



Dear Parents/Carers,

Happy New Year and welcome back!

As you will no doubt be already aware, the Primary Department has been looking into how we can make our playtime a more exciting experience for the children. Through the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Project, we have been able to look at the resources we had already and how we could improve the playtime of your children.

Research has shown that children spend 20% of their time in school playing. To ensure that this time is used to its full potential we have recently introduced an OPAL philosophy that allows the children freedom to explore play in their own imaginative ways, often using found and gathered resources in the natural outdoor environment.

At Belmont Special School, we are very lucky to have such a great area for our children to play in but historically lots of the children's play was orientated around sport due to the resources on offer, rather than more creative play.

To promote a more inclusive play environment in which all children can feel comfortable to express themselves, an OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) approach has been introduced. The first phase of our OPAL project began in Summer 2017. We are now nearing completion of the first phase and it has been a great success - many more children are loving the new outside opportunities, no matter the weather, as there is now so much more for them to do. Whether it is playing with the new tyres, (*kindly donated by Get Grip Tyres and Auto Body Repairs*) digging, enjoying imaginative play in the small world area or cooking up a storm in the mud kitchen, OPAL is offering a creative and exciting alternative to the regular playground activities.

In addition to the areas already being used, over the coming months we will continue to add new and exciting developments through consultations with the children's school council.

Through this approach to play children are not only more active at lunch or break times, but they are also having the opportunity to further develop life skills such as cooperation, team work and problem solving. They are becoming motivated and enthusiastic builders, engineers, explorers and designers.

An essential element of OPAL play is being well prepared for all weather conditions. The use of wellies and warm weather clothing is beginning to become common place for the children and they are now more aware of the importance of having suitable clothing and footwear in school at all times to allow them to experience playing in all weather conditions.

One of the big aims of the OPAL project and one we have also adopted is that the children should have a sense of challenge. The children therefore will have the opportunity to use bikes - balance and pedals. Helmets are worn due to their feet being off the ground and we actively encourage the wearing of a helmet on all bikes as a lifestyle choice as they get older.

The school have purchased a selection of scooters - two wheels, three wheels and four wheels. The playground is perfect for scooting as it is flat. All children will have training on how to keep safe on scooters and managing their own risk. The children are not required to wear helmets on the scooters. If you would prefer your child to wear a helmet when using a scooter then please contact your child's teacher/tutor and a helmet will be supplied.

*If you would like to view the Belmont Whole School Site Risk Assessment for the specific risk assessment for scooters and cycles then please contact the office where they will be able to obtain a copy for you.*

You can still help us further by donating any unwanted materials you have at home such as:-

- ✓ ○ Plastic or metal buckets or spades.
- ✓ ○ Kitchen utensils, plastic cups/ plates, pots, pans, baking trays.
- ✓ ○ Watering cans, wheel barrows, guttering or piping.
- ✓ ○ Wheeled equipment such as small bikes, scooters, trikes, diggers, cars etc.
- ✓ Toys that have been neglected due to new Christmas arrivals!!

Again, thank you for your continued support with our OPAL project and we look forward to inviting you in during the warmer months to experience OPAL play first hand.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Marshall and the Primary Department