

Ickford News

My apologies for the lack of newsletter last week but I am hopeful this week's makes up for it and satiates any burgeoning thirst for information that may have developed in the past two weeks. Though with Google at most of our finger tips, I am sure thirsts for information are regularly quenched.

In the past couple of weeks, whilst working on our curriculum, I have been considering two questions, "Do we need teachers now that we have Google?" and, "Is knowledge obsolete in a world with Google?" Thankfully, the answer to the first is "Yes" and to the second, "No" which in terms of paying the mortgage is kind handy really. However, I shall accept that this is only my opinion.

Google is an information provider and though it can be accessed at any point in time, finding information does not mean we necessarily have more knowledge. This is important because, our National Curriculum, which is the foundation stone of what we teach, is described as 'knowledge based' and the new Ofsted framework for inspecting school's curriculum, focuses a great deal on knowledge acquisition. One could therefore be forgiven for assuming that, in order to justify the provision of a good education, schools will simply need to fill children with the answers to 'pub quiz' style questions. Thankfully, this is not a trap we are about to fall into but I am reviewing our curriculum and its delivery to ensure that the children leave with a depth of knowledge and understanding that they can apply to the next stage in their education and beyond.

It is complicated, knowledge comes in different forms and where the children are concerned it is important that we

understand what the different definitions of knowledge are and how we can ensure that they acquire it. Why? Because without knowledge it is impossible to develop thought and furthermore, knowledge has its own 'gravity'. The more you have, the more you are able to get.

During the past few weeks I have been investigating the theories of knowledge and looking at our curriculum mapping particularly in the foundation subjects (Those that are not English, Maths or Science). I have been discussing my findings with the teachers and looking at the areas where we may need to make changes. I know we are fairly successful as a school but I don't want to stop improving and would hate to be accused of complacency.

Regular visitors to the school website may have noticed that curriculum maps have been removed for updating and replaced with some documents that show concept mapping in a variety of subjects. The aim is to engage teachers in planning for each subject using the threshold and key concepts as their starting points in order to ensure progression for every child as they move through the school.

We know that we have very high standards in English and Maths in particular and it is no coincidence that in both these subject areas, concepts are repeated built on each year. Nobody would question the fact that children are taught to complete addition calculations in Year 1 and that addition as a strategy is then taught over and over again in each year group, building on methods and deepening understanding. However, if every year the children studied the Romans in History or map reading in Geography, people would begin to question why.

Nevertheless, depth of learning requires a change to the long-term memory and in turn, this requires repetition. Just as we repeat teaching things in English and Maths we need to think about repetition in the Foundation subjects so that we can add depth to learning and knowledge. I am using the understanding and articulation of concepts as our goal rather than simply facts, I think we can achieve our aim of being the best. So, if children revisit learning about the Romans in another year group, it may be to deepen their understanding of the concept of 'empire' or 'society' and when map reading is repeated it may be to consolidate an understanding of 'space' or 'analysis of data'. These are exciting yet transitional times and I hope that throughout the rest of the year, I can keep you updated about our progress.

Talking of History, Class 3 enjoyed a day out at Waddesdon Manor last week as part of their 'Local History' topic and, by all accounts, really enjoyed their day. Other areas of the curriculum have also been enriched by the visits of professionals, Dr Makris who spoke about her role as a GP and Dr Tom Kemp, Emeritus Research Fellow in Zoology at St John's College Oxford (Ellie's Grandad) who gave a fascinating talk on evolution and palaeontology to Class 5. The fact that professional people are willing to give up their time is invaluable to the school and the children and I offer sincere thanks.

Giving of time also relates to the teachers in the last week and I am so grateful that it was not wasted because the turnout for parent evenings was very high. I hope that everyone has taken something from the meetings that will help you to support your children in making progress. I always advise teachers to ensure that they are honest in meetings (they are quite daunting for a teacher) whether it is good

or perhaps not so good news. Children don't need extra tuition, they just need strong attendance and parental engagement in what we do.

My failure to produce a newsletter last week, did (temporarily) rob our Badminton Teams of some well deserved congratulatory, press. It is then, time to congratulate the Year 3/4 team on winning the Area, Regional and County finals this year and the Year 5/6 team on winning the Area and Regional Finals and collecting Bronze medals in the County finals. We are very proud of all the children and the 3/4 team will get to join the 'Wall of Fame'!



It is the turn of the children in Year 2 next so hopefully we can have clean sweep of Badminton competitions this year.

Half term seems to have arrived too quickly for me but I am sure the children will welcome the break. Let's hope that the weather is not as bad as predicted and that storm Dennis (Dennis? Really?) is not the menace promised.

Have a good week,

Mr Ronane

