



Stowford School

Curriculum Statement for Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL)



Intent:

Children in British primary schools spend 20% or 1.4 years of their school attendance in play.

Research shows that play contributes to children's physical and emotional health, well-being, approach to learning and enjoyment of school. Given the importance of play in children's lives and current concerns about children's mental and physical health and opportunity to access time and space to initiate their own play outdoors, there are considerable benefits for children, parents, school and the wider community from participating in OPAL's programme. Having previously gained a Platinum play award, our intent is to continue to develop children's play and our outdoor spaces and embed play into school's policies and practices, establishing clear guiding principles and strategies for initiating changes at playtimes. The results can be transformational and - at best - spectacular and show progress even in more challenging school environments.

This intent is mirrored in our Wild Tribe curriculum intent.



Implementation:

By working with all school staff, parents and children we have developed a master plan for the development of the school grounds and play. This is continually being reviewed, adapted and improved.

Children have always developed all the key skills they'll need for the future (sometimes called soft skills) through playing every single day. It has been thus throughout human history. Self-regulation, cognitive improvement, confidence and character/determination are all highly valued 'skills' best improved through play.

One aspect of this positive development is deliberate exposure to situations which may appear to be challenging or 'risky'. The presence of a perceived risk, even a small one, sets off a process in the child's brain - the release of certain hormones. These hormones are messages for various parts of the body, telling muscles, lungs, eyes, nerves, etc. to quickly prepare the child for imminent action of some kind. Heart rate increases and attention sharpens. This learned ability might make us better able to cope with stress, deal with a hard task or make us good at a sport and helps to develop resilience. Equally, it might save our life one day.

We have improved the quality of day-to-day play times, with a consequent beneficial impact on **lunchtime behaviour** engagement, learning, personal development and **physical activity/literacy**. Staff, e.g. Meal Time Assistants support play and children's decision making.

Children attend primary school for seven years. Of those seven years, around 1.4 years will be spent outside actively playing, making 'playtime' by far the most dominant element within the curriculum. Unlike sport and PE lessons, children's active play can claim 100% engagement, provided it is supported with the right expertise, consistency and understanding of children's social, emotional and environmental needs. Children soon become engaged in far more interesting activities such as building dens, making 'meals' in the sand/mud kitchen, socialising with friends, performing on stage or embarking on expeditions to new lands.



Impact:

More teaching time: Most schools report ten minutes more teaching time per teacher with happier, more creative, and well exercised children who settle to classes much more quickly.

Improved behaviour: Stowford School reports fewer incidents of poor behaviour and less time spent in resolving playtime issues.

Faster core skills development: Children at OPAL schools rapidly develop creativity, imagination, cooperation, resilience, stamina and confidence.

Inclusion: OPAL's approach makes play better for every child, every day...no exceptions!

Happiness and wellbeing: Play is a human need and a human right. Children and staff at OPAL's schools report feeling less stressed and happier, and more excited about school.

Our **Outdoor Play and Learning** strategy supports children in becoming resilient, well-adjusted and competent citizens who are equipped to cope in the world beyond school. Stowford School supports the development of the core skills that are best accrued by children through high-quality play, including co-operation, context-rich language use, problem-solving, negotiation, creativity and mental and physical well-being.