



## February 2017 Learning Newsletter

This month's newsletter is focused on the school's continued drive to raise standards at Heronsgate. We would like to take this opportunity to update you on our journey for school improvement and the changes we are making to our curriculum to improve the learning opportunities for all pupils. We hope you find the information useful and would like to thank you for your continued support.

As you will be aware Year 6 SATs results for 2016 were disappointing and did not reflect the dedication and hard work from pupils and staff at Heronsgate. However, we acknowledge that whilst disappointing, changes to our approach for teaching maths and English are essential. The 2015 Ofsted report indicated that:

- Not enough pupils across the school make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There are gaps in the previous learning of pupils that have not been filled quickly enough.
- Pupils do not develop the skills to regularly produce longer and more detailed pieces of writing.
- Pupils do not develop the confidence to use what they already know about mathematics to solve problems speedily and accurately.
- The level of challenge for some pupils, including the most able, is not always high enough.

In order to address these weaknesses we have been consistently monitoring and adapting our approaches to teaching and learning with a new curriculum. In January 2016 a HMI Ofsted Monitoring visit took place and the following judgements were made:

- *Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.*

The inspector also identified that the school needed to do the following in order to improve further:

- *ensure that the impact of current and planned approaches to improve pupils' writing is rigorously monitored.*

So what have we done to address these points?

On the next pages you will find details of the improvements made at Heronsgate in our drive to raise standards for all children.

## Maths

### During the 2015/16 academic year the following improvements were made:-

Daily Fast Maths sessions were introduced to improve accuracy in the recall of number bonds, addition and multiplication facts. The initial focus of this approach is for pupils to concentrate on achieving accuracy in these foundation skills. Once accuracy is achieved pupils then work towards improving their speed to attain quick, accurate recall. This has been hugely successful across the school.

Whilst the Year 6 maths results were low, scrutiny of maths SATs papers highlighted that more pupils were successful in obtaining marks in the arithmetic paper than in the previous mental maths papers.

In addition to Fast Maths we removed maths sets and moved instead to a 'lifting the lid' on learning approach. This approach enabled all children to remain in class and have access to the appropriate curriculum for their academic year. Instead of giving children specific differentiated tasks which impacted on their perception of themselves as learners, and ultimately capped their learning, we introduced four challenges in lessons – each progressively requiring a greater depth of understanding.

With guidance, children are able to select their own starting point and move through or between the challenges – the impact of this model has been an improvement in engagement and self-esteem for the vast majority of pupils.

## Maths 2016/17

### The work continues...

Whilst improvements have been made in developing accuracy and speed in the recall of addition and multiplication facts, we recognise that we also need to improve pupils ability to make links in their learning and develop greater reasoning skills in order for them to apply their understanding in different contexts (including explanations and investigations), in line with the New National Curriculum for maths which places an emphasis on teaching for mastery.

This year we have been fortunate in joining the Enigma Maths Hub to support us in developing a mastery approach to teaching in order to meet the demands of the New Maths Curriculum. Through this, we are working with other schools and a maths mastery specialist to adopt aspects of the Singapore approach to teaching which focuses on using a CPA (concrete, pictorial, abstract) approach to enable all pupils to achieve and deepen their understanding of mathematics.

Early results indicate that already this approach is having a significant impact upon children's depth of understanding of different areas of maths. This will help to ensure children retain their learning and can access it in more easily in the future.

## Maths— No Problem!

The introduction of the 'Maths - No Problem' program will enable us to continue to adopt a consistent approach to the teaching of maths across the school and ensure all pupils have the opportunity to achieve their potential – regardless of ability. Other schools, who are part of the Enigma Hub, have successfully used Maths- No Problem as a base for teaching the Singapore approach and this has made a real difference to both progress and attainment in maths in their schools.

Following the successes of last year, we will be continuing with our daily fast maths sessions and incorporating the use of the four challenges with our new approach.

As a school we are fortunate to have 3 Maths Specialist Teachers who are working with staff to provide training and support in the development of our new approach.

### Further information can be found at:

<http://www.mathsnoproblem.co.uk/mastering-mathematics>

[https://www.ncetm.org.uk/public/files/19990433/Developing\\_mastery\\_in\\_mathematics\\_october\\_2014.pdf](https://www.ncetm.org.uk/public/files/19990433/Developing_mastery_in_mathematics_october_2014.pdf)

**You are also invited to parent evening workshops to learn about the new program and support your child in their learning-**

Tuesday 21 February 6.30pm Y3 & 4  
Tuesday 28 February 6.30pm Y5 & 6

### Writing 2015/16

We have been very pleased with the continued improvements in writing standards across the school. This has been brought about by implementing several strategies:-

Through the introduction of a topic based curriculum, within English we have implemented the use of a core text linked to the topic area – eg. In Year 6 Wolf Brother (Michelle Paver) has been used as a stimulus for deepening learning about the Stone Age whilst providing opportunities for studying how authors use grammatical techniques to develop writing and used as a springboard for pupils in incorporating these into their own writing. Using the core rich texts has enhanced the range and quality of texts that all pupils have access to and as a result pupil engagement and enjoyment in writing activities has improved.

The introduction of timetabled SPAG (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar) lessons, in addition to English lessons, has ensured that the specific teaching of spelling strategies and punctuation meets the expectations of the National Curriculum for each year group. These lessons provide additional opportunities for teaching about grammatical language and the application of techniques within written work across the curriculum. This has had a positive impact across the school and this year's spelling SATs scores were higher than national in several categories.

In Year 3 daily phonics sessions were run and used to address gaps in phonological knowledge and understanding. The impact of these sessions has ensured improved spelling, and improved decoding when reading therefore enabling children to develop greater fluency when reading and writing.

### The 'Big Write ' 2016/17

In order to provide a consistent well established opportunity for children to produce longer pieces of writing along with the developments in the literacy curriculum, Big Write weeks have also been introduced. Big Write week takes place at the start of each half term. All classes use the same stimulus (book or video extract) and across the week the children engage in activities to develop their literacy skills for the given genre.

Often the text is chosen from recommendations from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education. The activities involve reading extracts of the text, drama, reader's theatre, art, group poetry and mapping of key events – these activities enable all children to engage and obtain a good understanding of the given stimulus. At the end of the week the children are given a task in which they have the opportunity to apply their learning and demonstrate the depth of their understanding through an extended writing activity.

To date the texts used are:

Fox – Margaret Wild

Varmints – Helen Ward

Firebird - Saviour Pirotta

The Lost Thing – Shaun Tan

Our next 'Big Write' week will be based around non-fiction writing using an extract from David Attenboroughs' Planet Earth.

### Reading

Being able to read involves a great deal more than decoding words and reading a book. It requires an understanding of what is being read and making inferences and deductions through using clues within a text. As a school our focus for reading is developing pupils' reading comprehension skills.

At Heronsgate the traditional approach to reading and understanding of text has been through shared reading sessions. This has not enabled individuals to work closely with an adult as part of an ongoing process. In order to support pupils' in developing their comprehension skills we have adapted our curriculum to include guided reading sessions in all year groups four times per week. This allows each pupil the opportunity to work as part of a group working with an adult twice in a cycle.

During sessions when working with an adult there is a specific focus relating to inferring and deducing information from a text, using clues within it to develop responses. These sessions enable pupils to discuss ideas and articulate their thoughts drawing evidence from the text. On days when pupils are not working with an adult they will be engaged in a rotation of activities which include reading for pleasure and answering comprehension questions relating to a text using taught skills.

In addition to this, pupils in Year 6 will be receiving support during each of the guided reading sessions to develop and practice the strategies required in order to answer reading SATs questions, drawing upon their knowledge and skills in the time required.