

ST HUGH'S SCHOOL

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Headmaster

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Dear Parents

The purpose of the Curriculum Briefing Meeting this week was to inform you about the curriculum and routines that your children will encounter and, in particular, to share with you the Pre-Prep approach to literacy. This letter highlights my key points and further information about the curriculum can be found on the Pre-Prep section of our website.

We all want the best for our children but with the pressures of everyday life, it can sometimes be hard to decide upon our priorities. Recent research has demonstrated that three factors may be key to educational success : if children have a large spoken vocabulary, can read and, crucially, *want* to read then they are much more likely to do well.

Children need to experience a wide range of vocabulary and, in essence, the wider the child's spoken vocabulary the greater their understanding of the world. We aim to be ambitious in our use of language and encourage you to be similarly ambitious with your children at home. There are three tiers of language : everyday words (happy/sad), alternative words (delighted/miserable) and book language (jocular/melancholy) and children need experience of the two lower tiers in their early years, so that they can understand the language that they will eventually encounter in books.

Reading and writing in English are in fact decoding and encoding using an extremely complex alphabetic code. For example the words 'play', 'make', 'train', 'café' and 'straight' all have the same vowel sound (phoneme) but each is written in a different way, whilst the words 'cough', 'through', 'thought' and 'though' have the same letter combination (grapheme) but are pronounced differently.

To help make things a little easier at school, we initially use only the letter sounds not their names. Once the children have grasped the sounds, they are taught to blend them to build words, which is termed 'synthetic phonics'. We appreciate that if children were only given books containing the simplest sounds they would soon become bored, so we also share more complicated texts, use context and lively pictures to encourage their understanding of more difficult texts.

We know that children need adults to enthuse, encourage and support them in this learning process. The Read Write Inc phonic programme used at St Hugh's helps to build the foundations. We also complement it with creative writing, which is often topic related, to reinforce their learning. Each child reads every day in the classroom. However this is not



always necessarily 1:1 but often in shared activities, individual contributions to class work and though their topic related tasks.

Our positive approach to reading is crucial in nurturing life-long reading habits and we need to help nurture skills and encourage enthusiasm for a variety of books. We know that children love to re-read favourite books and this is important, as it gives a sense of achievement. : we should not over- emphasise the need to move on to *harder* books. It has been suggested that in these formative years a child should be encouraged to read a favourite book three times: to decode, to understand and to read for fluency and expression. Equally valuably we know that children love to snuggle up to an adult and hear a book read to them – often a book that they couldn't read for themselves

William Glasser wrote: “We Learn . . . 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what we discuss, 80% of what we experience and 95% of what we teach others.” So, if your child wants to talk about things or even teach you what they have learned that is wonderful! If we are enthusiastic and share our enjoyment of reading and language, if we listen to and read books with our children and if we find books that interest them, we are giving them a wonderful start.

For those who were able to attend, we hope the Briefing Evening was helpful and that for those not able to come along that this letter gives a flavour of what was discussed. If you would like more information or would like to discuss these issues further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We have introduced a Home/School Diary to aid communication between parents and Form Teachers: we envisage that it will be used to record a variety of things, such as reminders about events, books sent home, to be shared or read, and any incidents or events it would be helpful to know about at school or home (such as a scraped knee or a disturbed night.) We hope you find this really useful.

Yours sincerely

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