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Dear Parents & Carers,

In September, we want (and need) to be outside as much as possible. The government guidance asks schools to consider how they can utilise the outdoor learning environment. Therefore, our OPAL programme will be integral to ensuring that the children receive structured and beneficial time outside.

### **We love OPAL!**

We have now completed our first year of our OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme. It has been a great success – more children are loving being outside, no matter what the weather, as there is now so much more to do. Whether it is playing with tyres and planks, digging in the sand pit or digging area, making a mud pie in the mud kitchen, enjoying imaginative play in the small world area or exploring the willow village, OPAL is offering a creative and exciting alternative to the regular activities on the playground. In addition to the areas already being used, over the next year we will be adding more shelter for the children and more exciting and creative areas for them to utilise.

In December 2019, we were subject to a SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspection. We were delighted and proud to be able to report that the school received an 'excellent' grading. During the inspection, our OPAL programme was recognised as being a positive, vital part of our children's development. Pupils of West Monkton spoke very confidently about their OPAL experiences and the positive impact that it was having on their personal development as individuals.

### **The benefits of outdoor play for your child**

*'Self-directed play is a necessary and important part of every child's life'*



- Research shows that self-directed play supports the development of the whole child – cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills and contributes to school success.
- Your child will spend 7 years in school from Reception to Year 6. While most of that time is dedicated to curriculum, 1.4 years of that school time is spent outdoors during playtimes and lunchtimes. This is valuable time for hands-on learning and enriched exploration.
- When we improve play at school, both children and schools benefit. Children who play are ready to learn; they experience fewer behaviour problems and have a more positive



attitude toward school. Schools that plan for great play spend less time dealing with unnecessary problems and experience fewer playground incidents.

Through play not only are children more active at lunchtime they are also having the opportunity to further develop life skills such as cooperation, team work and problem solving. They are becoming motivated and enthusiastic builders, engineers, explorers and designers.

### **How will OPAL look in September?**

As a school we strive to continue to value and provide outdoor play in these challenging times. The government recommend that the outside space is used **as much as possible** for exercise, breaks, outdoor learning and play. Using the outdoor environment can limit transmission and more easily allow for distance between children and staff.

It is also recommended that play is made a **priority** – to allow children to reconnect with friends, to allow them to be active after a long period of confinement and to allow them to use play to process their thoughts and feelings. Play is important for all children, but particularly will be beneficial to those who have had difficult experiences during lockdown.



We have taken feedback from parents on board this year, and have built in a 'RAG-rated' system, where areas of the school grounds are assessed to see if they are suitable for play/lunch time each day. These areas are checked in the morning by a member of staff and given a rating of red, amber or green:

- Red areas will be out of bounds
- Amber areas will be dependent on the class teacher's discretion and the clothing that the children have in school.
- Green areas are open for all pupils to access.

This system ensures that children are safe and have a clear understanding of which areas they can use throughout the day.

### **Play Equipment/Loose Parts**

As a school we must must consider how play equipment is used, ensuring it is appropriately cleaned between groups of children using it, and that multiple groups do not use it simultaneously. We have removed soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean. We have made a decision that we will be reintroducing loose part play in the Spring term, dependent on government guidance.



## Outdoor Clothing

In September, all children will require wellington boots for play/lunch times. We have now had wellington racks made for each class which will be situated outside the cloakroom doors and wheeled into the cloakroom each evening. In order to ensure that we are utilising as much space as possible, children will need to wear wellies when the grass is wet or muddy. They will change into their wellies in the cloakrooms or outside and change back into their shoes at the end of break/lunchtime. Please can you name your child's wellies before they are brought into school.



We are also encouraging children to wear 'all-in-ones' during wet play/lunches so that we can protect uniforms as much as possible. As time goes by, this will become part of the fabric of our uniform policy. If you require support with obtaining outdoor wear, please do speak to us.

Finally, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your support with:

- Sending your child into school with appropriate warm/waterproof clothing and wellies
- Donating loose parts to school including small world creatures, cars, pots and pans etc
- Supporting the OPAL ethos by asking your child about their play and accepting that they may get dirty

You can still help us more by donating any unwanted materials you have at home such as:

- Plastic or metal buckets
- Kitchen utensils, pots, pans, baking trays, sieves, colanders etc for the mud kitchen
- Watering cans, wheel barrows, guttering
- Toy trucks, diggers, cars
- Small world creatures e.g. dinosaurs, farm animals etc

To check out the OPAL philosophy go to [www.outdoorplanandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplanandlearning.org.uk)

Thank you for your supporting us and helping us to provide high quality outdoor learning.

Miss E Curson  
OPAL Lead