

Hill West Primary School

Pedagogical Newsletter – February 2022

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Reminders:

School closes for half term on Thursday 17th February. School reopens on Monday 28th February for all.

Children's Mental Health Week

This week marks Children's mental health week. We know that children's minds are being constantly shaped by their environment – and in the wake of the global pandemic, many children and young people are struggling. In the UK, one in six are likely to have a mental health problem, and three quarters are not getting the help they need. How can we, as adults, parents, carers and professionals, provide a constant, trusted presence and work **together** with children to support their growth in an ever-changing world?
One of the most important ways we can all help is by listening to them and taking their feelings seriously. They may want a hug, they may want us to help them change something or they may want practical help. Children and young people's negative feelings usually pass. However, it's a good idea to get help if your child is distressed for a long time, if their feelings are stopping them from getting on with their lives, if their distress is disrupting family or school life or if they are repeatedly behaving in ways you wouldn't expect at their age.

Phonics and Early Reading

At Hill West we are committed to ensuring that every pupil will learn to read regardless of their background, needs or abilities. We want children to develop a genuine love of books and thirst for literature. We want them to read books written by a wide range of authors and we want all of our children, before they leave us, to read many of the classics.
We understand that when children make good progress in Reading they also find success in other individual subject disciplines; fluent readers learn more because they can read and gain knowledge for themselves. The ability to read fluently, comprehend and interpret is a prerequisite to success in later life.
To ensure that our children become fluent readers as swiftly as possible our approach is multi-faceted.
Synthetic Phonics – Little Wandle: Letters and Sounds Revised is taught from the start of Reception.
Decodable Reading Books – Reception and Year 1 children receive one fully decodable book each week which will consist of graphemes and tricky words that they already know. This book is read in school during Reading Practice Sessions and is also set electronically to allow the children to practise and apply the skills that they have learnt in school.
Shared Reading Books – Reception and Year 1 children receive an additional shared reading book to enjoy with their parents. Parents are advised that this book should be read to the children at home as this will not be fully decodable.
Quality first Reading into Writing Teaching – Daily English lessons are taught through a high quality, key-text and are based upon a 'Reading into Writing' approach.
Class Novels – Starting in Year 1, Class Novels are carefully chosen to expose children to a range of authors and texts.
Reading Eggs/Eggspress – from Year 2, guided one-to-one lessons that perfectly match each child's ability. Not only supports home reading but gives children instant access to over 2,500 books on-line.
Library Books – All children visit our school library weekly and choose one book to take home.

Our Curriculum Rationale

Reading and Vocabulary

We know that children who read only one book a day hear about 290,000 more words by age 5 than those who don't regularly read books with a parent or care giver (Logan, 2019). We also know that children who read regularly for enjoyment everyday not only perform better in reading tests than those that don't but also develop a broader vocabulary, increased general knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures. In addition, reading aloud is the single most important activity for reading success (Bredekamp, Copple & Neuman, 2000). Therefore, it is our unquestionable duty to read to every child at Hill West daily and expose them to the joys of story language through carefully chosen Class Novels. This exposes our less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own and entices them to become better readers. In addition we know it is important that we teach our children rich vocabulary. Studies showing that children with language difficulties at age 5 are four times more likely to have reading difficulties in adulthood (Law et al, 2017). By teaching a mere 300 to 400 words a year we can foster an annual growth of around 3,000 to 4,000 words (Quigley, 2018).

Our whole school curriculum has been designed, developed and refined over many years. High aspirations underpin our curriculum philosophy and we want our children to flourish socially, emotionally and academically through well-taught, progressive curriculum content. Building on relevant educational research, our curriculum has been responsive to the concepts of retrieval practice, interleaving learning and spaced retrieval. We understand that children make good progress across the curriculum and in individual subject disciplines when we build on their prior learning and the children remember more. We are committed to ensuring that learning is engaging but appreciate that to commit new knowledge or skills to the long-term memory, there is a need for regular retrieval, practice and consolidation.

Our curriculum has been designed to ensure learning is durable in the longer term and can be transferred from one context to another. We understand that semantic memory refers to the storing of information, facts or concepts 'context-free'; that is without the emotional and special / temporal context in which they were first acquired. We know these memories take effort and it's our pupils' amazing ability to store culturally-acquired learning in their semantic memory that leads to well-rounded, able young people.
We are committed, through our curriculum intent and implementation, to providing rich, autobiographical experiences for all children so that richer episodic memories ('episodes' of our life) are created.

Linked Learning through Thematic Teaching

At Hill West building on our understanding of how children learn, our curriculum is taught through key questions that link different subject disciplines thematically. We do this so that children have well-developed schema underpinned by interconnected knowledge and skills. Our key questions that link the learning are designed to engage and inspire, improving children's ability to; ask questions, investigate, interrogate information, present and argue whilst developing a range of skills and deep knowledge. Alongside this, children also receive a weekly subject-specific lesson that either reinforces prior learning through earlier linked learning, or introduces new learning that will be revisited during a subsequent key question.

Interleaving Learning, Retrieval Practice and Spaced Learning

Interleaving is a process where students mix, or interleave, multiple subjects or topics while they study in order to improve their learning. This was predominantly the basis for our key questions / thematic learning.

We create opportunities for pupils to recall information - known, as 'retrieval practice' - to strengthen their memory of this information, as well as usefully identifying any gaps in their knowledge. We use a range of techniques to support retrieval practice. For example, quizzing, cloze activities, questioning, creating a mind map from memory, testing, writing about what they know on a topic for two minutes, playing games, using flashcards or explaining a concept to a peer are all used. We ensure that our retrieval practice is low stakes and takes place regularly.

Just like retrieval practice, spaced learning is designed to help prevent pupils from simply forgetting what they learn over time. The key idea is after learning something new, exposure to this same information is repeated over time, leaving space in between. The repetition of learning is a benefit of course, but the gaps between the learning are the important part in terms of creating desirable difficulties; they leave room for the process of forgetting to begin, so that revisiting the learning involves thinking hard.

At Hill West, we know that when a child understands something, they have a well-developed schema. This is as a result of lots of organised, connected knowledge as opposed to a handful of unconnected facts. It is the connection between facts that is understanding. Our aim is to weave a rich web of understanding by enabling children to make a wealth of connections and think deeply and creatively.

SAFEGUARDING – Online Safety

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 outlines that it is essential that children are safeguarded from potentially harmful and inappropriate online material. The breadth of issues classified within online safety is considerable, but can be categorised into four areas of risk:

content: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful content, for example: pornography, fake news, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, radicalisation and extremism.

contact: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users; for example: peer to peer pressure, commercial advertising and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes'.

conduct: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm; for example, making, sending and receiving explicit images (e.g consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes and/or pornography, sharing other explicit images and online bullying; and

commerce: risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and or financial scams. If you feel your pupils, students or staff are at risk, please report it to the Anti-Phishing Working Group.

At school we take a proactive approach to teaching on-line safety as part of our PDW curriculum.

Mathematics

At Hill West, we are committed to ensuring that all children are mathematically proficient and confident in the use of maths in their everyday lives. As such we teach for maths mastery designed to ensure all children develop a deep and sustainable understanding of age-appropriate mathematical concepts, which can be built upon in the future.

Building on relevant educational research, our maths curriculum has been responsive to the concepts of retrieval practice, interleaving learning and spaced retrieval. We understand that children need regular opportunities to revisit previous learning in order to commit mathematical understanding to the long term memory. As a result, at Hill West, we follow the progressive short blocks devised by the Hamilton Trust Scheme to ensure that children have regular opportunities to revisit and recall prior learning alongside acquiring new mathematical skills and knowledge through fluency, reasoning and problem solving.

When we plan our lessons and sequences of lessons we structure the learning so that all pupils work through new content together as a whole group. Although we do not differentiate the learning task by reducing the level of difficulty for certain groups, the questioning and scaffolding that individual children receive in class will differ. Tasks are set for all children of similar difficulty as the expectation is that "the majority of pupils will move through the programmes of study at broadly the same pace" (National Curriculum, 2014). Teachers allow time for children to fully understand, explore and apply ideas, rather than accelerate through new topics. Pupils' difficulties and misconceptions are identified through immediate formative assessment and addressed with rapid intervention. This approach enables pupils to truly grasp a concept.

One of the three aims of the national curriculum is that all pupils become fluent in the fundamentals of mathematics. Fluency in maths is about developing number sense and being able to the most appropriate method for the task at hand; to be able to apply a skill to multiple contexts. The National Curriculum states that pupils should become fluent in the fundamentals of mathematics through varied and frequent practice. Russell (2000) suggests that fluency consists of three elements: Efficiency; accuracy and flexibility. As with much of mathematics, the key to fluency is in making connections, and making them at the right time in a child's learning.

Special Educational Needs

At school, we strive to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential personally, socially, emotionally and academically in all areas of the curriculum regardless of any protected characteristic. We appreciate that every child is unique and has individual needs. The majority of these needs can be supported through highly effective quality first teaching and a personalisation of the curriculum. However, some children may require additional support to accelerate their learning and to ensure they make good progress from their starting points.
We make provision for pupils who have any of the following needs:
Cognition and learning - Children who find learning, thinking and understanding harder than most other pupils
Communication and Interaction - Children who find it difficult to interact with others and the world around them
Social, emotional and mental health difficulties - Children who find it difficult to manage their anxieties, emotions and behaviours and as such this affects their everyday life
Sensory and/or physical needs - Children who have a disability that may make it difficult for them to manage their everyday life without changes to the physical environment or support through a range of personalised resources.
For those children with more complex and significant needs, we may involve external agencies to support class teachers.

Teaching Music

Our pupils are taught to sing and play musically with increasing confidence and control. They develop an understanding of musical composition, organising and manipulating ideas within musical structures and can reproduce sounds from aural memory. Assessment in music takes place in every lesson and at the end of each year, teachers assess pupil's progress and attainment in music against the year group curriculum to identify whether children are at the met standards or a (higher) standard. Our school appreciates the importance of singing and all of our children learn to sing and use their voices, to create and compose music on their own and with others. Singing contributes to enhanced wellbeing, improved self-esteem, increased focus and attention, supports language development and is fun.