



# Ferndale Primary School and Nursery

Headteacher: Miss Horrobin

Ferndale Primary and Nursery School - Wiltshire Avenue

Swindon - Wilts - SN2 1NX



13<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your feedback about playtimes, your thoughts are very valuable to us and we know that you want play to offer physical challenge; creativity and imagination; social connection and inclusivity and wellbeing.

We are delighted to update you on our exciting new project starting next term to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play. This project is called OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning Primary Programme) OPAL 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 and has won many awards.

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. There are many proven benefits for schools that carry out the OPAL Programme. They usually include: more enjoyment of school, less teaching time lost to disputes between children, fewer accidents and greatly improved behaviour.

As 20% of children's 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 we are 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%.

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. There are certain things children **must** have in order to be able to play. These include:

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

As the school improves play opportunities for your children, you may find the school is asking for donations of resources and is making changes about how the children use the school grounds. They may use more of our grounds, for more of the year. Your children may get a bit messier, be



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exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like.

The school will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to the OPAL mentor at your child's school. If you would like to learn more about the OPAL Primary Programme, please have a look at the OPAL website ([www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk](http://www.outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk)), where you will find lots of useful information and several videos about the programme.

In the coming 18 months you will be invited to events where you can come and see for yourselves what is happening and have the opportunity to join in too. **Our first OPAL community event will be on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May 11-1pm** (more details to follow).

We are also doing a 'Class Bingo' challenge on **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March** where we would like to challenge children to bring in and donate small loose parts for playtimes- the class with the most quantity and variety wins! The items we are looking for are attached to this email.

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

Fay Billingham  
Curriculum Lead for Play

Nancy Low  
OPAL Mentor