



Teaching and Learning newsletter: information for parents and carers

Edition 5, May 2019

Welcome to the teaching and learning newsletter, designed to keep parents & carers informed about what's happening in lessons so that you can best support your child.

Your child will attend close to 5,000 lessons across Year 7 – Year 11, excluding any revision lessons or extra-curricular participation, with several hundred more in BL6.

Whilst many children are keen to share their daily experiences of school with parents and carers, there are likely to be many more children for whom the routine enquiry of “How was your day?” is met with an indifferently delivered “Fine”.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide parents and carers with some insight into the typical classroom experiences for your child. The newsletter will provide a whistle-stop tour. Any parent or carer who would like more detailed information can find it in the Teaching and Learning Policy (<http://brineleas.cheshire.sch.uk/Docs/Pols/LearningPol.pdf>).

Questioning

Questioning is a teacher's greatest tool. It supports all stages of the learning journey. A key strategy in our teaching framework is 'cold calling'. Essentially, this means not relying on hands up, when asking a question. Nominating a student to answer a specific question brings several benefits:

- * We can check for understanding with precision.* Knowing whether we have taught something is easy. Knowing whether students have understood it is more challenging. If we are limited to assessing only those students who raise their hands, we are unable to assess all members of the class.
- * We create a culture of engaged accountability.* Students cannot choose whether they opt in or out of learning. Students are aware that they might be required to answer a question at any time. All members of a class are thinking about the learning, all the time.
- * We can deftly adapt our teaching to meet the needs of students of all abilities.* When we nominate a student to answer a question, we do so based on our knowledge of each student's strengths and weaknesses. A challenging question for one student will look different to a challenging question for his / her neighbour.

Classroom Culture

Where appropriate, all classes follow a 'gender seating' policy (seating is boy / girl / boy / girl). Teachers set seating plans based on our knowledge of our students: some students benefit from being close to the teacher, for example.

Lessons often begin with a recall task. This serves two purposes:

- * Firstly, it supports the 'science of learning' and the processes involved in committing information to memory (<http://brineleas.cheshire.sch.uk/Docs/NewsLetters/TandLNewsletter-Nov2018.pdf>).*

* Secondly, a recap of last lesson's learning supports students' journey through the curriculum. It is crucial to regularly remind students of what they are learning, how it fits in to the bigger picture and why it is important to master this learning.

Providing the reasons for learning stops the content from being broken down into atomised sections, taught in isolation. Students cannot make connections between floating, fragments of knowledge. These connections are needed to support students in committing information to memory.

Direct Instruction

Research confirms that minimal guidance during teaching does not work. As such, the majority of teaching here is 'direct instruction'. This is when a teacher addresses a class, as the expert, and explains the content (be it quadratic equations, the pluperfect tense, how to throw a javelin or bake a perfect loaf). 'Discovery-based learning' (asking students to discover new skills and content by themselves, eg. through independent research) does still exist, where appropriate. However, it is used judiciously and sparingly. Teaching at Brine Leas School usually takes a 'traditional' approach.

Testing

Several subjects set small, regular tests on the knowledge that forms the bedrock for each subject. These serve several purposes:

* Students need this 'bedrock' knowledge to be able to tackle more challenging learning later on. For example, students learning French are tested on the key verbs of *avoir* and *être* on a regular basis in Year 7, because these verbs are needed in order to learn how to form the past tense. Furthermore, they need to be so well embedded in the long-term memory that they can be effortlessly recalled. This way, they do not place any pressure on the working memory (the 'thinking space'), so it is free to focus on the new, challenging material.

* Testing in this way (think 'quiz' more than test!) also prevents forgetting. Forgetting is human nature, but practice at recall – making the memory bring forward the content – secures it in the memory and helps students to recall it in the future.

* This method also reaps the benefits of the *hypercorrection effect*. When you find out that something you thought was correct is in fact incorrect, the more confident you are that you are correct, the bigger the improvement in the change to your thinking.

Assessment

Assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning. Assessment data is gathered through questioning, through looking at students' work and through circulating and observing, whilst students are working. We advocate 'responsive teaching' here at Brine Leas, which sees teachers respond with as much immediacy as possible, to the needs of the students.

Information on our assessment procedures can be found in our Teaching and Learning Policy (<http://brineleas.cheshire.sch.uk/Docs/Pols/LearningPol.pdf>). Each subject area has its own subject-specific assessment policy, which is available on request. Please email me on emma.bentley@brineleas.co.uk if you would like a copy.

Finally, a reminder that all previous newsletters (including *How to Revise* and *Marking and Feedback*) can be found on the website: <http://brineleas.co.uk/parents/>