Derry Hill C of E (VA) Primary

"LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE" – MATTHEW: 5:16

15th October, 2026

Dear parents and carers,

We are excited to announce that we are about to start a programme called OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) at Derry Hill School.

OPAL sets out to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination, and enjoyment through improved play.

OPAL is a whole-school approach to children's play, supported by an 18–24-month period of implementation. During this time, the school has a dedicated mentor who provides staff training, guidance, and practical support as we plan, introduce, and embed the approach. But OPAL doesn't stop once this initial period comes to an end. It becomes part of everyday school life and the way we approach playtimes, with the school continuing its membership and having access to ongoing resources, guidance, and support. In doing so, we will join the thousands of schools across the UK that proudly call themselves an OPAL school.

Some background about OPAL

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, which is recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 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. OPAL has won first prize in an EU-funded award for the best active school's programme in Europe, two UK national play work awards and was awarded a quarter of a million pounds by Sport England to expand the programme across the UK.

As 20% of children's time in school is playtime (equivalent to 1.4 years of primary school), OPAL is based on the idea that, as well as learning through good teaching, children also learn when they play, so we want to make this time is as good as it can be.

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.

What we hope to get out of this programme

One reason the school is carrying out this programme is that childhood has changed, and due to factors, such as available outdoor space, access to equipment and screen time, many children no longer get their play needs met.

There are many proven benefits for schools that carry out the OPAL Primary Programme, including: 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 which evolution has developed to help children learn what cannot be taught, while also having so much fun.

What changes you might see

As the school improves play opportunities, you may find it changes how children use the grounds and you may see more requests for resources through our Donation Station. Children may use more of our outdoor spaces 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 environment while preserving the important benefits of play.

We are really excited about this project and hope that you will support us in our efforts to improve playtime for all children.

How you can help

To help us understand where we are starting from, and to monitor the impact and improvements from implementing OPAL, we would be very grateful if you could spend a few minutes completing the baseline survey below. We will also be asking the children to take part in surveys, as their voice matters the most.

We have already introduced the idea to the children and did a full assembly on the programme today. We would encourage you to speak to your children about the programme, encouraging them to think about what play means to them and how they think it could be improved.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE OPAL SURVEY HERE

The next steps

We will be spending the next few months with the support of our OPAL mentor, planning, and preparing for a launch in January. Please help us now by sharing your thoughts via the survey.

We may also be asking for help with making and sourcing items for playtimes. Please respond to any requests we have for play equipment and resources if you, or anyone you know, can help.

Any questions?

We have set up an OPAL Working Group and encourage you to speak to any of them if you have any questions. Or you can email the office and they will pass your message onto them.

OPAL Mentor: Rachel Murray
Head Teacher: Mrs Roberts
Curricular Lead: Mrs Hand, Mrs Brown, and Miss Hurren
Play Co-ordinators: TBC
Play Governors: Mr French, Mr Paxford and Mrs Olner
Parent Champions: Jo Chapman, Megan Lee

Best wishes,
Mrs Roberts
Headteacher

HEADTEACHER: MRS HAYLEY ROBERTS **BSc (Hons), PGCE, MA(Ed), NPQH, NPQEL**
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