February 2013

Dear Parents

We have been back at school for almost two weeks now. It has been a settling in time, as we all adapt to a new year and a new class. These few weeks are an important time of the year, when relationships are re-formed and shared knowledge of ways our learning might work for the year are given a foundation.

A key aspect of the NZ Curriculum are the key competencies: relating to others, managing self, participating and contributing, thinking, and using language, symbols and texts. Therefore as we begin the year these are very much in focus. When students are setting their goals, part of the goal setting will involve the key competencies.

**Religious Education**
This term we have prepared for our opening of the year school prayer liturgy. We will then need time to examine prayer time for our class, and after that we will begin the Jesus strand. St Patrick’s Day, Lent and Easter will also feature in the programme.

**English:**

**Spelling:**
The students received their lists to learn at school. While the lists are part of the spelling tests, usually in week 8, they are not the only item tested. There are rules, the use of prefixes, suffixes and a check on proof reading.

List 1-7 are the high frequency words that we use most in writing. List 8 is the words that are most often spelled incorrectly. List 9 and 10 are more an exploration of words,
their meanings and patterns in words. It is of very little use to merely learn these words. It is more about understanding about the use of prefixes, suffixes and root words. While encouraging your child to learn the words for each list, also encourage them to be word explorers. Foster a love and interest in words.

In all written work students are expected to spell the high frequency words correctly. They are also expected to use the patterns and rules that they have been taught. This tells me whether they have learned what they have been taught!! Students are expected to take full responsibility for their own proof reading when writing. If a parent or teacher does it for them, they will learn that someone else does it. If we require them to do it, they will learn independence in spelling.

**Writing/Reading**

We have just begun our writing programme. Students have one literacy exercise book that they will use to record their ideas about reading, their word work and they also have a section for a writer’s notebook.

We are using Google docs for much of our writing this year. During the last few weeks students have been learning to log on, and set up and share a doc. Associated with this is an email address that they will use when and if necessary. I have a central Teacher Dashboard where I can see each students work and their email boxes. Indeed it was a little disconcerting one evening to log into the Dashboard to read work and have two students working on their writing at that time, I watched the words form! One of the advantages of Google docs is that students are able to work on a piece of writing both at home and at school.

There will be a number of online sites introduced as the year goes by, as each is introduced students will be taught how to use them properly and safely. Digital citizenship is an important aspect in learning for today’s world.

Blogging is an important part of our class learning. At present we have been exploring the importance of writing quality comments on blogs. We are also learning about what makes a
quality post. A part of this is learning about the correct use of images on their blogs. Students need to understand they have to use their own images safely and also to use others’ photos, artwork etc., correctly with proper attribution. They also learn about copyright and that we just can’t use many images.

During the writing workshop time some time will be given to the writing we do online and the protocols around that. As well we will be exploring the whole process of writing, from planning to publishing stage. We will also do some storyboarding linked to a narrative, after watching a video. In the final part of the term we will look at researching, questioning, note taking and writing a report linked to our Social Science/Health topic.

In Reading the first three or so weeks are about setting up routines and ways of recording about what we are reading. I require students to set a challenging number of books to read for the year. Students will also make one or two other goals related to reading for this term and perhaps extending on through the year. We will also explore in the earlier part of the term how an author reveals a character and we will develop our thinking related to this. In the latter part of the term we will focus on non-fiction, especially in relation to our topic unit.

Maths.
This term our focus is on number knowledge, strategies for addition and subtraction and algebra. Each student is in a slightly different place for Maths and in as far as possible I will be working with individuals and small groups to help them learn what they need to learn. At present we are at a revision stage and I am taking the time to get to know student abilities so that we can move forward. We have just completed an IKAN test which gives students an idea of what number knowledge and basic facts they need to know. Goals will be set around that.

Basic Facts are by this stage now crucial to know. They need to be recalled easily and speedily. Basic facts need to be learned firstly for addition and subtraction and then multiplication and division. They need to be known within four seconds, otherwise they are deemed unknown. At this point in time students just have to accept the discipline of sitting down and doing the work!
There comes a point in time where no one else can do that for them.

**Physical Education.**
P.E. gear is needed most days at school. Make sure your child has safe and suitable footwear for this. We have fitness on a Monday and Jump Jam on a Friday. Small ball skills will also be a focus. Please make sure P.E. gear is named and in a bag. It should be at school Monday to Friday. “I couldn’t get them dry,” will not be accepted as an excuse, neither will “I needed them for Touch last night”. Here is an opportunity for self-management for each student.

**Topic.**
This unit is about students keeping young people their own age safe. In this unit students will investigate a range of social and economic risks experienced by young people in their community. They will explore how intermediate aged students can be better prepared to deal with risk scenarios, and develop skills and strategies which support them in developing the key competency of “managing self”. Students will create a ‘Savvy Safety’ action plan for their chosen risk area and put their findings into practice to improve their and others’ well-being.

Again online safety and digital citizenship will also be a focus as part of this topic.

**French Language.**
Madame Picot will continue to come in once a week for a 30 minute lesson to teach French. This will take place on a Tuesday morning. This term we are experimenting with two smaller groups, for 30 minute sessions, to encourage increased participation and opportunities to practise what is being taught.

**Homework.**
Each night students are expected to read for a suitable amount of time. I cannot emphasise how important that reading time is. It is essential to do, if they are to make progress. Each student is working on building their stamina and working on their own reading goals.
They are also to work on their learning goals to do with spelling, basic facts.

I do not give homework to the whole class unless it is something they can all do at their own level and grow from it. Often there will be writing that each student can do at their own level.

Some students will also set themselves Maths goals that I am willing to support them with. In discussion with them homework can be mapped out.

**Blogging.**

http://mistea.edublogs.org

Above is the address of our class blog. It can also be reached through the school web site. Information can be obtained there, that you might otherwise miss out on. You will be able to find out in more detail what we are learning about. A copy of this letter will be able to be accessed there, along with some other documents. We often post what we have been doing in the week or share work that students have completed. Please visit often!

With the student blogs you need to know it is closely supervised by me and they are all linked to the class blog, so I can watch over them. I am an administrator on their blog, and have occasionally been known to remove something that is not suitable. They should never post any photo of themselves that would link their face to their name. They never give their surnames. General photos that do not identify them should be fine.

Students are only given their own blog after they have shown that they are able to comment on blogs and know how to be safe online.

**Why blog?**

Blogs are great because you can share things with a wide audience. Instead of me just seeing the students’ work, all of the parents can view the work and leave comments. Using blogs is also a great way for students to improve their ICT skills and get experience using an emerging technology. Students improve
their literacy skills while blogging and it is a fantastic opportunity for students to learn about appropriate online behaviours.

**How you can help with the blog.**

One of the advantages of the blog is that the children get feedback from me and other students and teachers. I also strongly encourage parents getting involved, with comments to students. I can’t say this enough times.

Start with your own child, but move onto others. **Give them positive feedback,** also **questions that might extend their thinking.** Not sure how to put in a comment? Get your child’s help! We avoid using our surnames on the blog, so leave your first name or for example, “Tom’s Mum”. You do not have to be logged in to do so.

**Need to chat with me?**

If you wish to discuss something with me, make a time with me so that we can meet, generally for ten minutes straight after school, and then we can sort out whatever concern that you may have. I really welcome that. If it is just a brief word, before school is fine.