

Great Easton C of E (Aided) Primary School
Great Easton
Dunmow
Essex CM6 2DR



Tel: 01371 870219
Fax: 01371 870063
E-mail: admin@greateaston.essex.sch.uk

Headteacher: Claire Jackman

10th February 2015

Dear Parents

We are excited to finally present the outcomes of the parent and child homework surveys, parent meetings and staff collaboration. Detailed below is a guide to the practical ways that you can help your child make the most of their precious school days. Please keep this somewhere safe so you can refer to it again. Our ultimate aim is to always ensure we foster a **love of learning** and **inspire our children to be the best that they can be**.

If you were unable to make the open meeting for parents in October, but are interested in reading about the current research which was presented at the meeting, please see the 'Learning Links' section of the school website.

Summary of our research findings:

- Families feel pressurised to complete 'worksheet' type tasks and projects.
- The essential '**practise at home**' skills such as reading and number facts/times tables weren't getting enough focus or time (the worksheets took priority).
- Valuable teaching time in school is being used to help children, who have fallen behind their expected level, catch up on these essential skills (reading, number facts, times tables etc).
- Teachers feel that if these essential skills can be practised daily at home, there would be many fewer children working below the expected level.
- Homework activities in primary school years shouldn't be at the expense of playtime, downtime and family time - all vital elements of a happy childhood.

SMART Thinking

What we have therefore concluded after all the feedback and research is that the new focus for the entire school needs to be upon nurturing our children's innate curiosity and **love of learning** with independent study skills and thought processes. These life skills are vital for any child to progress and develop and we believe this can be best done by taking the pressure off home time and instead enabling you to spend more time with your child sharing a book or chatting about number. Teachers will then be able to give ongoing guidance on how best help your child in much more fun and beneficial ways. This will therefore now follow a new **SMART** way of learning focusing on building study skills that will provide life-long benefits. So if your child refers to 'homework' as the 'h' word - or they tell you off for saying it, that's because we are looking to inspire children to want to learn and find out about the world around them. We have re-vamped the traditional approach to the 'h'word and replaced it with being SMART:

- **Spellings**
- **Maths**
- **And**
- **Reading**
- **Together!**

Spelling:

- ✓ You can make a huge difference to your child by **practising weekly spellings little and often**. Pinning them up on the bathroom mirror or on their bedroom door will also mean the child can see them every day and become familiar with them and practising them out loud on car journeys.

Maths:

- ✓ If children can **recall key number facts** (i.e. which numbers add together to make 10) and **times tables**- your child will find maths lessons in school easier and more fun. We have a brand new exciting programme called 'Doodle Maths' which is intuitive and available for use at home as well as school and is a free downloadable app for apple and android devices - we will tell you more (including usernames and logins) soon!

Reading:

- ✓ This can be anything- newspaper, magazines, fact books, a recipe, or the works of Shakespeare! Children choosing to **read for pleasure** (active readers) find thinking of ideas for their writing and other school work much easier. Reading a nightly story is a big indicator of a child being more likely to read for pleasure.
- ✓ You may have been lucky enough to meet our Reading Champions- Major Read and Paige Turner- they are reading superheroes from the Planet Thesaurus who reward children, in exciting assemblies, for being enthusiastic readers!
- ✓ We also subscribe to the brilliant 'Fiction Express' which is for children aged 6-12+. It enables readers to engage with their favourite authors in a unique and original way by allowing them to contribute to the plot. Fiction Express for Schools e-books are published in weekly chapters at 3 pm (UK time) each Friday. At the end of every cliffhanging chapter there are voting options to decide where the plot should go next. The readers have the following Monday and Tuesday to read each chapter and vote by 3pm on Tuesday afternoon. The author then writes the next chapter, in 'real time', according to what the readers chose. Again more information will follow which will enable you to login at home and discuss what you think should happen next in the story!

Together:

- ✓ We recognise how busy everyone is and how many after-school clubs our children are lucky enough to attend and that family time is very precious. Therefore, being '**SMART**' encourages 'togetherness' as a crucial time for developing your child. A discussion at breakfast time, in the bath or in the car is more valuable than battling to complete a worksheet. **Money, and telling the time** are two really difficult topics to teach to a whole class, whereas a chat in the supermarket about how much change you're due, or how long left until bedtime would quickly help children become more confident. This means they will get maximum benefit from any work done in class. Similarly, reading a book to your child develops their language skills and vocabulary.
- ✓ **SMART** thinking will also encourage children who have been inspired by their topic to undertake optional more creative learning. Ideas will be given by the teachers to inspire children to want to learn, bake or make with you at home.
- ✓ **P4C (Philosophy for Children)** is an exciting concept which allows children to play with learning and to ask questions about the world around them. We will be introducing regular whole-school discussion, and even allowing you parents to join in by sending home a brain teaser in the Grapevine each week. (THINK BIG! If a tree falls in an empty forest- does it still make a sound? Watch this space...)

How will you keep track of your child's progress?

To strengthen the bridge between school and home we have come up with a plan! Teachers have kindly offered an **open classroom every night** after school where you will be welcome to pop in and look at your child's books and celebrate their work. This is an informal opportunity for your child to show off what they've done that day. Teachers may or may not be available, but you're welcome anyway!

Just when you think things couldn't get any more radical- we have a final piece of exciting news! We are going to pioneer a system of **sending school books home once a month** for you to review at your leisure and keep much more up-to-date with your child's progress. We know the children will be really excited to share the fruits of their labour and you will have the opportunity to leave your own comments in their books to ensure strong communication between parent and teacher. As always, you are welcome to make an appointment to chat to your child's teacher further at any time.

This is a really exciting time for the school and we're very grateful for all the feedback thus far; we hope that you will be as inspired as the children are to foster their love of learning and love of life. We are looking forward to **SMART** thinking enriching both academic and family life for our children.

Kind regards

Claire Jackman