



Monday 4th September 2023

Dear Parents,

I hope you all had a wonderful summer with your children and that they are as excited as I am about the year ahead. It was lovely for Mrs Marshall and myself to welcome them into Doves on our Move Up morning and introduce them to our first history topic of this year through their Medusa headdresses: Ancient Greece.

We started our term with a Welcome Week, focusing on getting to know each other and introducing our Grand Design topic with some art activities and problem solving tasks.

Phonics and Spellings

We will soon be starting a brand new phonics programme called Unlocking Letters and Sounds. You will be receiving a letter with further details and information about a Parents Workshop very soon but I wanted to give you a few immediate details in this letter.

Developing Phonics and Reading is going to be a whole school focus this year and accordingly there will be more classroom time allocated to these vital skills. In Doves, we will split into year groups to teach phonics and as part of the more detailed scheme, the children will be taught their common exception spelling words daily which means they will not need to be set weekly spellings until after the programme finishes at Christmas. Therefore, there will be no spellings in Doves until the Spring Term. Hopefully, the children (and you!) won't mind too much!

Reading at Home

Unlocking Letters and Sounds also comes with a reading scheme. It is much more detailed and goes beyond our previous phonics reading scheme. This means we need to reassess our children's reading during the first week back and putting them in the correct place on our new scheme. This might mean that your child might move away from the coloured band reading scheme and onto the new phonics reading scheme if appropriate. When they have completed the UL&S reading scheme, they will move back to the coloured band reading scheme but at a higher level. This may well sound a little bit confusing so please don't hesitate to chat to me about it if it does!

Unlocking Letters and Sounds encourages all children to become much more familiar and fluent with the books they are taking home to read. We want reading to be a celebration at Semley and the children should be bringing home books which they can read independently and feel empowered. The books will be closely matched to the children's phonics ability and they should be able to read 95% of the words. Unlocking Letters and Sounds have shown us how important re-reading books is to help children develop their confidence and fluency. Therefore we will be changing books on a Monday and Thursday this year to enable the children to re-read the books 3 times before changing them. Books will not be changed until they have been read over at least 3 nights.

The children will also be able to take an extra book home from school each week to share and explore vocabulary with you. This does not need to be read every night and is designed to promote a love of reading.

Mrs C-C is going to be continuing to celebrate our Nights of Reading this year. The children will continue to earn stickers in their reading record and receive a book prize if they reach 250 nights by the end of the year. Please continue to note down when you listen to your children read at home.

We have been lucky enough to have been brilliantly supported in the past by our parent readers in Doves class. I am hoping that a couple of parents might be able to offer an hour each week from 2 o'clock on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons to hear some of the Doves read. Please let me know if you think you might be able to.

PE on Mondays

I will be out of class on Monday afternoons and during this time the Doves will have PE with Luke and Sarah King which I hope will be a lovely start to the week for them. Please could the children come to school on Monday wearing their PE kits.

Fridays

I am delighted to tell you that Mrs Rayner will be working with the Doves on Friday mornings. She will be teaching them phonics and reading skills for English and shape for Maths. I know how much the children love working with her and she is thrilled that she will be able to spend time with them next year. In the afternoons, all the classes will have the wonderful opportunity of a Forest School session with Mrs Rumney and the lucky Doves have got the very first half term block of lessons! After this half term, the children will be taught Science on Friday afternoons by Mrs Rayner, Mrs Miles or Mrs Adcock. This will be a great opportunity for the children to get to know the other teachers better.

Show and Tell

On the first day of every month, the Doves are welcome to bring in something to show the other children. We love learning more about the children's interests outside of school.

What else will the Doves be learning?

I have enclosed a curriculum map for this term which outlines all the key learning objectives we will be covering. As you will be able to see, there a lot of exciting learning activities ahead. For one of the Science lessons, the children will be testing the strength of chicken thigh bones. They will be free of all meat residue but if you would prefer for your child not to participate in the lesson, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Mrs Marshall and myself are really looking forward to welcoming back some of our Doves from last year and saying hello to our new children and families. Whilst we will be having a Parents Evening soon, please don't wait for then if you have any questions or concerns. We want your children to feel happy and safe at school and are always here at the start or end of the day for a quick chat. If you would like longer, then please make an appointment at the office.

With my best wishes to you and your families for a happy year ahead,

Vicky Gambier