans to  
improve the lives and  
chances of all of your  
children**



## Intent

- Policy
- Audit
- Grounds plan

## Implementation

- Action Plan
- Meeting records
- Changes

## Impact

- Children's' survey
- Parents' survey
- First aid and behaviour data



FOR EVERY  
CHILD IN  
DANGER

Article 31 UNCRC Every child had the right to play

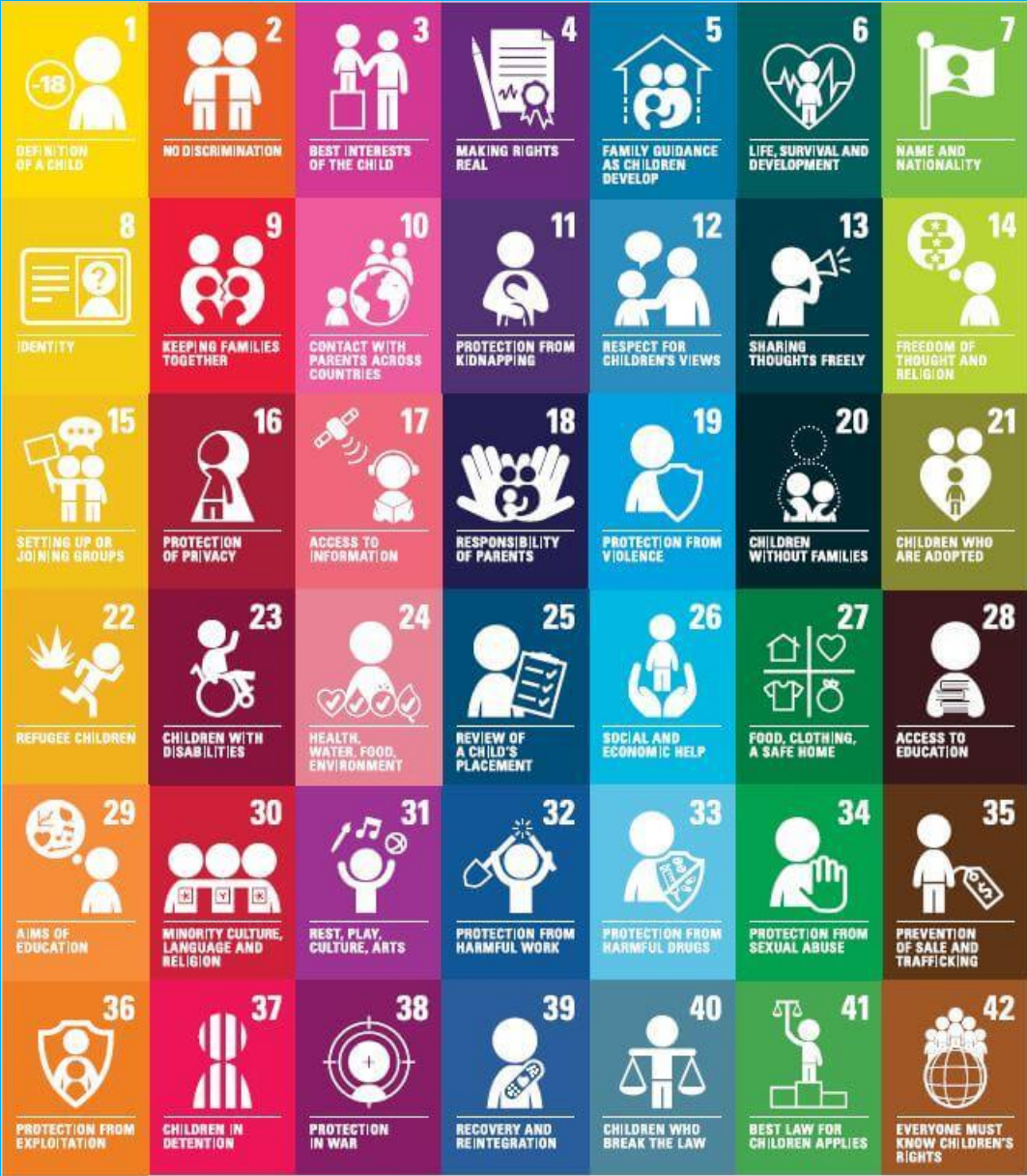
Children's Rights

HOW WE PROTECT  
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

WITH THE UN CONVENTION  
ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Rights





- Article 2- No discrimination
- Article 6 – Life, survival and **development**
- Article 8 - **Identity**
- Article 12- **to have voice heard and views respected**
- Article 13- Freedom of expression
- Article 14 – **Freedom of thought**
- Article 17 – **Access to information**
- Article 23 – Disabled children living a full and decent life with independence and active participation in the community
- Article 24 – **Health and wellbeing**
- Article 28- **Access to education**
- Article 29 – **Aims of education should develop mind, body and talents**
- Article 30- **Minority groups have right to share their culture and language with others in that group**
- Article 31 – **Rest, play, culture and arts**
- Article 39 – **recovery and reintegration from neglect and abuse**

# Time

- Play
- Other



# Play makes up 20% of school life

## Per Year

- 231 hours
- 37 days
- 7.4 weeks

## Primary Years

- 1.4 years



Childhood has changed ...

Children have not

UK Children screen time average

**6+ hours per day**

UK Children average  
social outdoor play

**5 hours per week**



# 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.



# The Impact of OPAL...

- More physically active more of the year
- Developing life skills – resilience, competence
- Risk management skills,
- Improved decision making
- Social skills, team building, negotiation

- Improved mental health and well-being
- Huge core skills improvement
- Improved behaviour
- Less accidents, incidents
- More inclusive
- No child bored, or feeling left out

- Cost saving – SLT and Teachers time
- Increased learning time – More settled and ready to learn



# A London School Playground

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

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





## Dangerous Activity?

**Risk = The ability to move beyond what is already known and already easily accomplished**

**Resilient learners overcome the risk of failure, pain and uncertainty**





# Children's Play and Leisure

## Promoting A Balanced Approach

September 2012

Health and Safety  
Executive

*'Play is great for children's well-being and development.'*

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

*'No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.'*

### Striking the right balance means:

- Weighing up risks and benefits.
- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks.
- 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 can you help?

*Supporting school improvement through play*



[www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)

**A waterproof  
coat**



**A pair of welly  
boots**



**A tolerance of weather,  
dirt and mud**



**Outdoor play is essential to your child's health and well-being**

# Open ended play materials

## Upcycled Loose Parts



Baking Pans



Cake Moulds



Ice Cube Trays



Kitchen Tools



Measuring Spoons



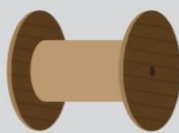
Pots & Pans



Strainers



Baskets



Cable Spools



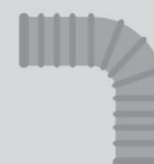
Cardboard Items



Cones



Containers



Corrugated Pipes



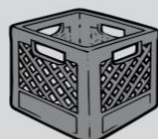
Dress-Up Items



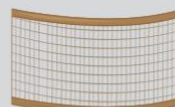
Fabric



Funnels



Milk Crates



Nets



Old Electronics



Pool Noodles



PVC Pipes



Rolling Carriers



Ropes



Shovels & Spades



Sinks & Tubs



Tarps



Tires & Wheels



Wooden Planks



# Access to nature...mud , sand, water

## Natural Loose Parts



Acorns



Grass



Leaves



Logs



Pine Cones



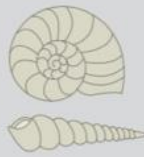
Rain & Water



Sand



Snow



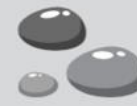
Shells



Soil



Sticks



Stones



Wild Flowers



Wood Cookies



# Can you help?

- What's in your loft ... it maybe really useful!
- Who do you know ...  
tree surgeon, plumber, builder, water board,  
sign writer, office/admin ...  
what waste might they have?
- Most things offer tremendous play value





## Great play helps make a better school

- Platinum OPAL schools have 10 minutes more teaching time per teacher per day  
50 minutes more teaching time per class per week  
30 hours more teaching time per class per year.
- Up to 80% less accidents and incidents
- Improved pupil enjoyment, happier children
- Increased physical activity
- Improved behaviour
- Inclusion for all



**Thank you** For supporting your child's school as they progress on their OPAL journey

Please CONTINUE to provide resources if you can

Please spread the word:

Check out our website: [outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)

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The future of play here is very exciting.

