



Victoria Park
Primary Academy

School newsletter published bi-weekly (#40) 20.10.23

Parents' Evening: It doesn't feel like five minutes since we were welcoming the children back in to school in September. But now that all are settled and established in their new classes, it's time for families and teachers to meet and share approaches. Bookings will go live on ParentMail next week for **Wednesday 8th November**.

Home Reading: This week we've reviewed all of our class and home reading records and asked groups of children to share their opinions and experiences of Reading at VPA. One aspect worth sharing with families is our approach to changing reading books. Rather than changing books every week, we've aligned to the Rocket Phonics guidance of keeping levelled reading books the same until children have mastered them fully, have read them several times over, have practised the sounds/words, and have a deep understanding of the story. This might be one week, or over several. All children should receive a levelled reading book (matched to the sounds that they can read) and a free choice of reading book, perhaps beyond their reading level, but one they can share with family members at home. Just reading ten minutes a day at home can make a huge difference to a child's long-term achievement and success.

Family workshops: To support with reading at home, the second of our family workshops is next week - **Thursday 26th October (2.15pm): Rocket Phonics - supporting early reading**. All children in years one-to-three have daily Rocket Phonics lessons, and as our reception children start theirs after half-term, now is a great opportunity for families to understand how and why we teach early reading through phonics.

Secondary school applications: For all children in Year Six, now is the time to apply for a place at Secondary School. Hopefully you would have taken the opportunity to visit local schools, but it's never too late to get in touch and arrange a tour. The deadline for applications is 31st October, via the website here: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/school-admissions/applying-secondary-school>

OPAL - a new approach to playtimes: From March 2024 we are hugely excited to be working with [OPAL \(Outdoor Play and Learning\)](#) to transform our playtimes. Children will be encouraged to explore our whole site rather than designated areas for specific year groups - including all of our playing field and Forest School areas. We'll also be introducing lots more equipment that children can use in imaginative play. For the whole of next week we will start to introduce what this will look like to children, and help them to write letters to businesses and charities for donations of resources. This might range from old packaging, tyres, suitcases, musical equipment - anything that children can repurpose in imaginative play. We'll invite all families into a whole school introductory meeting in the new year to share what this will mean for lunchtimes in the future.



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Student teachers and volunteers: There are several new faces at VPA as we welcome three new student teachers into Year 6, Year 5 and Year 1. These teachers are on their first placements and so will shadow our own class teachers. Whilst Mr Daniels and Mrs Cavill continue their recovery, we thank Ms Thompson and Ms Knight for stepping in. Mrs Nawaz started her maternity leave last week - we wish her and her family the best - and Miss Mulcahy, who has led music so wonderfully since February also departs next week, so we will have two further support staff in place. I also want to thank the 12 volunteers who have started since our last open day, many of whom joined our staff reading training last week to best support reading in school. Our next Volunteer Open Morning is Friday 8th December, please get in touch if you would like more information or to attend.

Healthy snacks: Can I please remind children and families that we are a healthy school and so highly sugary snacks, drinks, and lunches are not to be sent into school. I'll write out separately with guidance around healthy lunchboxes, but from after half-term I'll ask teachers to return any obviously unhealthy sweets and snacks at the end of the day. We have seen a rise in sweets in Key Stage two, this may be children buying snacks and fizzy drinks on their way to school, please can you reinforce this message at home.

PE Kits: We've also seen an increase in branded tracksuits and football kits worn to school on PE days. This has had an impact on children's wellbeing, as older children have started to make comparisons around what they are wearing. That's precisely our reason for a PE uniform, and to keep costs down for all families. Our permitted kit is: black tracksuit bottoms, a white t-shirt and blue sweatshirt or jumper. Again, I'll ask teachers to remind children and parents from after half-term so that you have time to provide this.

Trusted Adults in school: Mrs Mahal, Ms Blackstock and Ms Hoole have been making visits to classrooms and assemblies this term to remind children about their role as trusted adults, those people that children can seek out at any points to share their feelings or questions. All are fully trained as either mentors or Mental Health First Aiders, able to provide support.



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International events, charitable donations: This edition couldn't pass without recognition of local and international events, particularly in the Middle East. As a primary school it's important to teach empathy, understanding and tolerance, but to recognise that it's not always replicated in the wider world. I have chosen not to deliver a specific assembly or lessons around this, instead when individual children, or groups have asked, or talked about these events, we have redirected to our trusted adults in school to answer any specific questions they have. Two girls in year five had written a poem which they wanted to share. I fully understand this, it's their way of understanding their feelings and grappling with complex issues. Another couple of children had brought in collection boxes, however, as with all fundraising in school, aligned to our Poverty Proofing Charter, I would ask for these to be returned to families and not brought into school - as we want to deter children from carrying any money with them.

Trips and parent events: Somewhat linked, we thank Year 6 for their class assembly this week from their relevant Challenge Pack - Conflicts. Hopefully the poignant lessons from the past will help children in some way to understand the challenges of the present. This should be reinforced next week when all 90 children in Year 6 attend RAF Cosford. We also welcomed families from 3PB in for their reading themed INSPIRE session this week. Next week will be the turn of 3SW to share what they're learning together in class.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at Parents' Evening on 8th November, or on the front gate - though I'm going to need to drag out my thicker winter coat...

With best wishes

Mr Reed