



Hints to help your child at home



The school recognises the important contribution parents make to their child's education.

We hope that you will be actively involved in your child's learning programmes.

This booklet contains some ideas that might help you to support your child.

Contents

Personal Organisation	Page 3
Homework	Page 3
Revision and exams	Page 4
Conversation and vocabulary	Page 5
Reading – decoding	Page 5
Reading – comprehension	Page 6
Reading for pleasure	Page 7
Writing	Page 8
Writing Organisation	Page 9
Spelling	Page 10
Spelling Strategies	Page 11
Numeracy	Page 12

Personal organisation



- Don't assume that a child should be old enough to organise themselves – some need more help than others. Use checklists
- Have a family calendar with space for each person.
- Mark important dates from the Balcarras calendar on your family calendar.
- Talk through any complicated plans the night before so that everyone knows the details
- Stick a colour coded timetable on the front door – mark on homework days, PE days, Food Tech, clubs or other sessions where they might need to remember something specific
- Have a box for each child that you can put things in at end of day.
- Check they have correct equipment – review at holidays as you would uniform.
- Have 2 duplicate pencil cases – one that stays at home and one that stays in their school bag.
- Set aside a place for them to put letters, notes, money to return to school, preferably near the front door.
- Make a habit of checking their bag and books - they will soon start to remember!
- Put a whiteboard in their room to write reminders.
- Create a separate pocket/pouch in their school bag for letters etc.
- Make sure your child packs their bag the night before.
- Provide your child with a memory stick to save and transfer computer work
- Check the planner and homework on the VLE – this will tell you when particular pieces are due.
- Try to set aside a time each evening to run through any homework, events that you need to know about – maybe straight after tea.

Homework



- Use the VLE (www.balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk) to keep track of homework tasks and due dates.
- Provide a quiet and clear working space with a rota if your children share a room.
- Decide on a set time to do homework – before/after evening meal depending on your child.
- Use CGP guides/textbooks/exercise books/www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize for reference to read through points together so that you have a good understanding
- Get them to 'phone a friend' if they are unsure about what is required.
- Check their planner each day and sign at the end of the week.
- Plan ahead by making sure homework subject headings are written in the planner in advance.
- If your child has difficulty keeping on top of homework, get them to get into the routine of doing it on the day it is set.
- Put a post-it note for the teacher in their planner or book if homework has taken too long or you didn't understand what was needed.
- Develop your own reward system for keeping on track.
- Encourage your child to go to Homework Club at lunchtime (Y7-9 in 5A3, Y9-11 in 1A4) if it is an issue. There will be an adult there to help.
- If your child didn't understand a homework task, encourage them to tell the teacher straight away at the start of the next lesson.



Revision and exams

- Encourage your child to use Mind Maps/brainstorm before each block of revision - this will show up any gaps. Repeat the exercise at the end and this will show what has been learnt.
- Go through information with them, getting them to explain/teach points to you.
- Reduce stress/chores during the exam period.
- Build in some treats to keep them going.
- Buy or search online for revision guides and practice papers.
www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize is a particularly useful site. Subject teachers will give details of other on-line resources.
- Provide a whiteboard for them to make notes.
- Provide a selection of revision cards, post-its, highlighters and stationery.
- Make sure you have a copy of their revision timetable.
- Make sure your child knows about any family commitments to factor in.
- Put their exam timetable somewhere noticeable – be aware of when exams are.
- Check they have all necessary equipment including a calculator.
- Make sure they actually get out of bed – call/text before an afternoon exam.
- Use the resources provided by the school - exams info link, revision strategies, CDs and booklets.
- Encourage them to attend any revision sessions.
- Talk about any special exam access arrangements they have and how they are going to use them to their best advantage.

Improving Literacy Skills

Conversation and vocabulary



- Talk a lot to your child while you are doing things together.
- Talk with your child about their day. Talking helps to organise your thinking and is an important first step for any writing.
- Talk about new words that your child is not familiar with, using a dictionary or thesaurus to find out more – there are dictionaries on-line and on mobile phones
- Try to keep adding more sophisticated vocabulary.
- Encourage them to ask the meaning of words they don't know/understand.
- Set aside a specific time to talk about the day – try to cook/eat together.
- Play card and board games and complete crosswords and word puzzles together.
- Watch TV, play computer games together and comment on them.
- Talk about the TV show you are watching. What were the main ideas? Talk about the order events happen in – practising this skill is important as children can find this difficult to learn. What did they like/dislike and why?
- Research has shown that talking about news events is especially helpful for improving children's general performance at school
- Show an interest in schoolwork, progress and reports - without nagging!

Reading – decoding



- Read with them – take it in turns to read a line or paragraph each.
- Don't be too quick to correct mistakes or supply words they cannot decipher.
- Use the *pause, prompt, praise* technique...
 - > Give them time to look at the context to see if they can work out a word from the meaning of the rest of the sentence
 - > Help them to break the word down into syllables and sound out/blend each part (remember each syllable must contain a vowel sound)
 - > Praise for working it out or trying hard
 - > Supply the word if they are really struggling
- Talk about regular/irregular patterns in the English language.
- Tell them that there are some words that they will just have to learn by sight.
- Praise their attempts, improvements and increased fluency.
- Put the sub-titles on the TV so that they can read along when people are speaking.



Reading – comprehension

- Listen to audio books on CD and read the actual book at the same time.
- Talk about books to check comprehension.
- Try reading the same book as your child so you can talk about it together.
- Ask your child to talk about parts of a story they liked and why.
- Talk about the key facts, characters, plot, setting, theme and author's purpose.
- Have them retell the main ideas or describe characters, events or facts they were interested in.
- Help your child to link stories to their own life. Remind them about what they have done when a similar thing happens in the story.
- Help your child to follow a recipe and cook for the family.
- Encourage your child to read and follow instructions for playing a game, for constructing something, the cooking instructions on a food packet or tonight's TV programmes.
- Remember their reading doesn't have to be a book – it could be a magazine, comic, newspaper or something from the Internet.
- Be a role model. Show you read for a variety of reasons: to compare products advertised in brochures; to be informed on current issues; to find a phone number or a bus timetable; as a form of relaxation.
- Focus on 'reading between the lines' – often children tend to focus on the literal meaning and miss the inferences
- Encourage your child to read and understand, not just to 'bark at print'.
- Point out that reading and writing are linked and success in one is likely to lead to success in the other.



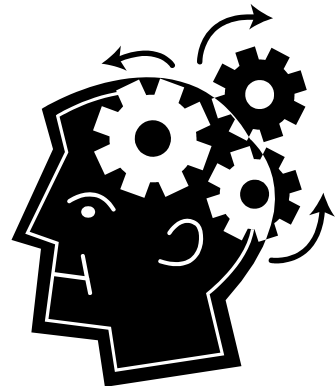
Reading for pleasure

- Encourage your child to read every day.
- Make reading fun and praise your child's efforts, all the time.
- Buy a book or a magazine a month for your child.
- Just because your child can read doesn't mean that they don't enjoy listening to someone else reading. It could be a non-fiction book on a topic they like, a magazine, a newspaper, a short story or a longer book read in instalments. It could also be a more difficult book/article that your child needs your help to read and understand.
- You could also listen to audio stories together – you can borrow these from the library or download from the Internet.
- Encourage your child to read the lyrics to their favourite songs. Talk about why the composer wrote the song. What were they trying to say? Search the Internet for more information.
- Find books or magazines about your child's interests. Reading about their favourite sport or an issue they are interested in will help them to be an expert on a particular subject and they are likely to know the specialist vocabulary.
- Find books that relate to TV shows or movies, or the area they come from. Knowing some of the ideas, characters before you start reading can make it easier to understand a book. Talk about how the book differs from the TV show or movie or builds on what they already know.
- Join the library and visit regularly to help your child choose books that interest them – you may want to encourage your child to read different types of books including non-fiction stories.
- Be positive whenever your child is reading, no matter what they are reading. Respect your child's opinion as it shows they are thinking about what they read.
- Read information on the computer or Kindle – you can customise text by changing the font, size, spacing and background colour.



Writing

- Encourage your child to listen for and use interesting words. Having a wide range of words will help your child create stories which will increase in complexity.
- Use technology. Text messages and emails are a form of writing even if the language is not always standard English.
- Use computers if your child isn't keen on writing. They don't have to think about the presentation of their work and editing does not require a complete re-write. Spell-check helps too as the user is always presented with a correct version of the word they are looking for.
- Create a message board. This could be done with magnetic letters and words or a whiteboard/pin board. The messages might be instructions, reminders or praise for a job well done, as well as examples of work. Encourage your child and other family members to respond with messages too.
- Be a positive audience for your child. Always respond to the effort behind the message and the message content first (regardless of how the message is written) and the presentation second.
- Keep in mind what your child is currently learning to do and comment just on that.
- Talk about what your child writes. Be interested. Use it as a way of starting conversations. Listen to your child's opinion, even if you don't agree with it.
- Encourage your child to read more – any text, not just books. Reading provides a model for good grammar, punctuation, varied sentence structure, a wide use of connectives and choice of words for impact.
- Buy interesting stationery for your child to use. Coloured pens and pencils can be an incentive to write together with special paper or books. Give a diary, book or notebook as a present.
- Plan for them to be able to use a computer for writing – at home or the library.
- Look for real reasons for writing. Encourage your child to read and write letters, messages, postcards, invitations, lists, rosters, thank-you notes, recipes, emails. Start with postcards to family and friends, if your child only wants to write a few sentences – encourage your family to write back.
- Make lists for a particular reason e.g. shopping, jobs to be completed.
- Encourage your child to write on their own - poems, songs, short stories or a diary – on paper or on the computer.
- Be a role model. Show your child that you write for lots of reasons: replying to an email; writing a shopping list; sending an invitation or letter; writing for your work or your own study.



Writing Organisation

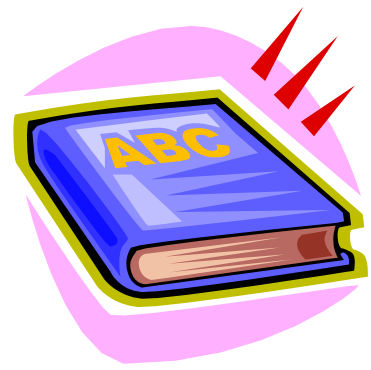
- Use a variety of tools to help your child organise their thoughts and structure their writing e.g. writing frames, timelines, flowcharts, family tree type plans – find what suits them best
- Use Mind Maps or spider diagrams to brainstorm and organise thoughts
- Talk through/rehearse ideas before writing to practise vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar.
- Use task/writing plans that break the task into stages
- Use exemplars and frames to see what the finished product should look like
- Learn how to write in paragraphs by writing notes on separate pieces of coloured paper – each piece represents a different paragraph

- Use the computer as an organisation/draft tool
 - > Set up your WP page with paragraph sub-headings and topic sentences
 - > Add bullet point notes for each paragraph
 - > Flesh out the notes into full sentences with added detail, description and explanation

or

 - > Brain Dump – put all ideas on the page in a stream of conscience
 - > Colour code all ideas that are linked
 - > Cut and paste these similar themes into paragraphs in a sensible order

- When doing research, use a printed copy of the text and highlight information in a range of colours.
- Collect together all the information in one colour and make that a paragraph.
- Write your first draft, leave it for a while and then come back to it
- Practise proof-reading and find a way to cover all areas such as...
(SSTPP) Sentences, makes Sense, Tense, Punctuation and Paragraphs
- Use a whiteboard to practise writing style – this way there is no permanent record of poor handwriting.



Spelling

- Choose some words your child wants to learn to spell. They might be words their teacher has corrected in a piece of work, or new words that they are going to need. If they are used a lot, or needed for new work, there is more motivation to learn them. How many can you work on – three, five, ten? Be realistic
- Create key word lists for each subject – look through books to find common errors and find strategies to remember the words
- Focus on a few useful spelling rules and learn difficult common words i.e. because, through, quite, necessary
- Don't let your child get anxious about spelling – encourage them to say the word under their breath and try to think about all of the **sounds** in a word so that the spelling is at least phonetic
- Encourage your child not to 'dumb down' – use the best word and have a go rather than sticking to easy words
- Buy a commercial computer spelling games program like *Nessy* or *Wordshark*
- Show your child how to use the computer spellchecker – the spellchecker tends to be more accurate if you get the right number of syllables and the first few letters. This is a fantastic way to make sure you are always presented with the right word – often better than using a dictionary. Repeated exposure to the correct spelling often imprints it in the mind.
- Sometimes the 'synonyms' tool is even better. For example, if you want the spelling of 'gigantic' you could type in 'big' and the synonyms tool will provide the correct spelling plus several other alternatives.
- Practise spellings on a mini-whiteboard – there will be no permanent record of mistakes and your child can keep erasing until they feel confident.
- **Stay positive.** Think about your child's successes every day, all those words they have managed to spell correctly, rather than worry about those they got wrong!



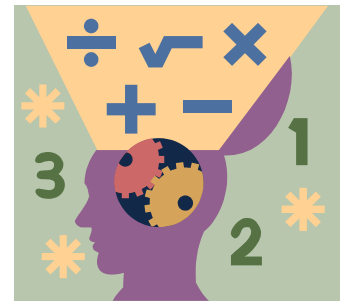
Spelling Strategies

- In general, look for patterns, words within words, break words into chunks
- Break words into syllable chunks (diff-ic-ult, temp-er-at-ure) by counting the beats in a word
- Break each syllable into sounds (c-o / o-p / e-r / a-t-e)
- Learn patterns/prefixes/suffixes – ough, ight, sub-, trans-, -ion, -tle etc.
- Think about rhyming words (feet, sweet, meet, greet)
- Look for words within words (there is **a rat** in separate, island **is land**)
- Over-stress the difficult part (i.e. Wed-nes-day, Feb-ru-ary)
- Use mnemonics
 - because = **big** elephants can't always **use** small **exits**,
 - friend = **I** will be your friend 'til the **end**
- Make connections (I'd love a **pie**ce of **pie** but **pea** = green > **peaceful**)
- Think about the meaning of the word (**bi** + cycle = **two** + wheels)
- Apply spelling rules (writing > written – double consonant after short vowel)
- Visualise (by imagining word written on blank wall / back of eyelids/up to the left)
- To break words into syllables: clap out the number of beats in the word, or put your hand under your chin and feel how many times your chin moves down.
- To break words into sounds: Ask yourself, 'How would I spell 'sharp'? 'Let's see, I think there are five letters in that word... but only three sounds (draw three boxes, preferably using a whiteboard). What is the first sound? How can I write the middle sound? What comes at the end?

sh	ar	p
----	----	---

The middle bit is often the tricky part and you might need to try alternatives before you get the spelling that looks right.

- Find spelling games on the Internet – there are lots to choose from
- Watch TV with the sub-titles on so that you are hearing and seeing words spelt correctly at the same time.
- Play Scrabble together.
- Do wordsearches. You can make your own quite easily on the computer (use lower case letters) at www.puzzlemaker.com. You can incorporate new words being learned, tricky spellings, subject vocabulary etc.
- Do crosswords together (watch out for anagrams as they will be tricky for weak spellers)



Numeracy

- Use as many opportunities as possible to talk about number.
- Be alert to 'Maths-rich' situations where you can involve your child.
- Help children to interpret numbers they will encounter such as price tags, road signs, receipts.
- Children who are good at Maths are prepared to 'have a go'. Discuss strategies you use, and strategies they use – encourage them to work out where they have gone wrong.
- Talk about prices when you are out shopping – ask your child to work out how much change you are expecting, how much you will save by buying items on offer, guessing the final bill etc.
- Work out how much a meal out/cinema tickets/ice creams will cost.
- Give your child a set amount of money to buy several items and get them to budget.
- Discuss time when you are deciding how long to stay in a car park.
- Work out when you need to put food in the oven to be ready at a certain time.
- Ask your child to weigh out ingredients and double up/halve recipes.
- Play dominoes, Yahtzee, Monopoly, card games and board games involving one or two dice.
- An excellent resource for Maths games is www.happypuzzle.co.uk
- Work out measurements together when you are buying materials e.g. wood, paint, furniture, petrol.
- Weigh and measure family members – keep a height chart.
- Mark special events on the calendar and talk about how many days/weeks until the event.
- Watch the weather report together and discuss temperatures.
- Open a bank account for your child and calculate the interest.
- Play darts, snooker, golf, go bowling.
- Calculate distances covered/still to go in a journey.
- Get your child to calculate the £ equivalent for foreign currency.
- Teach your child to read bus/train timetables and calculate journey times.
- Encourage your child to plan the evening's TV viewing and talk about how long a programme/film will be.
- Get your child to programme the DVD, microwave, alarm clock.
- Prepare for outings together. Involve children in planning timings, distances and expenses.
- Buy a good revision guide that explains Maths points to you so that you can work through them with some confidence.
- Check out www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise for numeracy games.
- Check out www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize for teaching and revision tips.