

Dear Parent / Carer,

A great half-term lies ahead! Not only have teachers planned projects that will really capture the children's interest but some great innovations have been introduced: below you can read all about "Big Maths" and "Accelerated Reader". Both these projects have been introduced following considerable self-evaluation, and we know they will have a huge impact on the children's learning. They are being implemented on a phased basis: they are up and running now in Years 3 & 4 and will be rolled out to Years 5 & 6 in due course. ALL the books in the library are aligned with Accelerated Reader and we are really grateful to everyone who made such a superb effort to re-set the library.

Learning outside the classroom: Trips out of school are a really great way to engage children and to give them practical experiences. Years 5 went on a trip to the Theatre to see the Horrible Histories play and are off to the Castle Museum for a fabulous Roman Empire day. You may well like to take the family to see the "Power & People" exhibition yourself! It brings together a stunning collection of artefacts to explore the story of one of the most powerful empires ever. The Castle is one of only six venues to host the largest ever UK exhibition of Roman artefacts on loan from the British Museum.

Not all learning outside the classroom involves travel. As you will have seen, our School Gardens are progressing well. The veg plot has been fenced and we are about to remove the turf and dig over the beds in readiness for growing season! We are also about to plant our school orchard on the opposite side of the path. The children are very excited about the thought of picking their own apples for fruit breaks! All year groups will be involved in growing things and apart from all the practical maths and science that they will get, we also hope to grow fruit and vegetables that we can enjoy in our school lunches!

Book Week: As you know we are linking our introduction of Accelerated Reader with our Book Week (and World Book Day). Miss Putt and the other teachers have planned a great week that the children will really enjoy – including a dress-up day on Wednesday.

Accelerated Reader

Years 3 and 4 have made a very positive start to using Accelerated Reader and we have been delighted with how quickly they have settled into the new routine. Every child has a reading range based on the test they did before half-term and the library books are labelled so that they can easily choose books which are suited to their reading abilities. A great selection of new books has been added to all levels, so the choice is better than ever.

Children are being given support with note-taking and mind-mapping so that they are able to record important information about what they are reading. These skills will be useful in all areas of the curriculum.

There is a daily reading session of between 20 and 30 minutes and children are already showing increased focus, purpose and enthusiasm. As soon as they finish a book, they are able to do a computer quiz using both the book and their notes to demonstrate their understanding. The number of 100% scores is growing!

The next reading test to update reading ranges is planned for the third week of term.

For anyone who would like to understand more about Accelerated Reader, hear more about how parents can get involved or ask specific questions, there is a meeting on Wednesday 12th March at 3:30 p.m. in the Hall.

We look forward to seeing you there.

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Big Maths

Years 3 and 4 began an exciting new maths programme in January called "Big Maths". It is proving to be very popular among pupils and is already having a positive impact on results. It was adopted in response to our School Improvement Plan's aim: to accelerate pupil progress and raise attainment in numeracy.

Big Maths is a systematic, cohesive and progressive programme which addresses, specifically, the core skills essential in order for children to become fully numerate. These include: times tables, the four number operations and mental maths. It is a 20 minute session per day in addition to the daily numeracy hour. The 20 minutes are divided into four 5 minute slots each addressing a different mathematical skill. It is a fun, fast-paced class which the children enjoy immensely. Every Friday, the children take 2 assessments, which they look forward to, being lively and entertaining with countdowns to music and a supportive environment. **The first requires them to finish as many multiplication tables and basic addition calculations as they can within a set time frame (eg 1 minute) and, week on week, the children try to beat their previous result. The second tests their knowledge of the other aspects of the syllabus including partitioning, the number operations and fact families.**

Teachers monitor progress by tracking data and, already, it is very clear that children are showing improvement.

Big maths is fully in line with the new National Curriculum's programme of study objectives and is proving to be an excellent addition to Firside's existing, successful numeracy programme.

Here are some Year 4 children's comments on Big Maths:

"I like the tests because they don't put you under any pressure- they are fun!" (Dylan)

"I like it because it recaps over things you might have forgotten." (Becky)

"In Big Maths you learn things in small chunks and repeat them often which make it easy to learn." (Caitlin)

"Big Maths is epic!" (Elliot)

School Sports Update

We are entering an exciting and busy period for our sports teams. Today we have sent our largest ever squad to the West Norwich and Dereham School Sports Partnership swimming gala. Hopefully we will see some of them qualify for the county final.

The Norfolk Winter School games will be held across the week beginning the 10th of March. We have 3 teams that have already qualified for these finals – a great achievement. Firstly, 9 athletes will compete in the cross country final at Gresham's School. We are equally proud of 9 different children who will compete in the inclusive event known as 'Playground to Podium' that allows children of all abilities to enjoy competitive sport. Our tag-rugby team will then play against the best teams in the county at Diss Rugby Club.

The year 6 mixed football team have, for the second year running, qualified for the final of the CSF schools' cup! They are now a tantalising few games away from representing Norwich City FC at the national finals which will be held at the Etihad stadium in Manchester. The Year 6 boys team are in a strong position in their league and are still involved in the cup too. The year 5 team look forward to returning to action after their 'winter break' next week. Hopefully, we will be reporting lots of good news in the next newsletter.

We are delighted to have secured some funding, through the Bikeability programme, to allow 12 pupils in year 5 to undertake a two day intensive cycling proficiency course. This is in addition to the usual training that we already offer to all pupils in the upper school.

The children continue to work towards their individual target of running 50 miles in the Golden Mile initiative. This scheme is designed to encourage children to include regular exercise as an integral part of healthy living. We are looking forward to all at Firside 'going the extra mile' to fund-raise for Sport Relief. More details will follow shortly.

As a reminder, please get all your family and friends to send in Sainsbury's Get Active vouchers. These always prove a useful way to add to our sports equipment which benefits all the children. There is a collection box near the office.

Diary

March

Mon	3 rd	Book Week
Wed	5 th	Dress-up day – come to school as your favourite book character Used-book sale
Thur	6 th	School Disco 5.00 to 7.00pm
Fri	7 th	Book-making – mixed-age day
Mon	10 th	Cross-country county final – <u>9</u> children taking part!
Tues	11 th	Yr5 Cycling/road safety event
Wed	12 th	<i>Parents:</i> Accelerated Reader meeting.....after school Tag-Rugby final
Fri	14 th	CSF Football competition FINAL at Carrow Park <i>Parents:</i> Year 3 Ancient Greek assembly
Mon	17 th	Kwik Sticks hockey tournament <i>Parents:</i> Yr3 parents to lunch
Thur	20 th	Yr5 Football tournament at UEA
Fri	21 st	<i>Parents:</i> Yr4 parents to lunch
Thur	27 th	<i>Parents:</i> Yr5 Book Café2:00 pm
Mon	31 st	<i>Parents:</i> Yr5 parents to lunch

April

Fri	4 th	Last day of term <i>Parents:</i> Yr6 parents to lunch
Wed	23 rd	First day of summer term

Parents in School: We were delighted so many of you came to the *Book Cafes and* other Year group events such as the Year 6 Space exhibition. Thank you for coming and taking part so enthusiastically - the children are always very proud of what they have achieved, and enjoy being able to show it off to an audience. Please look out for the Parents to Lunch invitations: these are really popular with both parents and grandparents and we would love you to join us.