

Parent Forum via zoom

Monday 6th December

In attendance:

22 parents and staff, Jeanette Brumby, Hania Ryans and Emily Bruggy, Steven Aldridge, Leanne Dhillon and Rachel Whitely.

Hania Ryans:

Good evening and welcome to our Parent forum about play. Just some housekeeping rules before we start. Please make sure you are muted and feel free to write any questions in the chat. I will be taking notes and Emily Bruggy will be monitoring the chat.

We choose the topic of Play as in our last parent questionnaire a number of parents' feedback that they were unsure what OPAL was. OPAL is outdoor play and learning an approach we use in our play times and lunch times. To tell you all about OPAL tonight we are very fortunate to have Michael with us who is the founder of OPAL.

Why at Fairlawn do we have such an emphasis on play? Playtime is 20% of a child's school day and we want to make sure that this time is valued and celebrated. Not only does play provide an opportunity for physical development but it also provides important opportunities to learn about socialisation, co-operation, resilience, creativity and imagination.

Play and outdoor learning are such an integral part of the learning at Fairlawn which is why we have termly play days and have developed our Forest school and outdoor learning. We feel it is important for all children regardless of their stage at primary school to have the opportunity to play and explore.

Before we hear from Michael. Emily will share a video of play at Fairlawn and then explain how we organise play.

Emily Bruggy:

Discussed space to play around the school, working with Michael has led us to opening more spaces around the school. Shared the timings of playtimes (refer to slides). Emily went on to explain that once a week we look at an aspect of play during celebration assembly and we spend a lot of time tweeting. Emily explained the role of the peer mediators, we have 21 Year 5 and 6 peer mediators. They sort out minor conflicts between children, so this frees up the adults to arrange the play areas. We have play rangers, which enable us to open up more play areas. They each carry a first aid kit and wear a pink hi vis jackets. The play rangers have all been trained. We are always looking for donations from parents. Emily gave a general reminder for children to wear appropriate clothing which is labelled. Emily then discussed holding a welly claiming evening after school, as we have lots of unclaimed wellies. Emily then introduced Michael.

Michael Follett:

Michael talked about how important freely chosen play is to children. Michael talked about his past, he lived in a nursery school, trained as a play worker and was head of play for 2 local authorities. He said schools are good at a lot of things but not necessary playtimes. There should be amazing playtimes for children every day. Children are most themselves when they are at play. He discussed his dogs and how with playing with them is just like playing with children.

What do children need for a good childhood?

Children need good quality play, it helps to teach everything that cannot be taught. Really good play is inclusive for everyone. Everyone should have a good play offer, it does not have to be complicated. There is no such thing as age appropriate play. Year 6 might want to play with trikes and teddy bears, there needs to be lots of choice about play 1.4 years in a primary school is play, in the past there has been no training for playtimes. When children are playing they are always learning, they are choosing, selecting and learning about cultures. Play teaches the unteachable curriculum. Childhood has changed, culture and society has changed, UK children screen time is 6 hours a day. Outdoor play is limited. Two key things children learn through play is to self-regulate and build resilience. Children need to gradually build resilience they need to learn that they do not always get their own way. The role of the adult is to build a culture to support play. Play is the most important aspect of childhood.

When can we do to support play?

We need to make sure we are not like helicopters, we need to not pass on our anxieties about risk. We need to observe and follow play. OPAL training courses are available on the website. Children should be taking risks, it takes children beyond their comfort zone – this is how we learn. If children take risks they are actually safer as they learn to manage these risks. We follow advice from HSE, we also have a play risk assessment and play policy and an action plan. ‘Good play is not pretty but looks beautiful.’

What can you do to help?

Basic ingredients are natural loose parts and are the raw ingredients needed for play. Children do not need expensive equipment but we do need a lot of stuff. In the past play has been marginalised for females and children with SEND, due to the domination of football and boys’ sports. OPAL is inclusive for all and meets the UN SRC right 31 – Play is a human right that Fairlawn should respect.

Positive feedback was received via the chat option and Ms Ryans asked parents to spread the word.