

Dear Families,

Our phonics lessons this week were delivered by Miss Ali, an excellent student teacher who is working in Class Four for a few weeks. She will be back with us to do another week after half-term. We learned the new GPC 'oo' long sound, 'oo' short sound 'ar', 'or' and 'ur'. We are nearly at the end of the Phase Three content of new GPC will be finishing soon – just another six to go before we begin re-visiting and consolidating. We have also been practising writing tricky words 'no', 'go', 'the', 'into', 'I' and 'to' and reading new tricky words 'you' and 'they'. I have given most of the children tricky word list 4 now to practise at home and the only word we haven't done on that list is 'here', which we will be look at after half-term.

The children's writing is really coming on and we will be focusing more on writing sentences from dictation over next half-term. Some of the children have already started having a go at composing their own captions or sentences when we work together, and also through lots of child-initiated writing, which they have been using to support their own play. You will have noticed writing a caption has been one of the tasks in the homework recently. Remember to encourage the children to keep the captions short and simple, you can suggest one, using the GPC they know or let them think of one and help them with the tricky words or GPC they don't know. Alternatively, you can acknowledge their great caption and paraphrase it together into a simpler one they can then write independently. Say the words together and see if they can remember what order to write them in before segmenting each word in turn. Holding a sting of words in their heads is a very tricky thing to do at this stage but they will get there with practise. Spaces between words is also really important and we usually refer to them as 'finger' spaces at school. Better still, just let them 'have a go' using the phonics they know and don't worry about tricky spellings they don't yet know. This is hard to do sometimes when you know the correct spelling but a vital part of giving them confidence in their own writing. As long as it's phonetically correct and you can read it, that's all that matters. I did my phonics assessments this week to help me plan if anyone needs any additional support anywhere. I have seen a big improvement in the children's alphabet recital, although many are still struggling to identify individual letters by their 'names' when out of sequence. These are both skills we have been working hard on through different games and activities and will continue with of course. Today the children wrote the start of their target/goal for the Going for Goals, Wizard of Oz display and I talked to them about the key things they need to practise (as a result of my assessments). I will put pictures of the goals on Tapestry over the half-term.

Over the past two weeks in maths we have been comparing height, length and time, which the children were very good at. We thought about numbers, counting order and representations, consolidating understanding of numbers to eight using games as well as the ten frames and counters. We also shared one of my favourite picture books called 'Window' by Jeannie Baker, which links to many areas of the wider school curriculum as well as maths, including history, geography and science (Understanding World in our Early Years curriculum). The 'story', which we told together whilst looking carefully at each picture from the book on the interactive white board, is about a little boy growing up in Australia. Each of the pictures are two years apart (some of the children cleverly deduced this by seeing birthday cards on the inside windowsill). In each picture we see how the environment in which Sam lives is changing over time and how his window, which initially looks out into the Australian countryside, ends up looking onto a busy street, there were some great links here with Mrs Jarvis' story, also based in Australia. The children showed great powers of observation and, amongst other things, learned that the little boy was called Sam. After sharing the book and talking about how the environment outside Sam's house changed over the years, from countryside to busy town, the children all drew a picture of what they would like to see from their window.

In RE over the last two weeks the children have thought about Jesus as a boy, compared how he might have lived to how we live today and changes over time. They shared the story of Jesus visiting the Temple when he was twelve years old and how he got separated from his parents. Mary and Joseph thought he was lost, but he was in the temple talking with the wise men about God, who he called His father. The children enjoyed the story and used the pictures to help them retell it in their own words. This afternoon they worked in their colour groups, with picture prompts, to think of the things that are the same for us today as they were over two thousand years ago and how some things were different.

As you will know, the Book Fair is on in the first week back. I sent the competition sheets home earlier this week and have already received some back, thank you. We will be judging them on the first day back before the fair starts.

Mrs Jarvis has given me the following information about her music lessons over the past two weeks: *In music lessons, we learnt how sound effects can help to tell a story. We read the story of Jack and the Beanstalk and thought about the different sound effects that might fit into the story. Then we listened to a version of the story with lots of sound effects. We had a lovely discussion about how this made the story more interesting and helped us to use our imagination. We sang some songs related to Jack and the Beanstalk, learnt how to speak and walk like the giant, and played the Bean game – our favourite was the French bean!*

*This week we listened to the Australian traditional story of Tiddalik the Frog and to a song written about the story. Firstly, we had a look at a map of Australia to see where in the world it is and had some interesting conversations about what life might be like there. We identified the musical techniques that were used in the song to reflect the words and help to tell the story. We looked at the fast and slow rhythms, picking them out of the song and clapping them. We listened carefully for the high and low notes. The children heard some special words which helped to tell the story like 'swish' and 'rumble'. We found out about an Australian musical instrument called the didgeridoo and listened to the very unusual sound that it makes.*

I haven't sent any specific homework for the half-term, as the children all deserve a rest. However, I put an extra reading scheme book in everyone's reading folder and you all have a new mini book. You can of course look back at the old phonics books and mini books to go over GPC, tricky words and correct letter formation, as well as the alphabet names of individual letters. For maths practise you can count anything and everything and help the children see relationships between and within numbers to ten (and beyond if you wish), as well as numeral recognition of course. Keep noticing odd and even numbers and think about doubling small numbers. Most of all though, enjoy family time and have a great half-term. I look forward to seeing you all on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February.

Kind regards from Mrs Watts.