LARKFIELDS INFANT SCHOOL

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Dear parents/carers,

Our school is about to start a programme to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play.

In what ways, if any, do you think you benefited from playtime? Thinking about your own childhood, what did you like playing at school or at home? Children today don't have the same freedoms we once did, so we want to give children back time to really enjoy and learn from play. The right to play is recognised in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is the result of over 20 years of testing and development in over 2000 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 playwork awards. In 2019, OPAL was awarded a quarter of a million pounds by Sport England to bring the programme to many more schools.

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.

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.

- Average screen time per day is six hours.
- Average outdoor play time per week is five hours.
- Percentage of UK children who only play outdoors with other children at school is 56%.

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 developed to help children learn what cannot be taught, while also having so much fun. Children need certain things to be able to play. These include:

- Clothes they can play in.
- Having things to play with.
- Having a certain amount of freedom.

As the school improves play opportunities, you may find it asks for resources and changes how children use the grounds. Children may use more of the site for more of the year, get a little messier, experience more challenge and uncertainty, and have greater freedom to choose where, how and with whom they play. The school will manage this through a risk-benefit approach, maintaining a safe enough environment while preserving the important benefits of play.

OPAL will support the school for 18-24 months, and you will have the opportunity to meet the OPAL mentor at your child's school. If you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please visit the OPAL website (www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk), where you will find lots of useful information and several videos about the programme.

Over the next 18 months, you will be invited to events where you can see what is happening for yourselves 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.

Best wishes

Mrs Lager OPAL lead Hlager

Mrs Irwin Headteacher

Phil Burdes OPAL mentor