

END OF OPAL PRIMARY PROGRAMME AUDIT

Tuesday 19th March 2025

OPAL Mentor: Mike Barclay



GENERAL COMMENTS

This school has delivered an outstanding and exemplary implementation of the OPAL programme, achieving an exceptional 100% score and following the programme with unwavering commitment, creativity, and attention to detail. From strategic leadership to daily practice, the school has embedded the OPAL ethos across every level of its provision, creating a rich, inclusive, and deeply child-centred play culture that stands as a model of excellence.

The school's leadership has ensured that OPAL is not just an initiative, but a strategic priority, supported by protected time for staff, and a strong, well-informed governance structure. The Headteacher, Curricula Lead for Play, Play Coordinator, Governor and Parent Play Champions, Site Manager and members of The Play Team have all been instrumental in driving the programme forward. All supervising staff are trained, visible, and valued, and their reflective practice is embedded through regular meetings, CPD opportunities, and a strong sense of identity and purpose.



GENERAL COMMENTS

The school's approach to risk-benefit assessment is robust and well-articulated, with clear systems for inspection, supervision, and decision-making. The RAPID framework is fully embedded, with children actively involved in understanding and managing risk through assemblies and day-to-day routines. A healthy culture of freedom and trust pervades play times, where children are given permission to explore, take risks, and follow their own play agendas.

Playtimes have been restructured to maximise children's access to uninterrupted play. Free-flow lunchtimes, the removal of lining up, and minimal tidy-up routines have all contributed to a relaxed, respectful, and playful atmosphere. Supervision is skilfully managed through zoned, rotating plans and delivered confidently by staff who understand when to intervene and when to step back.



GENERAL COMMENTS

The physical play environment is fantastic. Natural spaces have been rewilded and opened up, offering rich opportunities for adventurous, nature-based play experiences. A large variety of well-maintained and freely accessible loose parts support creativity and construction, enabling children to create their own spaces for play. Children are even given access to tools and dens structures are allowed to develop over time which results in children engaging in increasingly complex and social forms of play. Imagination and self expression is celebrated through music, dressing-up, open-ended structures, and dedicated performance spaces, while physical play is supported by a wide range of fixed and loose resources—from climbing frames and monkey bars to hay bales, tractor tyres, and tree swings. Ball play is well managed and balanced, ensuring football has its place without dominating, and alternative sports and games are actively promoted. Children have the freedom to move, build, explore, and connect in countless ways, and the school's attention to scale, location, and design ensures that each space contributes to a diverse and highly playable landscape.



GENERAL COMMENTS

What sets this school apart is not just its compliance with the OPAL programme, but its wholehearted embrace of it. Every aspect of provision – from maintenance plans and sustainability efforts, to the vibrant communications with families and the wider community – reflects a passionate, knowledgeable, and sustained commitment to high-quality play. This is a school where play is not only protected, but celebrated, and where children's right to play is realised in its fullest, most joyful expression.





1.1 CHAMPIONS & IDENTIFIED LEADERS



The school has established a strong, strategic approach to play through clearly defined and well-supported roles for both the Curricula Lead for Play and the Play Coordinator, each with protected time built into the staffing structure. The Curricula Lead has a timetabled afternoon each week, while the Play Coordinator has 17.5 hours per week, including mornings for resourcing and lunchtimes for supporting playwork practice. These roles are ratified by governors and embedded in the school's structure, with job descriptions and policies fully developed and adopted. The OPAL working group, which includes the Headteacher and a well-supported governor and parent play champions, meets at least once per half term to review provision, action plans, risk management decisions and to reflect on playwork knowledge and practice. This group plays a key role in strategic implementation and leads on risk management, ensuring decisions align with the school's play policy and commitment to a risk-benefit approach. Their regular meeting minutes reflect thoughtful consideration of how playtimes operate. Strong active leadership from the Headteacher and Curricula Lead has positioned OPAL as a strategic priority, closely linked to other school priorities, enabling significant resources to be allocated to play—well above OPAL's recommended minimum.

The school demonstrates a deep and sustained commitment to strategic development and review of its play provision, underpinned by a clear and well-articulated play policy. This policy, endorsed by the governing body and published on the school website, outlines the school's values and principles around play, including a risk-benefit approach to decision-making and a focus on maintaining a 'safe enough' environment for children. The OPAL action plan has guided the school's progress, with the final audit checklist used as a primary tool in later stages to inform planning and self-evaluation. A strategic grounds plan has also been developed, showing thoughtful consideration of play opportunities, children's freedom of movement, and the infrastructure and staffing required. The school's play charter, which highlights children's right to play, is prominently displayed and regularly referenced in conversations with children. This strategic focus is supported by a strong governance and leadership structure and backed by an impressive 220-page Canva portfolio that includes videos of play assembly presentations (which follow the CINI model), survey results, and a publicity-friendly version of the school's own strategy and priorities for play times.



This extensive documentation reflects not only a strong sense of purpose and pride, but also a commitment to sustainable development and ongoing improvement.



1.2 POLICY & PLANNING

1.3 COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATION



The school has built a vibrant and well-communicated culture around play, celebrating children's playtimes while promoting a shared understanding of risk-benefit approaches. Regular and dedicated play assemblies with children celebrate their play experiences and address risk management in an engaging and age-appropriate way, with evidence of these discussions logged. OPAL awards, including the much-loved Golden Welly and Golden Broom, feature in weekly celebration assemblies and are shared across newsletters, social media, and the school website. Communication with parents and the wider community is exemplary, using every available channel—regular newsletters, social media, and a very impressive section on the school website that includes the key staff roles, play policy, action plan, grounds plan, play assembly presentations, and positive images of play. Weekly after-school play events and half-termly play days involving parents further reinforce engagement, with excellent feedback from families and regular donations of materials. Play is also integrated into the induction processes for new staff and families and regularly featured in staff briefings. The school's play team is a recognised part of the staffing structure, with half-termly meetings and a strong culture of clear communication. The governor and parent play champions also visit play times, attend planning meetings and are actively involved in the OPAL programme. The school has produced robust tools for ongoing review, including template forms to monitor site usage and pre/post programme surveys. Survey results highlight significant increases in staff satisfaction, with staff reporting greater resilience and happiness among children. As a strong advocate for OPAL and children's right to play, the school actively shares its journey by presenting to other schools and hosting visits—demonstrating leadership and a deep commitment to promoting play across the wider education community.



2.1 EQUALITY OF ACCESS

The school has created a highly inclusive and equitable play environment where all children, from nursery to Year 6, mix freely and choose how and where they want to play across the entire school site. From October onwards, even reception children are fully integrated, with no restrictions based on age, gender, or play preferences. Freedom of movement is a key feature, and children's right to play is actively promoted and protected—restrictions are only applied when absolutely necessary for safety. The diverse range of spaces and opportunities ensures every child, including those with atypical play behaviours, can find meaningful ways to engage. Staff have noted clear improvements in children's play skills, especially among those who initially found it challenging to play cooperatively. Relationships between year groups have strengthened, and the wide range of opportunities available has helped reduce overcrowding and associated risks.



2.1 EQUALITY OF ACCESS

The layout and management of space further reinforce fairness and inclusion. Zoned areas and a clear MUGA timetable ensure ball games like football don't dominate, while still providing opportunities for those who want them. A mix of small, medium, and large social spaces caters to varied interests and preferences, and inclusive adaptations—such as waterproof gear, 1:1 support, and accessible equipment—ensure all children can participate fully. The school has proactively addressed barriers to participation by maintaining a wellie and uniform bank and offering to buy winter coats for children who need them, ensuring every child has appropriate clothing. There is ample challenge across the site: for the most capable, this includes construction, climbing, and parkour-style elements like hay bales and tractor tyres. The school is also moving towards a relational behaviour approach, where only serious incidents might impact lunchtime play, further demonstrating the school's commitment to creating a respectful, inclusive play culture for all.

The school takes a robust and proactive approach to supporting outdoor play in all weather conditions, ensuring that playtimes continue outside except in the most extreme weather. A strategic plan for grounds development and maintenance has enabled the majority of the school site to remain accessible year-round, with closures limited to only essential situations. The playground includes a number of large quality structures that provide shelter from the rain or direct sunlight. The wooded areas have been opened up to provide further natural shelter and drier spaces for play, and supervision levels are adapted seasonally as part of a winter plan that balances access with site care.

Every child from Nursery to Year 6 has access to suitable footwear and outdoor clothing. Each class has its own welly storage area, and a central welly bank ensures spares are available in a range of sizes.

Children who need waterproof protective clothing are provided with it, and spare uniform and winter coats are readily available via the school's uniform bank. Parents/carers receive reminders that outdoor play will happen in all weathers. This consistent messaging, alongside the visible evidence of children playing outside in all weathers, has helped embed a shared understanding among parents and carers. Staff are also equipped with suitable clothing to support outdoor play in cold and wet conditions.



A detailed site review has led to the careful opening up of all grounds to children, with only the forest school area kept out of bounds during playtimes due to its use as an outdoor classroom. Outdoor welly storage, located on hardstanding areas where mud can be stamped off prevent mud from being tracked into the building. Together, these thoughtful arrangements ensure that the school delivers on its commitment to enabling high-quality, all-weather play for all children.



2.3 EXTENDED ACCESS



The school has created a welcoming and inclusive approach to extending play beyond the school day, offering a wide range of opportunities for children and families to enjoy the grounds together. The site opens 25 minutes before the start of the school day, providing an additional two hours of outdoor play each week under the supervision of parents and carers. Clear signage ensures parents are aware of their responsibilities during these extended times. There are also two weekly after school sessions, one being an additional play session for children with parents and the other a more focussed self-build session where children get to build things with the play coordinator. The school also organises half-termly family play afternoons, which both celebrate children's right to play and help to further engage parents in the school's OPAL approach. The school also runs holiday camps each school holiday, welcoming children from the school and the wider community to enjoy play provision underpinned by the OPAL approach. Altogether, these arrangements reflect a deep commitment to accessible, community-focused play provision that extends well beyond the traditional school timetable.

3.1 CARE & MAINTENANCE



The school has a well-developed and sustainable maintenance strategy designed to keep play spaces accessible, well maintained and rich in play value throughout the year. A carefully considered winter plan ensures the grounds remain usable in all seasons. Field pitches are rotated to avoid overuse, and features such as small world play and tree swings are relocated during colder months to support site recovery. The site manager plays an active role in these processes, attending working group meetings and collaborating closely with the Curricula Lead and Headteacher to enhance and maintain the site's play value. A robust system is also in place for the management of loose parts, supported by dedicated time for the Play Coordinator to oversee resourcing. Daily checks are conducted on large loose parts, with damaged items directed to the 'resource hospital'—a designated space marked by clear signage—before being repaired, recycled, or disposed of as needed. There is a healthy budget for investing in consumables each year. A lot of effort has also gone into applying for additional funds through grant applications. Annual OPAL bingo events and non-uniform days also help to drive donations of loose parts. The Eco Council and extra-curricular clubs are actively involved in helping to maintain the site including replanting and growing fruit and vegetables, reinforcing children's connection to their environment. Litter-picking equipment is readily available in the playground self-store, with bins across the site and regular involvement from children in helping to maintain the space. These systems reflect a deeply embedded culture of care, responsibility, and shared ownership that ensures the school's outdoor spaces remain high quality, inclusive, and full of potential for play year-round.

The school demonstrates a deeply embedded and confident approach to risk-benefit management, supporting a culture where children experience meaningful freedom during playtimes and staff feel secure and competent in their supervisory roles. This healthy, balanced attitude to risk has led to a significant shift in mindset across the school, with rough-and-tumble play allowed on the field, supervised use of tools, and a strong emphasis on children's right to explore and take reasonable risks. All aspects of OPAL's RAPID framework are fully integrated into daily practice, including routine site inspections, external assessments of fixed equipment, and thorough procedures for managing loose parts. The Play Coordinator and Site Manager lead daily maintenance and inspection routines, logging outcomes and ensuring all donated or newly constructed resources are safety checked before use. The Play Team monitors the site visually during breaks and lunchtimes, using walkie talkies to communicate and respond to issues in real time.



3.2 HEALTH AND SAFETY: DAILY, WEEKLY AND TERMMLY



Risk-benefit thinking is consistently applied and well understood across the school community. The school's play policy outlines its commitment to 'safe enough' play and functions as a first-level risk-benefit assessment (RBA), with a further detailed RBA document for managing higher-risk activities. Staff, including teaching and play team members, have been trained in the risk-benefit approach and actively contribute to assessment and decision-making processes, which are clearly communicated and regularly reviewed. Governors are kept informed and supportive of the approach. Risk-benefit principles are not just top-down; children themselves are involved through regular play assemblies where new resources are introduced, and messages about safety, responsibility, and dynamic risk management are shared. Children are empowered to assess risks independently and alongside peers, including placing damaged items in the 'resource hospital', adding to children's sense of ownership and responsibility. This comprehensive and inclusive approach has fostered a confident, permissive play culture where risk is not avoided but carefully supported and celebrated as part of children's growth and wellbeing.



3.2 HEALTH AND SAFETY: DAILY, WEEKLY AND TERMLY





The school has embedded a strong culture of professional learning and reflective practice around play, with all supervising staff having completed the Playwork Essentials training as part of their induction and ongoing development. New staff are required to undertake the same high-quality training to ensure consistency, and all team members are supported to engage with further reading and reflection on key texts such as Play Wales' Playwork Guide volumes 1-3. The Playwork Principles guide day-to-day supervision, and staff regularly reflect on these principles. The result is a confident and low-intervention approach to supervision, with staff visibly at ease, interacting playfully with children while maintaining clear, agreed boundaries. The school has made exemplary use of both OPAL College and the OPAL e-pack. A CPD plan has been developed using these materials, with records kept of training attended and written reflections from staff on the training they've undertaken. These reflections show a deepening understanding of how the Playwork Principles apply in practice and illustrate a commitment to continuous learning. The application of playwork theory is clearly evident in the confident, purposeful way staff support children's play across the school—a powerful demonstration of a school-wide commitment to professional development and high-quality, child-centred practice.

4.1 STAFF TRAINING & PRACTICE

The staff responsible for supervising playtimes are proudly known as the Play Team, a title that reflects their strong identity and valued role within the school community. This identity is actively promoted through team photos shared on the school website and in newsletters and regular recognition in school assemblies. The team is easily identifiable during playtimes by their distinctive blue high-vis jackets, worn alongside the school's Play Detectives, and they are well equipped to support outdoor play in all conditions. The Play Team meets formal 60-minute meetings every half term, with a focus on reflective practice, professional development, and inclusive decision-making around playtime arrangements. This is supported by all TA contracts having dedicated time for CPD and staff meetings. Other teaching staff also have minutes from play team and OPAL working group meetings routinely shared with them to ensure consistency across the school. The Play Team has a clear communication pathway into the school's OPAL working group, ensuring their voices and experiences directly inform strategic planning. The professional development needs of the Play Team are carefully supported by the Curricula Lead and Headteacher, who work closely to ensure time and resources are in place to deepen staff understanding of playwork principles. This well-supported, highly visible, and reflective team plays a crucial role in sustaining the school's high-quality play offer.



4.2 PLAY SUPERVISION & MANAGEMENT





4.3 SUPERVISION PRACTICES



The OPAL approach is fully embedded across all playtimes, with thoughtful planning ensuring that children benefit from a full hour of play each day, including at least 40 minutes for play at lunchtime. The school has made strategic changes to lunchtime logistics to maximise play, including the bold introduction of free-flow lunches. This allows children to choose when and with whom they eat, contributing to a relaxed, child-centred atmosphere and extending their time for play, as well as their sense of responsibility and autonomy. There is no lining up at the end of playtimes—children simply come in calmly when they're ready—creating a smooth and pleasant transition back into the school day.

A clear and effective supervision plan supports the use of the entire school site, with staff confidently using direct, remote, and roaming supervision depending on the zone and opportunities on offer. Seasonal supervision plans are in place, and the supervision rota outlines who is responsible for each area and how coverage adjusts in response to changes like the winter grounds plan. The Play Team, led by the Play Coordinator, sets up each day and feeds into the ongoing evaluation and improvement of play provision, ensuring that staff strengths are used effectively and that supervision styles adapt when needed. There is a strong focus on continually adapting the site and resources to keep things novel and interesting.



4.3 SUPERVISION PRACTICES



The school's approach to managing resources and transitions is both efficient and playful. Resources are left out between morning and lunchtime breaks, allowing children to continue play without interruption. Children and staff work together to keep things in order, and the whole school recognises the sound of the song "Happy" as a fun, familiar signal that it's time to tidy—typically taking no more than four minutes. Many of the den type structures are allowed to stay up over a longer period meaning that children can return to them day after day. These routines, alongside a fully embedded Positive Relationships Policy that spans classroom and playground, support a calm, respectful culture that values and protects children's time to play.



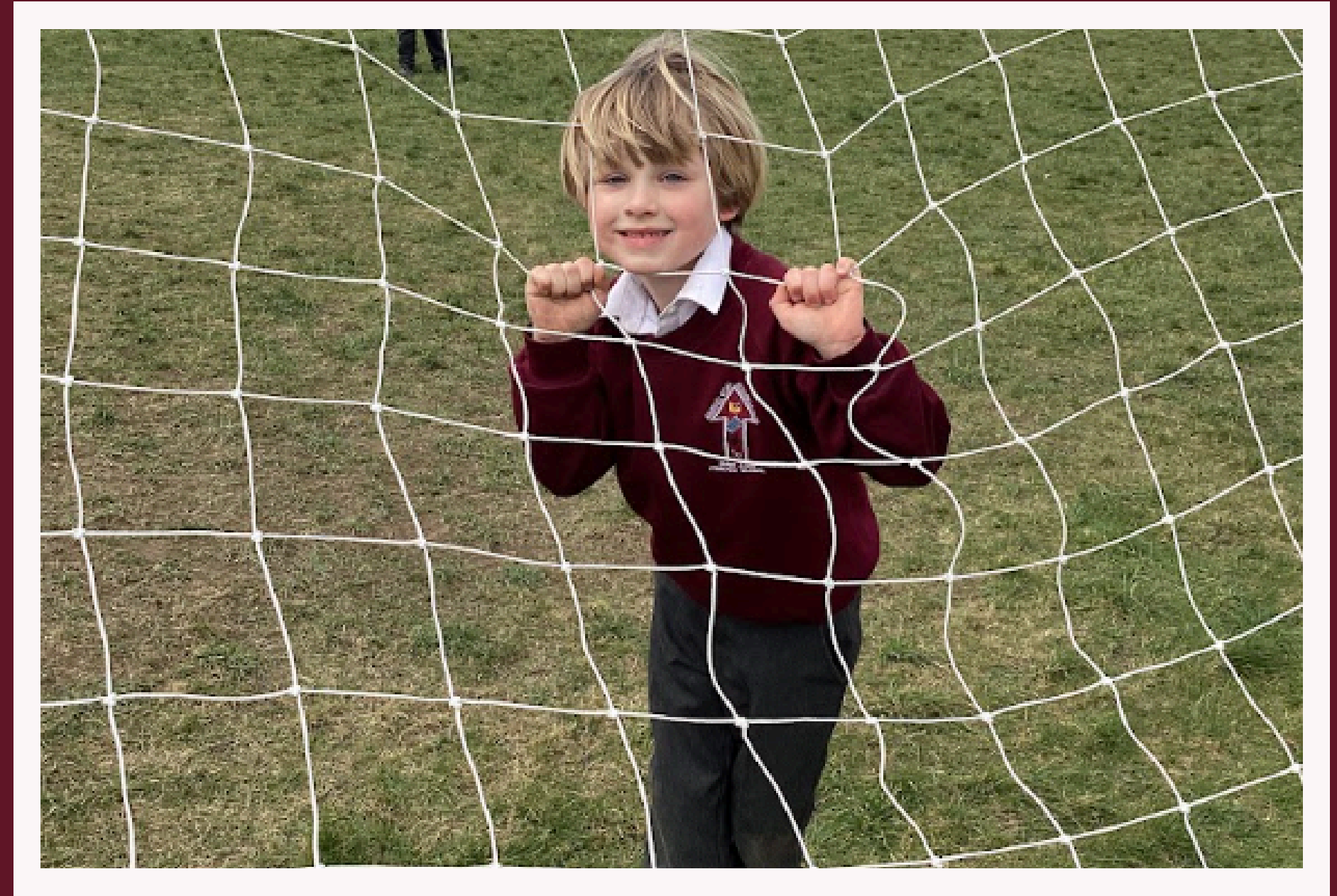
5.1 FABRICATED LOOSE PARTS



The school has created a rich and varied loose parts play offer, with a wide range of materials available in sufficient quantity to ensure no scarcity and maximum opportunity for creative, open-ended play. Resources include small world items in portable containers, den-building materials, large construction pieces, and a range of novel and unexpected items that spark imagination. The large loose parts and den building areas is particularly impressive with children creating impressive self built structures that are allowed to stay up for short periods of time. Children are free to use any of these resources as they choose, anywhere across the site, and their self-directed access is supported by a well-thought-out and robust storage system. Weatherproof materials are kept in allocated outdoor areas, while smaller are stored in the high quality loose parts shed. The storage plan also includes seasonal adjustments—such as relocating the small world zone to protect grassed areas in winter—and provides suitable transportation options like carts where needed. The OPAL loose parts list has guided the collection and purchase of consumables, and the Play Coordinator leads on ensuring the supply is well maintained and regularly replenished. Broken items are managed efficiently, with children clearly understanding what to do when resources need to be repaired or removed. The result is a highly adaptable and inclusive play environment where children can explore, build, imagine, and collaborate in countless ways. The diversity of materials and the freedom to use them creatively has made loose parts play a central feature of the school's outdoor offer, enriching children's play experiences year-round.

5.2 NATURAL LOOSE PARTS & MATERIALS

Children at the school enjoy daily access to a wide range of natural materials—including sand, earth, water, sticks, and stones—which they are free to use as they choose in their play. The scale and design of these natural play features have been carefully planned to suit the size of the school grounds and the number of children using them, resulting in a rich and diverse playable landscape. A large, permanent sandpit and a dedicated digging area near the impressive and fully stocked mud kitchen can comfortably accommodate over 20 children, with benches and access to water that further support imaginative and messy play.



The school has made significant efforts to enhance access to nature, including substantial rewilding on the field, allotment area and planters on the playground, and the opening up of woodland space for climbing, swinging, and den-building. Willow tunnels, a herb garden, and a sensory garden provide further depth to the environment, alongside minibeast hotels and pond-dipping resources. Natural loose parts such as grass, sticks, leaves, and soil are plentiful and distributed across the site. Children are also actively involved in the care and development of these areas, regularly planting fruits, vegetables, and flowers. The attention to scale, location, and integration of these features ensures that the grounds function not just as a collection of play spaces, but as a cohesive, child-friendly landscape that invites curiosity, exploration, and deep engagement with the natural world.



5.3 SOCIAL SPACES



The school offers a rich variety of social spaces across its site, thoughtfully designed to support different types of play and meet the needs of all children. These spaces come in a range of sizes—small, medium, and large—ensuring children can find, or create, the right space for how they want to play. From cosy, sheltered corners where imaginative games can unfold uninterrupted, to large open areas for energetic running games, the school grounds support a full spectrum of social and physical play. Children move purposefully between zones, often co-opting spaces or gathering around particular features, creating a dynamic and ever-changing play landscape.

The opening up of the woodland and rewilding on the field has added depth to the play environment, offering natural shelter, small hideaways, and playful opportunities 'on the way through.' Purpose-built structures like the sandpit, mud kitchen, and hay bails serve as destination spaces, developing their own unique play cultures over time. Big loose parts and den-building materials are plentiful, breaking up larger areas and empowering children to create their own temporary social spaces. The playground features a variety of high-quality shelters and seating, including tipis, gazebos, benches, and climbable tent-like structures, encouraging both active and restful play. This diversity ensures that children have the freedom and flexibility to find or shape the kind of play space that suits them best, fostering a socially rich and inclusive play environment across the school.



5.4 MOVEMENT & JOURNEYS



The design of the school grounds and the variety of resources available actively encourage children to move their bodies in diverse, joyful, and physically challenging ways. Across the site, children can be seen running, climbing, jumping, swinging, crawling, clambering, skipping, balancing, and riding freely. Wheeled toys, such as scooters, are available in sufficient quantity to prevent queues or conflicts, and children are trusted to ride them without the need for helmets—reflecting the school's healthy, balanced approach to risk.

The site includes an impressive range of physically engaging features that promote full-body movement. The hay bails, tractor tyre structure and large tunnel offer unique and challenging landscapes for play. New investments in fixed equipment, such as monkey bars and horizontal bars, add to this by providing unique opportunities for building upper body strength and hanging upside down. There are also tree swings, slack lines, and climbing frames that support a wide range of physical play styles.

Large loose parts resources such as tyres, pallets, crates, as well as toys like space hoppers and parachute nets and provide at scale offering opportunities for construction, lifting large objects and further energetic forms of play. There is also the MUGA providing a dedicated space for ball based games but these are also allowed to take place on the field. DChildren have ample space to move freely and energetically, using their whole bodies throughout play times in an environment that celebrates movement, risk, and the natural joy of active play.

The school has paid attention to creating playable spaces that nurture imagination, self-expression, and emotional engagement, resulting in a colourful and dynamic atmosphere where even the oldest children feel comfortable and inspired to engage in imaginative play. Across the site, carefully chosen decorations, open-ended structures, and loose parts are used to extend and provoke imaginative play, with different children naturally gravitating toward different zones that reflect their interests and creative instincts. These spaces have been intentionally designed not only to support imaginative play but also to influence how children feel—creating playful, expressive environments that invite immersion and joy.

Music plays a key role in shaping the atmosphere, with at least three portable speakers placed around the site. A wide variety of genres—ranging from chill-out tracks and pop to musical theatre—are included on rotating playlists, with children, through their role as Play Detectives, contributing to the selection and helping to shape the mood of the playground. Dressing-up clothes and accessories are available daily, hung neatly on a clothing rail and regularly maintained by the Play Coordinator, who washes and replaces items as needed, with support from family donations. A performance stage with audience seating provides a dedicated space for roleplay, singing, dancing, and storytelling, adding another layer to the site's performance-focused opportunities.



5.5 AFFORDANCE, VARIETY & IMAGINATION

The school has taken a thoughtful and well-balanced approach to ball play, ensuring it remains a valued part of the play offer without dominating the playground or limiting other forms of play. Dedicated areas for ball games—using the field and the MUGA—allows children to enjoy football and other sports freely, while protecting other forms of play from interruption. This clear zoning enables a wide variety of play to flourish across the site, with children (including many boys) increasingly choosing to engage in other types of play alongside or instead of football.

The MUGA operates on a seasonal rota, providing opportunities for a range of age groups and promoting ball and non-ball games for all children, regardless of gender. Some days specifically encourage alternative sports and activities, expanding children’s exposure to different ways of playing. A diverse collection of sports equipment has been purchased to support this variety, giving children the freedom to explore different games at their own pace. A wide selection of balls is available for use on the field, with clear expectations that ball play is both respected and well-managed.



This balance of freedom and protection ensures that ball games have a rightful place in the play environment, while creating the space and conditions for a much broader, richer play culture across the school.

5.6 BALL GAMES

5.7 ACCESS TO NATURE



The opening up of the woodland area and rewilding of the field have transformed the school grounds into rich, natural spaces for adventurous and imaginative play. Where access was once restricted, children can now explore freely among trees, bushes, wildflowers, and long grasses, engaging in a wide variety of self-directed games. The woodland now includes tree swings, hammocks, dens, and social seating, all thoughtfully maintained to ensure the space remains both accessible and full of natural loose parts like logs, branches, sticks. These materials, along with features such as willow tunnels, sand, and water, create an environment alive with visual, tactile, and sensory experiences.

This natural provision is further enhanced by the school's commitment to biodiversity and sustainability. Grants from the RHS have funded the purchase of planters, soil, plants, and gardening tools, supporting children's direct engagement with nature and strengthening opportunities for hands-on learning and nature-based play experiences. The Eco Team leads on biodiversity initiatives, working to embed sustainable practices across the site and promote an ecological mindset within the school community. Together, these efforts have created a diverse, stimulating, and sustainable outdoor environment where nature features and materials add to the flexibility and adaptability of play spaces and offer children daily opportunities to connect with the natural world.