



OPAL Newsletter

February 2024



Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome to the first of our OPAL newsletters. Many of you will have heard from the children that OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) is coming to their lunchtimes and finally the day is here!

Today in assembly, I have shared the first OPAL zones that will be opening up on Monday and I am excited to be able to share these plans with you and how you can support play within our school. You will find the presentation attached [here](#) that was shared with the children today. Please make time to talk to your children about these areas.

Across each newsletter, we will celebrate the play that our pupils have been taking part in with their quotes and photographs. We will keep you up-to-date with changes to the school grounds; they may use more of the grounds, for more of the year. (This may mean that they get a bit messier, be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like!) We will also reach out for donations of resources to enhance the next play zones. Towards the end of this newsletter, you will find greater information about the background and the benefits to OPAL for your children as well as information already available on our website.

What zones are coming on Monday?

There will be four zones opened to the children on Monday. These are:

1. **Small World Play Zone including the Vehicle Testing Zone.** Think dolls houses, stuffed toys, pretend vets, castles, on and off roading toy cars and lorries etc.!
2. **Cardboard City Zone.** Enough cardboard to put Amazon packing to shame! However, used in just about every possible way a child can use their imagination.
3. **Sand Pit Zone.** Like the beach, just without the sea (and sun at the moment!)
4. **Digging Zone.** Children love to dig; it is therapeutic and productive and satisfying – but a little bit muddy!



An important note for parents about the digging zone:

Children will only be permitted to go in the digging zone if they have wellies. Wellies **must** be named and can be stored on the welly pallets (upside down) by the digging area. Please be aware, they will not be stored in classrooms.

Across all four zones, there are clear expectations of how these areas should be used, including the number of children able to use the areas at one time. I have talked to the children about our expectations for them to self-regulate in 'messier' areas – for example, if they are using the digging or sand areas, they must think carefully about how messy they get.

Considering questions such as, will my grown-ups be happy if I go home covered in mud? Am I



comfortable sitting in muddy clothes all day? You can support their self-regulation by having these conversations at home. *Please note we will not be calling home for spare clothes if children choose to get excessively muddy.*



How can you help?

To facilitate this project, we have already bought new resources and have begun to move some things around on the playground and field areas. We have been able to make links with local businesses for donations as well as regularly scouring local, free, social media pages to obtain many of the items. Introducing and continuing OPAL will work best when we have your support too.

To continue with the current zones and enhance the offering, we are looking for donations of the following:

- Buckets and spades for the sand pit.
- Hand trowels for the digging area.
- A continuous supply of cardboard – this will always need replenishing (however, please do not donate cardboard with staples in, thank you)
- Soft toys
- Toy vehicles
- Dolls/figures
- Hats/scarves/jazzy shirts/elasticated skirts/waistcoats/wedding dresses/character costumes

Important!

All children can take part in the OPAL zones even if they have not been able to donate anything.

Donations can be brought into school and placed in the red donation box by the new OPAL store.

But what next?

Over time, I will be introducing more zones to the children and these will require some additional loose parts. Loose parts are any materials that can easily be moved, combined and incorporated into children's free play. The items we are looking for will enable children to enjoy a wider range of play experiences during playtime; in particular, we are looking for:

- Suitcases of any size and type
- Anything on wheels/castors – outgrown bikes/prams/scooters/walking frames!
- Plastic milk crates/supermarket delivery crates
- Nets and thick ropes
- Keyboards/torches/laptops/calculators/mobile phones/desk phones/webcams/cameras that are no longer working
- Fabric (large sheets/brightly coloured fabric)

Not sure?

If you have something that you think would be useful to donate but you are not sure, please send an email with a photo to opal@barnesfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk and I will come back to you.

- Foam sheets/camping roll mats/yoga mats
- Cable drums
- Pegs (to help to set up dens)

Our Wish List...

There are also items that are trickier to obtain due to funds or availability. We have a Barnes Farm OPAL wish list on Amazon if you still wish to support but are unable to donate; the link to the wish list is [here](#).

We are also on the lookout for some 'big ticket items'! If you know of anyone that is having a kitchen replaced, we would gladly take receipt of any old kitchen units/worktops to put towards making a 'Messy Café'!

Finally...

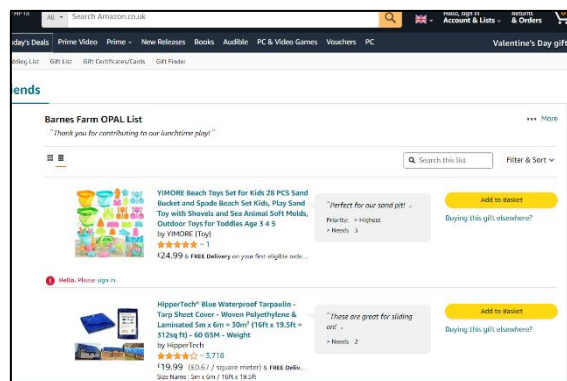
We have an OPAL working party, which includes members of the school staffing team in addition to a committed parent governor and PTA member. If you are interested in supporting any manual work (for example building structures /messy café's etc.), please email opal@barnesfarm-jun.essex.sch.uk to indicate your interest.

I am thrilled to be offering this to our pupils and look forward to sharing and celebrating more of it with you over the coming months.

Kind regards,

Mrs Walker

**Deputy Headteacher
OPAL Play Lead**



Background and benefits of OPAL

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.

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. Play is not 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 so much fun. The experiences our 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.

We are supported by Becky, our OPAL mentor and she began working with us in September 2023 and will continue for 18 months. 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.