



TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE

# Higher Bebington Junior School

Mill Road, Higher Bebington, Wirral, CH63 8QE  
[www.higherbebington.wirral.sch.uk](http://www.higherbebington.wirral.sch.uk)

E-mail: [schooloffice@higherbebington.wirral.sch.uk](mailto:schooloffice@higherbebington.wirral.sch.uk)  
Tel/Fax: 0151 608 1011

Headteacher: Mrs S. Calveley B.Ed.(Hons)

7<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,



I am delighted to share with you the news that last week marked the start of our **OPAL** (Outdoor Play and Learning) journey at Higher Bebington Junior School.

## What is OPAL?

The OPAL programme is designed to improve opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and enjoyment through improved play. The Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme is the result of over 20 years of testing and development in over 800 schools and has been used in Spain, Canada, France and New Zealand. The programme has also been adapted and used in schools in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Austria under the Play Friendly Schools project. In 2018, OPAL won first prize in an EU-funded award for the best active school's programme in Europe and two UK national play work awards. In 2019, OPAL was awarded a quarter of a million pounds by Sport England to bring the programme to many more schools.

## Why OPAL?

OPAL is based on the idea that, as well as learning through good teaching, your children also learn when they play. They are clear that play is not simply 'messaging about'. It is the process that enables children to learn all of the things that cannot be taught, while also having so much fun. Children do lots of this at the start of primary school, particularly in the Early Years but it can be lost as they progress up through the school.

As a school, we know that the children spend around 20% of their time playing at break and lunchtimes and we recognise that this is one area that could be improved to match the quality of the rest of our curriculum offer. For example, we know that lots of children want to play football but this isn't possible at lunchtimes at the moment due to space limitations. Equally, we know some children would appreciate quieter areas away from the hustle of the main playground to undertake reading or craft based activities and again these aren't always available.

With this in mind, we have embarked on the OPAL programme which is designed to help us address these issues and improve the quality of play for all our children. As the programme progresses, we aim to have spaces for the footballers, the artists, the den makers and performers and just about everything in between. We hope to make full use of all the areas available to us- including the school field. ***The aim is that there should be something for everyone!***



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## **How long will it take?**

As you can imagine, this is not a 'quick fix' but an 18 month programme with the goal of it being sustainable for school at the end of that period. There will be some quicker, relatively instant changes over the next half term and then some that will require more time to set up and embed. By taking a well-planned, staged approach, underpinned by robust policies and risk assessments, we should end up with a sustainable programme that can be maintained well beyond the initial 18 months.

## **Who will have input into the OPAL programme at HBSJ?**

Everyone! The development of the OPAL programme is a key area on our School Improvement Plan for this year with all school staff and Governors having an input. We will also be asking for the views of parents, pupils and staff along the way and using these to support and drive our work. Look out for our first parent survey next week!

Within school, Mrs Devoy and Ms Bosmans will be responsible for leading the programme and they will be in contact with you with regular updates. The school will be supported by OPAL for 18 months and there will be an opportunity to come and talk to the OPAL mentor if you wish. In the coming 18 months you will also be invited to events where you can come and see for yourselves what is happening and have the opportunity to join in too.

## **How can parents and carers help?**

OPAL state that 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 we improve play opportunities for your children, you may find we ask you for *resources* (spare bits and pieces from around the home, donations from businesses etc.), *your time* or *your skills* to help us develop and change the school grounds. We may use more of the grounds, for more of the year. Your child may get a bit messier, be exposed to more challenges and have greater freedoms to play where, with whom and how they like. The experiences the school is fostering are essential for children's physical and mental wellbeing and are in line with all current good practice advice on health and safety, wellbeing and development.

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. 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,

Mrs Calveley  
Headteacher