



Dear Parents and Carers,

I am delighted to share that Our Lady of the Visitation will soon be beginning an exciting new programme designed to enhance children's opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, cooperation, coordination, resilience, creativity, imagination and, above all, enjoyment through improved play.

We will be working with the **Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) Primary Programme**, a nationally and internationally recognised approach developed over more than 20 years and implemented in over 800 schools worldwide, including in Spain, Canada, France and New Zealand. In 2019, OPAL received significant investment from Sport England to help bring the programme to many more schools across the country.

OPAL is founded on the belief that, while children learn a great deal through high-quality teaching, they also learn profoundly through play. As playtime makes up approximately 20% of your child's time in school—equivalent to around 1.4 years of their primary education—we want to ensure that this time is as rich, meaningful and enjoyable as possible.

One of the reasons we are embarking on this programme is that childhood has changed. Many children today do not have their play needs met outside of school. Current trends show that:

- The average daily screen time for children is around six hours.
- The average weekly outdoor play time is around five hours.
- 56% of UK children only play outdoors with other children while at school.

Schools that have adopted the OPAL Primary Programme frequently report numerous benefits, including higher levels of enjoyment at school, fewer disputes, improved behaviour, fewer accidents, and better use of teaching time.

Play is far more than "messaging about"—it is a vital process through which children learn many of the skills that cannot be taught directly. To play well, children need:

- Clothes they can play in.
- A variety of things to play with.
- A degree of freedom and independence.

As we develop and enrich our play offer, you may notice changes in how the school grounds are used and hear requests for various resources that will enhance children's experiences. Children may use more of the outdoor space throughout the year, may come home a little messier, and may engage in more adventurous and imaginative activities. These experiences are essential to children's physical and mental wellbeing and reflect current best practice in health, safety, wellbeing and child development.

Our school will receive dedicated support from an OPAL mentor over the next 18 months, and there will be opportunities for you to speak with them directly. If you would like to learn more about the programme, please visit the OPAL website, where you will find helpful information and videos about the approach.

We are truly excited about this development and look forward to your support as we work to enrich playtime for all our children.

Yours sincerely,
Ms K Coll

Headteacher



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Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Primary School | Greenford Road | Greenford | Middx | UB6 9AN

Headteacher: Ms Kathleen Coll Tel: 020 8575 5344 | E-mail: admin@olovrc.com | www.visitation.ealing.sch.uk