

Pendragon Parents' views about OPAL



What's going well?

- Great alternatives to constant football! Creativity, freedom, learning that it is okay to get messy, teamwork.
- Yes, children are able to explore more freely with a wealth of resources, which enhances positive experiences.
- Everyone is having fun
- Less arguments and more playing
- Children are happy talking about it.
- Everything. My children love OPAL
- Kids are having lots of fun
- Lots of variety and exciting stuff to do
- Sparking children's imaginations
- Greater variety of outdoor activities
- All weather opportunities
- The variety of items that can be used in different ways
- The resource it gives for creative play and props. Appreciation of being outdoors.
- Children mixing with other Year groups.
- I think that there is something for everyone - depending on likes, mood, ability etc. It stimulates their curiosity and creativity when playing with the varied equipment. Promotes gross motor skills and their confidence to try new things, which out of school they may not otherwise try. My daughter complains a lot less about friendship issues as they spend more time playing, or helping others play and use equipment.
- Varied activities. Things to do.
- Playing creatively
- I think they are enjoying, my son is happy playing and contributing to the playground.
- The children have access to equipment which has not been available before. Things like colouring and toys that were not previously allowed are now allowed. Children now have fewer indoor break times. Children are able to make calculated risks, which is vital for their development. Things like the scooter boards and tyres have been a welcome addition and the children speak highly of the fun they have with them. Thank you for bringing the fun back to play at school.
- Children have time to explore and be children
- Children embracing getting muddy, imaginative play and creativity
- Getting the children to be active and outside.
- Encouraging active play. Freedom to get muddy. Equipment is fun.

Pendragon Parents' Questions & Answers



Mud and mess:

- How dirty are the children expected to get?
It is not an expectation that children get dirty but it is recognised by staff and children that this is likely to happen. Children are encouraged to wear all-in-one suits or waterproof clothing if they have these in school on wet or damp days. We also welcome children to have a set of spare clothes kept in school.
- Are they allowed to play out in their trainers instead of being made to wear their wellies?
Yes but it would be advised that any children wishing to do this have an old pair of trainers in school in addition to their school shoes as we cannot have children in school wearing exceptionally wet or muddy footwear

Clothing:

- Could the activities be more tailored to different weather conditions? ie: no extensive mud play during rainy season as it adds a lot of extra washing and overall costs for the families
We monitor when children can use the field or other muddy areas within the grounds in an attempt to avoid this from happening. However many of the children do enjoy playing in the rain and mud.
- Could OPAL happen just once or twice a week?
As stated in the parent slideshow OPAL is an all weathers initiative that happens daily. At Pendragon, we continue to monitor and review the play opportunities and experiences.
- I have spoken to a number of parents who are struggling financially in the current economic situation who are finding the additional outdoor gear requirements (waterproofs, new shoes/boots) and the additional ruined clothing is unaffordable. What are the school doing to combat this?
We are currently in the process of setting up additional clothing and footwear banks within school available for any children that require additional clothing. We welcome any donations of unwanted wellies, coats and waterproof clothing. We also advise any parents to reach out to your child's class teacher or Mrs Willmore if you require additional support.
- The additional washing of clothing and shoes is another time burden parents can ill afford. What are the school doing to combat this?
See answers above. We would also like to remind parents that we have quite a lot of unnamed second hand uniform in school that you are welcome to look through.
- What measures can be taken to reduce the impact this is having on children's clothing?
*As above.
Since being made aware of damage to clothing, we have reviewed the use of some equipment to ensure that clothing is better protected. If you are able to send your child to school in a less expensive coat this would be advisable.*
- Do the children have to play in the muddy areas or is it by choice of the child? What is the best waterproof clothing that the children should wear? Is there a way to donate spare clothing to help families who do not have wet weather gear for their children?
*See answers above.
No, children absolutely do not have to play in muddy areas, OPAL is about the right for children to choose where and how they play. Waterproof clothing does not need to be the most expensive; it simply needs to protect your child from getting soaking wet and clothes underneath getting muddy!*



Weather:

- Can kids learn well in the afternoon when they are cold and wet and covered in mud?
See above answers.
We advise that ALL children have spare clothes including socks school therefore if they need to change they can! Staff will always work hard to source spare clothing if children require it. Since the introduction of OPAL, our children show they are even more ready to learn after playtimes.
- It's currently too cold to send a child out with just a waterproof rain jacket that's easy to clean.
Children are very welcome to come to school in extra layers if need be.
- Why are you adhering to scheduled play when the weather is clearly inclement?
We monitor the weather daily. It is essential children are prepared for all weathers.
- My children were both cold despite additional clothing, how is this justifiable?
Response from our OPAL mentor 'The weather is almost always poor in the UK and so OPAL take the approach that we only keep children in in dangerous weather, including storms and hail etc. It is the responsibility of schools as centres of child development to ensure children are equipped to live healthy lives in the UK climate. This means being dressed for all weathers, being resilient to hot, and cold, wet and dry. There is such a crisis of lack of movement in current childhood that the greatest danger to children is inactivity. During the winter, viruses such as colds and flu spread through the air in enclosed spaces. The healthiest place to be is outdoors. Most children love playing in all weathers or at least having the choice to do so. Schools are there to serve the developmental needs of children; therefore, the clothes they wear are also there to meet the needs of the children. If children are cold or looking, cold staff will always assist to help make this better for the children.
- The older children are a bit annoyed at having to stand in the rain - no areas to shelter/ chat/sit. I have no aversion to them being out in the rain at all - but it's a shame that choice is removed from them. A classroom could be left open with some games available.
Shelter is coming – we hope to obtain more den building materials for wet weather. This will get better when there is more shelter. We hope to fundraise in the future for waterproof materials particularly tarpaulins for dens however we would always welcome any resources that you might not require to help make this happen!
- Why are the teachers changing regularly but the children have to stay outside even in heavy rain and thunder and lightning?
The play team are outside in all weathers with the children, the children do not go out in thunderstorms.

Facilities:

- My daughter reported the bathrooms were filthy on Friday 5th and that they are muddier and dirtier than usual. What are the plans for keeping them hygienic?
This day was an extremely rare case – the toilets were cleaned by staff immediately as soon as this was observed. Toilets are checked daily and if cleaning is required during the day, this will happen.
- What measures will be put in place to protect facilities so they can be used properly at other times of the school year?
See answers above



Safety and risk:

- Are the children well supervised with all the activities?
Yes every range outside is supervised by a trained member of the play team.
- What assessments are done to ensure safety?
We follow the RAPID approach as below:

R:	Risk-benefit assessment
A:	Assemblies focused on playtime
P:	Policy for play ratified by your governors or equivalent
I:	Inspections carried out regularly
D:	Dynamic risk management embraced by all staff

All resources are checked before they go into the playground and regularly inspected. Adults are trained to look out for hazards during playtime and children are also taught this in the weekly play assemblies. Most of this equipment is very similar to what they use in early years across the country. Risk Benefit Assessment logs (as on our website) are completed for all equipment and children are taught in play assemblies how to look out for and manage risk for themselves which is a vital skill to have in the future. New research released by Helen Dodd states children fundamentally need to engage in risky play. Children who spend more time playing adventurously have fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

- How do you ensure that objects are used safely?
See answers above
- Are the stuff brought in by people examined to see if they meet health and safety standards?
See answers above. Yes absolutely.
- Are children made aware of risks associated with, eg ingesting mud (potential illness, getting worms) - are they supervised washing their hands thoroughly afterwards?
Yes, the risks are discussed with and by the children during an OPAL assembly as well as ways that these risks can be managed to keep everyone safe. Risks are often revisited and where necessary mitigations reviewed and adjusted. See answers above

Supervision and Access:

- Why can't kids play on the bottom playground during OPAL?
Children play in all areas of the school grounds. OPAL promotes full use of our amazing school grounds. Access to nature and being outside is beneficial for children's mental health and wellbeing
- Why are staff not better monitoring unwelcome interactions between pupils?
Children are supervised by members of the play team. Regular talks with the children about consent, empower them and give them confidence to share how they feel with one another. Play assemblies are used to discuss and revisit all the different play types' children engage in during playtimes.
- My daughter reports that equipment is not shared and that staff are not ensuring fair play. What is being done to ensure that equipment is available to all?
This is discussed in play assemblies and for equipment whereby we have a limited amount, plans are in place to purchase more! Turn taking, sharing, communicating with others and resolving conflict are all key skills children need to develop. OPAL very much promotes these skills as some of the most common benefits of play, another aspect discussed during OPAL assemblies. Children are encouraged to find solutions and we are observing this more and more in the children. For example a Year 4 child came up with a great solution to sharing scooter boards which was implemented the following day.



- Are the children adequately supervised?
See answers above
- Are there fewer or more members of staff supervising play?
The number of adults outside has not changed. OPAL looks at how adults can be utilised better to maximise the play opportunities and to ensure children access as much of the school grounds as possible.

What would make playtimes better:

- My child can't find an adult to let them know they are hurt.
All adults wear a high visibility jacket. Children are encouraged to speak to an adult when something happens. Part of OPAL is about raising the profile of the play team through the weekly assemblies in which the majority of the team are present. If you do hear anything of this from the children then please do let us know and we can remind them who to go to if they need any help. Every member of the play team is first aid trained and carries a red first aid bag.
- My children often say that it's hard to get a turn on popular items.
See above answer.
We are also in the process of setting up a system for the children whereby they can provide their feedback and suggestions about OPAL, this will enable us to address these areas in our assemblies and the children are then given more responsibility and ownership of solutions.
- Don't have big sticks etc. laying around and have adequate supervision in.
See answers above.
To reiterate children discuss the risks of equipment and how to play with this appropriately. If you hear of any incidents please do let us know. Injuries can and will happen with any equipment, whether it is a stick or a tennis racket, OPAL is about supporting the children to manage the risks no matter what the equipment is.
All ranges at lunchtime are supervised by trained members of the OPAL play team.
- Fairer supervision of sharing the equipment as currently the boys hog the scooter boards and tyres, particularly lunchtime. And refuse to share and sometimes they are used as weapons.
See above answers. There are plentiful tyres for all children, it is the one loose part we have lots of!
Children know they are not to use any equipment as a weapon but imaginary object play is encouraged.
- A little more supervision to stop some children destroying other children's creations.
Mastery play is actually a play type that many children really need; they have an innate need to destroy things. We absolutely do not want it to be something another child has made but this is also the first time the adults have supported this kind of play so we are all learning too. Play is supervised within all ranges but we cannot see everything. We will do our best to help children resolve any instances and support their play elsewhere.
- My daughter in KS2 reports that there is little for them to do and that the equipment is geared towards younger children. Requests for a reading area are being ignored. What are the plans for KS2?
See answers above.
Plans for reading spaces are coming. Children are allowed (and many do) take books outside. All equipment outside is accessed by all year groups (the slideshow demonstrates this)
We welcome suggestions and requests from the children.



- My daughter in KS2 also reports that she feels unable to talk about her lack of enjoyment in the play scheme. Are the children being asked for their opinion anonymously? If not why not. *See above answers. To reiterate children feedback in assemblies, speak to Mrs Willmore or members of the play team. Our school council asks for feedback and children have spoken in their classes about what is working well and even better ifs, this has also been shared with all children in assemblies. A suggestion box is coming.*

General questions:

- How did the idea come about?
Observations at lunchtime identified that many children were pacing. This was not necessarily due to lack of resources but more so pupils not knowing how to play and staff not trained specifically to support children's play.
- Is Opal mindful/wellness for children?
Yes see slideshow and the benefits of OPAL and play in general
- How much will it cost to dispose of all the tyres? Presumably this will come out of the school budget.
Usually about £2.50 per tyre when they eventually have to be changed or disposed of but the tyres will last for years so the benefits the children get from them far outweigh the costs.
- How is the Opal scheme funded? Their website says can be paid for from the PE budget. As it is in playtime I think it should be shared from all areas of the schools budget not just PE.
OPAL is currently partly funded through our PE budget, however we use different pots of money where necessary. We Encourage parents to join our Governing body if you would like to be part of the financial planning for the school.
- How are you monitoring the benefits of the scheme?
An initial survey was completed by the staff, children and parents at the very beginning of OPAL and this will be repeated again in a year's time. General observations, regular play team meetings, weekly assemblies, discussion in class, OPAL is a standing item on the school council meeting and it is one of our priorities on the school development plan so is reviewed regularly by SLT and the OPAL working party.
- I don't understand why the school need OPAL. Within nursery settings for over 25 years, they take their inside resources outside to keep continuity of learning. I'm not sure why schools have not realised this and need guidance from an outside company to say it's ok to do this.
Response from our school mentor 'A lot of schools are quite fearful. If it were the norm, schools would do it but they do not and so although this is something schools can do by themselves, we are not the gatekeepers of play and we actually have a national campaign encouraging all schools to have a plan for play. However, schools are reassured by the expertise we provide in terms of risk and play work training. It does not often last in schools that try it alone but we have completed a lot of work to ensure the sustainability of the programme even if there are staff changes.