



OPAL
Update
June 2025



Playtimes at Whitchurch

Whitchurch Parent Survey Summary

What's Working

Children enjoy playtime for **socialising, freedom, and physical activity**.
It supports their **wellbeing, development**, and provides valuable **fun and relaxation**.

Key Issues

- Limited equipment and repetitive activities (mainly football).
- Concerns over safety and supervision.
- Restricted access to play areas and some gender-based segregation.
- SEN children need greater support and inclusion.

Suggestions for Improvement

Equipment & Activities

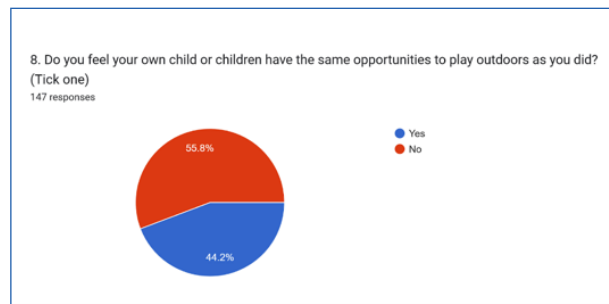
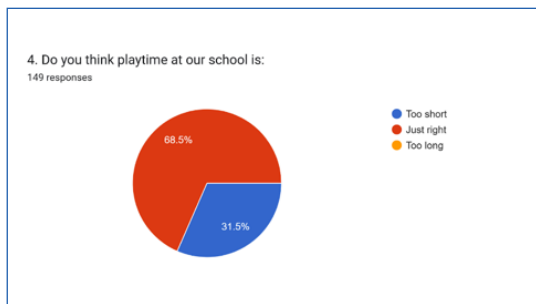
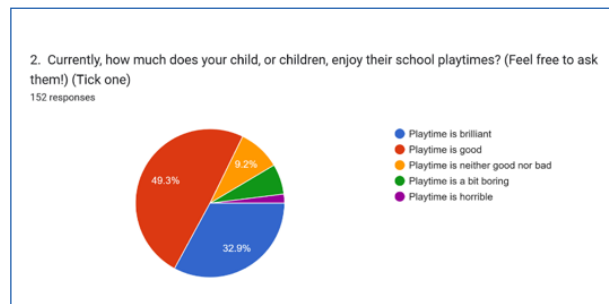
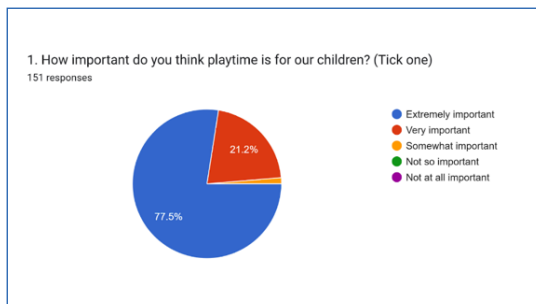
- Introduce more varied equipment: swings, slides, monkey bars, trampolines, climbing frames.
- Expand sports options: cricket pitch, football areas, badminton, netball, running track.
- Add creative activities: chess, puzzles, arts & crafts, LEGO, floor games.
- Encourage imaginative play: wooden boats, forts, mud kitchens, pretend play areas.
- Offer quiet zones: reading areas, board games, public speaking spots, sensory play.

Supervision & Staff Involvement

- Increase staff presence to supervise, engage, and support fair play.
- Use play buddies or peer mentors for inclusivity.
- Involve older pupils to help guide younger children.

Environment & Facilities

- Add grassy/nature areas, shaded spots, and quiet spaces.
- Open up restricted areas like the outdoor gym.
- Improve basic amenities: working water fountains, more benches, and sheltered areas.



Whitchurch Children Survey Summary

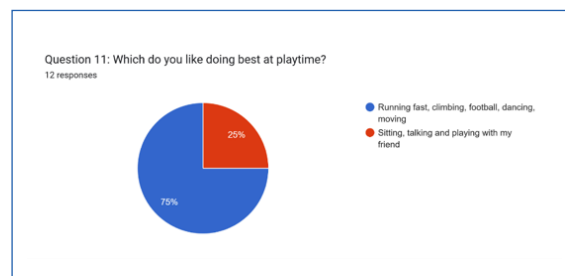
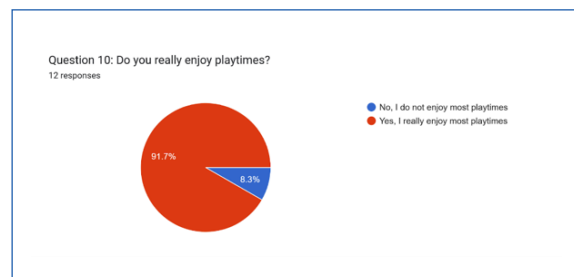
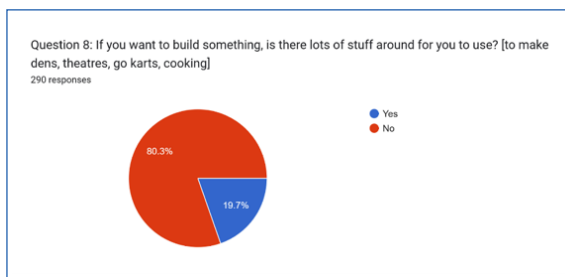
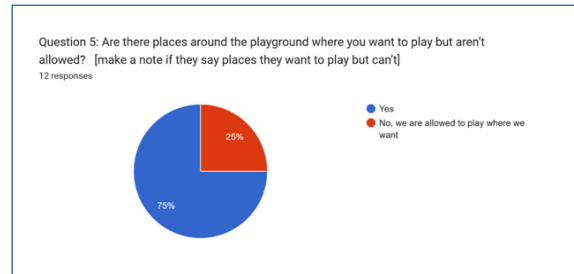
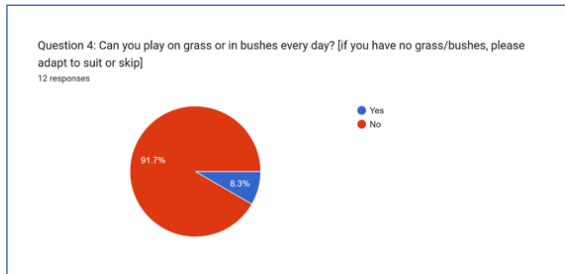
Older Children's Dream Playground

- More football pitches, MUGAs, better goals, fair matches
- Basketball courts with proper hoops and balls
- Gymnastics areas with full equipment
- Cricket pitches and other sports facilities (tennis, running tracks)
- Popular equipment: swings, slides, monkey bars, zip lines, trampolines, treehouses
- Quiet/creative spaces: board games, arts & crafts, reading, public speaking corners
- Fun extras: water parks, go-karts, snack bars, ball pits, candy stands

Younger Children's Dream Playground

- Key equipment: swings, slides, seesaws, monkey bars, climbing frames, sandpits
- Sports and active play: football daily, MUGA and basketball for KS1, running tracks, scooters

- Imaginative play: Lego, ride-on toys, bubbles, cooking area, reading corners
- Social & inclusive: mixed-age playgrounds, age-appropriate equipment, more benches and quiet spaces



Whitchurch Staff Survey Summary

Why Children Enjoy or Don't Enjoy Playtimes

Why Children Enjoy Playtime

- Time to play freely and have fun
- Opportunity to socialise and build friendships
- A chance to run around and be active
- Gives children a sense of freedom and happiness

Why Some Children Don't Enjoy Playtime

- Lack of equipment or structured activities
- Football dominates space; others feel left out or bored
- Many don't know what else to do and prefer staying indoors
- Limited variety in games leads to repetitive play

Playtime Issues staff notice

Football & MUGA Conflicts

- Most issues stem from football: arguments, rough play, and unfair use of MUGA.
- Football dominates, leaving others out or bored.

Behaviour & Transitions

- Some children struggle to calm down after play, especially those with additional needs.
- Playtime disputes often spill into class, disrupting learning.

Supervision & Support

- Children lack tools to resolve conflicts and don't always seek help.
- Staff often deal with unresolved playground issues after the fact.

What staff see as the Benefits of Play

Friendship & Social Skills

- Builds friendships, encourages teamwork, sharing, and communication across year groups.

Emotional Wellbeing

- Provides brain breaks, relaxation, a sense of freedom, and emotional regulation.

Physical Development

- Improves fitness, coordination, and energy levels for learning.

Imagination & Creativity

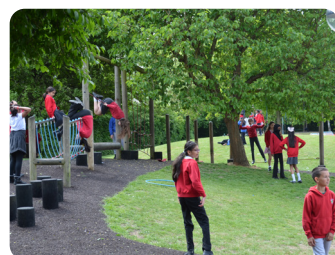
- Fosters creativity, role-play, and self-expression.

Confidence & Independence

- Supports risk-taking, resilience, and self-awareness.

Connection & Inclusion

- Allows interaction with siblings, peers from other classes, and supportive staff.



Why OPAL?

OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) programme is designed to transform school playtimes by improving the quality, inclusivity, and variety of play.

Solves Lack of Variety & Boredom

- Current problem: Too much focus on football; limited equipment; children get bored and argue.
- OPAL solution: Introduces a wide range of play opportunities (loose parts, creative zones, quiet spaces, physical challenges), so every child finds something engaging.

Improves Inclusion & Social Development

- Current problem: Some children feel left out, especially those with additional needs or who don't enjoy football.
- OPAL solution: Play is designed to include every child, regardless of ability, background, or interests - creating social bridges and building friendships.

Reduces Behaviour Problems

- Current problem: arguments, especially around football and the MUGA; conflict spills into class.
- OPAL solution: Encourages child-led, collaborative play; more choices reduce frustration and competition. Also builds resilience and conflict resolution skills.

Supports Learning & Wellbeing

- Current problem: Children come in unsettled, tired, or overstimulated; difficult transitions back to class.
- OPAL solution: Varied play supports emotional regulation, brain breaks, and physical development - making children calmer, more focused, and ready to learn.

Helps Staff & School Culture

- Current problem: Staff spend time managing incidents instead of supporting learning; supervision is stretched.
- OPAL solution: With clear play structures, trained Play Leaders, and diverse zones, behaviour improves and staff are free to engage positively rather than just manage problems.

Makes Better Use of Space

- Current problem: Underused or restricted areas; not enough space or equipment.
- OPAL solution: Maximises every corner of the outdoor environment for play - including grassy areas, corners, shelters, and even the mud!

Summary

OPAL isn't just about more equipment - it's a whole-school culture change that:

- Makes play more fun, inclusive, and meaningful
- Reduces conflict and behaviour issues
- Builds essential life skills
- Helps teachers focus on teaching
- Boosts children's wellbeing, confidence, and happiness

***"Better play equals better behaviour,
better learning, and happier children."***

What's Next? Launching OPAL this September!

We're thrilled to announce that our OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) journey officially begins this September!

Over the Summer and into the new term, we'll be transforming our playgrounds into inspiring, inclusive spaces full of exciting opportunities for every child to play, learn, and grow.

Here's a sneak peek at what's coming:

New Play Zones Coming Soon

- Two large sandpits - for digging, building, and imaginative fun
- Two large mud kitchens - messy, sensory, creative play
- Hammock village - a space to rest, relax, and dream under the trees

Play zones designed for all kinds of play: physical, creative, imaginative, social, and quiet time

We Need You!

We're on a mission to collect resources and involve our whole community to help bring this vision to life. Think wood, pipes, tyres, crates, pots, pans, fabric, cable reels... the more variety, the better!

Got a skill? Can you build, fix, donate, or volunteer time? We'd love your help!

Come and See Us!

- Visit our OPAL Stall at the Summer Fair!
- Learn more about the OPAL project
- See sample resources and play ideas
- Sign up to help or donate
- Ask questions and get involved!

Together, we're building a better, happier, more playful school - and we can't wait to see what our children create!

Miss Ward



Let's
get ready to
reimagine play
in September!

