

Curriculum and Assessment

Information Session for Parents and Carers

We recently invited parents to join us for an introduction to the new curriculum. Those of you who attended raised some additional questions that we promised to answer after the session concluded. For each of these questions, we offer a comprehensive answer for you below. Some questions around the same theme have been grouped.

Is there weighting applied to exams in Year 6 for Years 3, 4, and 5 or just the current Year 6?

At the end of Year 6, children undertake Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) which are tests that are externally marked. Only children in this year group are subject to these tests. In previous years, once all tests for all Year 6 children nationally are marked, a grade/level boundary was applied to determine what could be deemed as pass marks for each level. Under the new assessment system we understand that SATs will continue but may be assessed under a standardised score and not a level, as levels no longer exist.

Children in Years 3, 4 and 5 are assessed from their work by the teachers and these assessments and the evidence required are then moderated internally. Children in these year groups do not sit any formal, externally marked tests.

Class sizes in Singapore are 14 – 15. How can we have much bigger class sizes and still be comparable?

In mainstream schools in Singapore class sizes tend to be 40 children or less for most schools. Class sizes of approximately 15 are often found in independent schools. The success of Singapore's high performance is a combination of factors from culture, aspiration, expectation, curriculum design, education structure and the principles and methodologies underpinning high quality teaching, learning and assessment. No country can ever be directly comparable but we can all learn from the best examples.

Teacher quality and the development of pedagogy is the most important factor in achieving pupil outcomes; how schools do this and organise themselves is determined by individual schools and schools have to do this within the structure of our education system. It is more often the case that the quality of teaching has the biggest impact on achievement rather than class size. It is the methodologies of high performing countries that are used and explored as models of practice for others to learn from and adapt, rather than simply replicating exactly what they do. All countries have their own cultures, values and governments that directly affects how education is shaped and what might be successful or otherwise depending on all of those factors combined.

What can we do at home to help with handwriting legibility?

Can you display an example of the handwriting model required for the new curriculum please?

Please refer to the Curriculum area of the school website where we have displayed a model of the handwriting script to help you.

If a child has generally poor handwriting will it drag down the rest of their marks?

Do children that have difficulty writing cursive really have to write in it (as this is now used as marking criteria)?

If children have poor handwriting it will have a detrimental impact on them achieving mastery in writing. There is greater emphasis on handwriting quality in the new English curriculum.

We have handwriting lessons each week focusing upon correct formation of joins, letter sizing, consistency and fluency. Children are taught to use both cursive and non-cursive script and when to use the correct

handwriting style to fit the purpose (e.g. using non cursive writing for labelling diagrams, filling in forms, notes).

How do you ensure that, with the new demands that the new curriculum is making on our children, they will not be feeling too pressurised, especially in the run up to SATs?

Will the current Year 6 children get the opportunity to familiarise themselves with SATs style papers before they have to sit them in May 2016? If so, when will this happen?

How confident are you that Year 6 will be able to take on board all of these new curriculum 'add-ons'? How are you ensuring they are not stressed out?

SATs have been a statutory part of education for children in Year 6 since 1995. We understand their role in the assessment process but recognise that the education of the whole child is what we aim for. Throughout the children's four years at junior school we are open and transparent with them about testing, assessment and what SATs are when they are faced with them in Year 6. Our aim is to prepare the children for the conditions of the tests, where they are required to sit and work independently under test conditions; it is statutory as are SATs at Key Stage 3 and onwards to GCSEs and further education.

Our aim with our curriculum is to prepare our children to be able to apply all that they know effectively in any test question. With any test situation we are aware of the pressure this places on children, parents and staff and do all we can to be open about the process and minimise the effects of the pressure. Through what we teach, how we teach, homework, booster lessons and parent SATs evenings we provide all we can to ensure that the children are supported to be as prepared as they can be.

The changes to the National Curriculum do not necessarily impose any additional 'add-ons', the principles behind the National Curriculum, its structure, some of the content and how it will be assessed requires us to think, teach and do things differently; so we are having to reshape what we do and how we do it for the benefit of outcomes for children rather than do additional things. Children are required in every year group across the primary curriculum to achieve higher standards and the level of challenge has increased. We are very aware that this may cause stress, yet we are confident that with the positive relationships we have with our children and parents, our curriculum design which aims to engage, that our children are so fully immersed in the joy and flow of learning that stress is not detrimental to the children's learning and performance.

Throughout Year 6, children are prepared for how a test will look, what it will feel like to be working independently within a time frame and how to behave under test conditions; children will have real experiences of this before the final SATs. Dealing with formal test situations is a life skill that we teach throughout the curriculum, in all lessons they will learn how to answer test style questions and where necessary teachers will organise additional booster sessions leading up the test.

Will it be the same team that will provide the intervention to a specific year group, so that they are familiar with the students?

With the emphasis on high quality teaching and learning taking place in the classroom with class teachers, we believe that they are best equipped to address misconceptions in learning and devise the intervention. The drive is for children to 'keep up' rather than 'catch up' and our teaching and timetabling will be adapted to provide for children to do this. We aim in the main for intervention and support to be delivered in the classroom by the teachers or in some cases, Learning Support Assistants (LSA) and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) under the direction of the teachers.

Our LSA and HLTA are timetabled to pupil needs in any year group, first being assigned to support those with special educational needs. We aim for consistency in standards of practice across the school which any adult could deliver.

What will happen at Robert May's School (RMS)? Will the new style of learning be adopted by RMS at Key Stage 3? How does this fit with what RMS are doing and expecting?

How does the new curriculum feed through to secondary school?

Are they also introducing this new curriculum?

How will this new system of teaching translate when they reach Year 7? Are you working with RMS or other secondary schools?

We have a strong transition programme and relationship with Robert May's School and working with all other schools that feed into RMS and they are aware of what each school, including Hook Juniors, is establishing as its practice to cater for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

In February 2015, three members of the Senior Leadership Team at Hook Juniors delivered a presentation to Robert May's staff to inform them of how we are adapting and embedding the changes to our mindset, teaching practice, curriculum and assessment. Every school is responsible for determining how they perceive the changes and how teaching and learning is realised and shaped in their own schools, this is for individual schools to deem. The National Curriculum is progressive from Early Years to Key Stage 4 and as such we are aware of the requirements of the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment at Key Stage 1 as our children transition from the infants to us and at Key Stage 3, as our children transition to Robert May's. We continue to work closely with Robert May's and local schools to develop consistency in our understanding of what mastery looks like and how it is achieved, in addition to ensuring as part of transition that RMS having a clear perspective of every child, their attainment and progress in all aspects of their learning and development as they transition to Key Stage 3.

Our aim is to prepare our children at Key Stage 2 to achieve mastery and achieve the best they can from our Key Stage 2 curriculum in order that they build upon their achievement at Key Stage 1 from the infant school and are properly prepared for secondary schooling and Key Stage 3.

To what extent have teachers been trained on this new curriculum prior to the start of term?

All school staff and governors have been engaged in planning and preparing for the new curriculum since September 2013. As a school we have discussed and revisited the core principles of what we believe to be the right education for our children and how this will be shaped; from here we have adapted our curriculum and subsequently an assessment system that is a fundamental part of feedback for learning. All teachers are subject leaders and have taken part in professional development to support their drive for change with their subject areas; this then supports all staff to plan for each subject in their year group.

As the main changes are to teaching and learning in Maths, Writing and Reading, we have incorporated weekly inset sessions after school every week to address staff professional development in these areas. Teachers who are Maths (Mrs Bailey) and English (Mrs Hilton) leaders are attending local networks working collectively with schools to share expertise, skills and knowledge to deliver support and training back at school. Our teachers were prepared and ready to deliver on our new curriculum and assessment as a result of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) they have undertaken over the past two years.

We highly value all aspects of CPD and see teaching and learning as a dynamic process – our staff are always engaged in new learning and actively seek opportunities to do so for the benefit of their practice for the children. The senior leadership team and the governing body strive to invest as much as possible in staff CPD.

If there is a notion that all children are treated as equal in ability, how, in the future will children from either end of the normal distribution – bottom 10%, top 10% be catered for in a way that they will not be affected adversely?

How are you going to give more challenging work to move able students if every student in the class is working at the same pace?

What does it mean – 'children moving through the curriculum at broadly the same pace'? At a consistent speed through their years or same as each other?

There is the notion that all children will move through the curriculum and each lesson at broadly the same pace with the intention that all children will achieve mastery by the end of a key stage (Year 6 at the end of Key Stage 2). However, children may achieve mastery at different paces and different times throughout Key Stage 2; some for example, may attain mastery in a particular maths objective where some children may need further lessons to do so. At the heart of this is robust and accurate assessment for learning

where teachers use all sources of information to continually assess children's achievement in all lessons (observations, dialogue, questioning, quality of responses, pupil work, marking) in order to plan and adapt teaching and learning for the next lesson. This will take into account the needs for different stages of ability, as is currently the case and teaching and tasks will be adapted to cater for ability needs – differentiation of task and teaching will be adapted to allow children to best achieve and attain mastery. The aim is to adapt teaching to enable those who are struggling to make rapid progress and catch up and for those who are more able to be deepening their learning in a range of contexts and as such would be expected to be exceeding. Expectations for achievement in the National Curriculum for the end of each year group have risen, these are expressed as Age Related Expectations (ARE) and determine whether a child is on track to achieve end of Key Stage (Year 6) expectations.

Differentiation - providing different students with different avenues for learning - has always been part of teaching, learning and assessing and will remain so. As such the needs of the top and bottom 10% will still be catered for, although more so within class by the class teacher. Our assessment system measures who is below the programme of study for their age group, who is developing, mastering and exceeding.

How is the feedback, following teacher marking, relayed to the child?

How can a teacher carry out formative assessment with 35 children?

How is feedback given?

How is it documented?

How does feedback on homework fit in?

Feedback for learning is, and always has been, a fundamental part of teaching that is part of our assessment for learning practice. It can be realised in a number of ways, all of which are dependent on the context of the lesson and the child. Teachers will assess and provide feedback as follows for all pupils in lessons regardless of numbers in their class:

- Teacher discussion with the child in the lesson
- Teacher response to children's answers, whole class, groups or individually
- Marking of work in books
- Teacher marking where a response to any feedback is required by the pupil in the next lesson
- Target stamps on work

We realise that feedback is one of the most important aspects of practice that has a positive impact on learning and undertake a variety of methods to ensure it is effective. Children are given the opportunity in lessons to respond to marking and teachers address any misconceptions with children should their feedback require further clarification.

If you are having extra Maths and English lessons to cover the new curriculum, are the foundations subjects being cut down? How do you decide which ones miss out?

The content of all subjects has been reduced and as we take an integrated approach to curriculum design where subject skills, knowledge and understanding are taught within concepts and topics, this allows us to teach all subjects. Sometimes subjects are taught discretely or may be taught in a block of time and sometimes it is taught holistically within the topic. All teachers are leaders of one more subjects with accountability to ensure that the subject is taught to a high standard with measureable outcomes for all children and that their subject content is covered; we teach all subjects and no subject is missed out of the curriculum. Maths and English are also linked to foundation subjects and are taught through topic/concept areas and vice versa, we may use the content of specific subjects to teach skills in Maths and English. It is all interwoven. Our aim is to develop the whole child and with that every subject is important but Maths and Literacy skills are key to learning in all subjects, key to accessing learning and are vital skills for life.

Assessment through questioning was mentioned. When some children are naturally more talkative and confident when answering questions, how can you ensure that all children are assessed equally and comprehensively?

Teachers know and understand their children and will recognise when questioning in front of a whole class, groups or individually is the most appropriate technique to enable them to respond. We will adopt a variety of methods to determine what a child can and cannot do, questioning is one of them but should a child be shy within a whole class setting, the teacher will understand this and may use another form of assessing what they know and understand to determine any judgement about their learning.

What happens if your child doesn't master each phase?

What happens if a child is 'below' when reaching the end of a phase?

Our assessment system will record whether a child is 'developing', 'mastering' or 'exceeding' at each phase with the intention that children will catch up and keep up with their peers. The end of a 'phase' is the end of a period of work within a school year. Phase 1 is September to the end of November, phase 2 is December to the end of February and phase 3 is March to the end of May. Finally, phase 4 is a consolidation of all previous phases from June to July. Those who are 'developing' will be supported and have teaching and tasks differentiated to allow them to catch up. We recognise that all children have differing rates at which they will achieve mastery but the aim is that they will do so by the end of Year 6.

The Key Stage 2 curriculum from Year 3 is a journey towards mastery by the end of Year 6, children do not always progress at a linear rate and there will be peaks and troughs in progression along the way. We are only expecting children with a specific need of lower cognitive ability to be 'below', as this suggests that they are below the standard of the curriculum for children of their age. For these children they will, like all children, be provided with a curriculum differentiated to their needs and with targets for their learning progression.

Do the resources vary from school to school?

Yes, resources vary from school to school but the content of the National Curriculum does not – what we have to deliver remains the same, the way schools choose to design the curriculum, the method of delivery and the resources to support delivery is for individual schools to determine.

You mentioned a number of times, teacher/child one to one sessions – either for assessment or closing gaps – how realistic is this? How much time would this take?

What would the rest of the class be doing?

Teachers, Learning Support Assistants or Higher Level Teaching Assistants may use a variety of techniques to assess a child and respond to a child to support which may include short, focused one to one sessions. This will usually take place in the classroom during whole class teaching when the teacher has set the class to undertake their learning tasks whilst they address an individual child. A teacher will use their professional judgement to determine when this is appropriate or necessary. There is an increased element of one to one questioning within a whole class lesson to determine understanding and for the teacher to provide feedback and model teaching, this enables the whole class to listen and learn at the same time.

Could you do a specific evening on Maths please?

Will the school run another Maths evening – helping parents understanding of learning/teaching methods?

We most certainly will! We have received a lot of positive feedback from parents after delivering Maths and English workshops and we intend to deliver sessions on both in the Spring term.

What is the difference between assessment in lessons now and previously? I understand that those assessments have to be done anyway to check whether your lesson objectives are met.

Teachers continually assess. We are placing more emphasis on the use of daily formative assessment in all aspects of teaching and learning to address misconceptions and close the gaps for children as they arise in lessons, and less reliance on use of summative testing at a given point in time. There will be a balance of both forms of assessment but we will be assessing what children know, can do and understand based on their verbal responses and recorded bank of evidence in their books.

Do the children learn to use calculators and computers in Maths lessons?

Computing is a key part of the National Curriculum; we teach the skills discretely and integrate the use of computing across the curriculum in all subjects, including Maths where it is appropriate. However, the Maths curriculum is heavily focused upon children understanding, applying and being able to solve Maths problems using only mental and written methods; children are not allowed to use a calculator in any tests including Year 6 SATs.

This is about raising standards. If there is no comparison between 'old' and 'new' – how will you know if the overall objectives have been met and whether standards have been maintained, have increased or decreased?

The standards for each subject are identified in the National Curriculum programmes of study so we are clear about the expectations and how this can be realised through high quality teaching to deliver mastery

in learning. We cannot compare the old curriculum with the new because the standard has changed, it is different. We are now looking to measure our school performance against the percentage of children who attain mastery and those who exceed in just the same way as we did when measuring school performance against levels (percentage of children who attained level four and above in maths, reading and writing). As a school and along with the Governors, we monitor, evaluate and assess all aspects of our provision and performance against guidance from the Department For Education as to what those standards are.

In terms of measuring whether children have met objectives, each child will be tracked and teacher assessed against each objective in their programme of study, all of which match curriculum content, within each phase of teaching.

Are the age related expectations differentiated by birth month, e.g. for summer born children, compared with those who are six to nine months older?

Age related expectations are not differentiated by birth and never have been under any National Curriculum. They are standards that all children within that year group are expected to achieve by the end of the year or by the end of a key stage. Therefore, end of year expectations for children in year four are set for all children in year four regardless of the term in which they were born.

Can we have any examples of further questions for English?

Examples of SATs papers for each area of testing can be found in the Curriculum section of the school website.

How does planning come into English, e.g. to get good flow and structure within their text - is this now pushed harder?

English National Curriculum strands are split into reading, writing, spelling, and grammar and punctuation with age related expectations and objectives to achieve them in each strand. Teachers plan to teach discrete skills in each strand within the context of a form of writing (e.g. reports, narrative and diary), they also teach the skills required through the context and writing form so that children learn how writing flows and is structured and the impact this creates.

Teachers model the writing planning process and specifically teach editing and drafting skills; they encourage the children to behave as writers and authors and provide opportunities for children to go through stages of the writing process whilst applying the specific language and grammar features required of the writing form. The learning is structured and progressive. Reading many texts within the form they are studying also supports children with understanding text cohesion and structure.

When a child has reached 'mastery with greater depth' in maths, how do you progress the child on from there? I feel that the new system doesn't cater for moving on to new concepts that the child might be ready for.

Children will continually be challenged within the programme of study, where they achieve 'mastery with greater depth' we will be designing learning opportunities for them to demonstrate that they are 'exceeding'. Teachers will be looking for a wide range of evidence in a wide range of contexts for children to be mastering or exceeding. The system is based around moving a child on once a teacher is satisfied and has enough substantial evidence to support their judgement that a child fully demonstrates skills, knowledge and understanding of a concept at mastery and beyond. Teachers will design lessons based on children's needs.

What about children who reach the Key Stage before the end of Year 6?

Children cannot reach the Key Stage before the end of Year 6; the end of Year 6 is the end of the Key Stage. The curriculum is designed over the four year Key Stage 2 period.