



# Hill West Primary School

## Pedagogical Newsletter – May 2015

### Reading Eggs

Have you tried it yet?

[www.readingeggs.co.uk](http://www.readingeggs.co.uk)

Reading Eggs makes learning to read interesting and engaging for children, with great online reading games, activities and texts. Suitable for children from Reception through to Year 6.



Issue 14,  
May 2015

In this issue:

Reading Eggs

Interesting Times

Homework

Let's talk about  
Play

Don't Starve  
Children of the  
Hunger Games

Life After Levels

What makes an  
Inspiring Teacher?

Congratulations

Pushy Parents



Reminders:

We break up for half term on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May and all children return on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June.

### Interesting Times as a MAT

I wonder if the education system has ever been through such interesting, eventful and demanding times? Ofsted state that over 70% of schools are judged to be good or outstanding and this is significantly more than in previous decades. The teaching profession is the best trained with the most talented generation ever; our education leaders are rising to the challenge of becoming system leaders by working with leaders in other schools to make a difference to children beyond

their own schools. Pearson international league tables (PISA) place the UK in the top six performing nations in the world. So against this backdrop we are seeing the biggest change in the English education system that we have ever seen, with academies taking the lead as the driver for a self-improving system. The phrase 'autonomy to unleash greatness' is becoming an enabling factor in the journey to move from good to great. Being part of a multi-academy trust leads to deep collaboration, honest criticism and a shared sense of accountability.

### Homework

We are making some changes to our homework procedures in the next week or so and a letter will be issued shortly to explain these in detail. Our philosophy on homework remains unchanged. Homework should essentially extend the learning that your child has been exposed to in school and enable them to practise key skills, gain greater in-depth knowledge of a particular subject and enable

them to share their learning with an adult at home. This is a time when children can work alongside an adult at home in a one-to-one capacity. Reflecting on some of the points raised at parent council all homework will now be acknowledged with a homework sticker, homework appreciation will be tweeted from classes across school and non-completion of homework will be followed up with offers of support and guidance.

## Glossary of Terms

**Pedagogy** – the craft of teaching

**OFSTED** – Office for Standards in Education

**MAT** – Multi Academy Trust

**System Leaders** – work beyond organisational boundaries to address issues of mutual concern

**Mastery** – comprehensive knowledge or skill in a particular subject or activity

**Paradigm** - a model, usually created over time, and based on observed behaviors and/or actions; or based on teachings from people we trust



## Let's Talk About Play

During our first years of life we learn at a pace that will never be matched again. We find out how to roll, sit, stand, walk, run, skip, hop, talk, feed ourselves; we even learn how to interact socially, make marks, stack blocks, count, identify colours, respond to our names, use the toilet, look at a book, dig in the sand and much more. We learn these skills mostly through direct exploration of the world, by watching what other people do and through playful social interactions. It is easy therefore to see, why play which encompasses learning through experience and exploration is so deeply rooted in the best early years practice. Yet as children get older play is seen more and more as an inefficient use of time. It slowly disappears from the classroom. Clearly it is not possible for children to learn everything through play: key skills such as reading and writing require deliberate and methodical practice (although they can be practiced in playful ways). But a balance is definitely needed.

To make a case for more play in schools, it is useful to look at what happens when children are not given chances to play. The current focus on the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children is an interesting case in point. We know that the difference in vocabulary acquisition between children from dissimilar backgrounds is stark and we are clear about the impact that impoverished language has on a child as they start school. And yet we overlook the way in which this early language develops. The reality is that for children from advantaged homes, language develops through a multitude of high quality, playful interactions with carers and peers. Very young children do not sit down to receive direct instruction in language; they learn it by being given lots of chances to listen, play and explore.

Play deprivation is a difficult area to study because of obvious ethical issues. One study looked at a group of 26 young male murders. It found that 90% of them had been deprived of play as children and notes that "normal play behaviour was virtually absent through the lives of highly violent, antisocial men". Play helps us to develop a repertoire of coping capacities. As such it is essential that play extends way beyond the early years in our schools. Play offers us something that direct instruction does not. When we play, we have agency: we make decisions based on our own interests and needs, rather than what others tell us we should do. And that is a powerful tool for learning because, for all the talk about compliance and tightly controlled routines to maximise learning, we also need to keep children engaged and involved in their learning.

### *Don't Starve Children of the Hunger Games*

This headline caught my attention in the TES earlier this year. It suggested we shouldn't be afraid when primary pupils want to stretch their reading beyond age-appropriate fiction – we should encourage it. This obviously needs careful consideration and parents who are prepared to talk to

their children about the adult themes that arise. Many of our Year 5 and 6 pupils are ready to read texts that would be sold from the Teen Fiction shelves in book stores across the country. This can also be true of our younger pupils too of course who stumble on the mature themes in Jacqueline Wilson or Malorie Blackman. What is your view?

## What Makes an Inspiring Teacher?

Being an inspiring teacher is not something reserved for a few elite teachers. Research from CfBT Education Trust explored the notion by looking at what a group of teachers, identified by the head teachers as inspirational, did in the classroom.

Genuine warmth and empathy towards all pupils in their care.

Respect for the pupils in both his/her behaviour and use of language.

Making clear that the pupils' best efforts in the classroom are expected at all times.

Managing behaviour, space, time and resources efficiently and effectively.

Implementing clear instruction, including explicit and high expectations and objectives for learning.

Skilful use of questioning and feedback to make lessons highly interactive and extend the learning.

## Life After Levels



There are four very good reasons for removing national curriculum levels suggested Tim Oates, Chair of the Expert Panel responsible for revising the national curriculum.

1. **Undue emphasis on pace.** The rate of progress, or how fast pupils moved through the levels, had become more important than pupils' understanding of the curriculum. This also led to the rather bizarre situation where, despite having a national expectation, it became expected that pupils exceeded the national expectation.
2. **Unsuitability of best fit descriptors.** A best fit is not always a secure fit.
3. **Determining levels by average marks on a test.**
4. **Jurisdictions that have high international rankings have never used a system of levels.** Instead assessment is based on "depth of understanding", or "mastery" of all of the key concepts of the curriculum.

The new national curriculum was therefore built on the premise that pupils should study fewer things but in greater depth. Moreover, a paradigm shift in what we think of as progress is required. Progress is no longer about value-added, exceeding expectations or the speed of progress. Now progress is all about depth of learning and mastery of the curriculum. Therefore understanding the new paradigm of progress is our first challenge.



## Congratulations



*Congratulations are extended to all of our pupils in Year 6. Although we do not have the outcomes of their tests it is fair to say that none could have been more aspirational or motivated in the pursuit of excellence. Well done all.*

## And in the News; Pushy Parents

There has been a rise in the number of parents "living their lives through their ambitions for their children", the head teacher of Eton has said. But is this true or do parents just want what is best for their children? While child-centred parenting has been the norm for the past couple of decades, new research suggests that if we want to raise confident, well-adjusted, healthy children, our style of parenting has to change. Forget the "helicopter parent" (who hovers continually over their offspring), the "lawnmower parent" (who tries to mow down all obstacles in their children's path) or the "tiger mother" (a parent who hothouses her children to succeed academically, named after the bestselling memoir by Amy Chua). We should now be learning how to be "underparents". At the heart of underparenting is an ethos that encourages children to do chores, learn to cook, get muddy – and fall off the climbing frame from time to time. An unfortunate phrase for an effective style of parenting.