



## Exford Primary School

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# Today's Focus - The Classroom program

## Early Days

Initially, your child's school experience is entirely based on helping the children to feel safe, settled and happy at school.

The children have a shorter week during the month of February, with the children not attending school on Wednesdays. The teachers will make an appointment with you for your child to come to school on a Wednesday to do some learning tasks as part of our getting to know the children's learning needs. This assessment forms the basis for the teacher's development of a learning plan for each child.

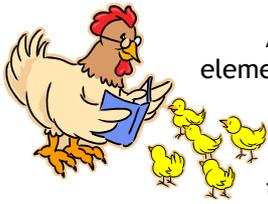
Each day has a similar structure, all aimed at supporting the children to feel familiar with the school environment, their classmates, their teacher and other staff and students. In a school environment like ours, this happens easily for our children and their families. We focus on developing strong links between the classes and the age-groups to support a 'village' feel, which assists with school connectedness and children having a sense of belonging.



During the first term, particularly, you will see lots of:

- Morning routines being developed - e.g. the children unpacking their school bags and putting items in different places
- Children choose a book to sit down with and read at their table (mums and dads are welcome to read with the children)
- Take Home books get changed and put in the box for the teacher's attention
- Reading to and Shared Reading with the children
- Spoken language activities - e.g. Show and Tell, songs, chants, clapping games
- Craft activities - especially relating to stories that have been read in class
- Use of concrete materials in Mathematics activities - there is very little emphasis on written work initially
- Cut and paste activities
- Practise writing own name / surname / family members' names
- Developmental play - e.g. construction, dress ups, writing, drawing etc
- Games that encourage co-operative play
- Use of the playground equipment
- Learning about safe play areas and out of bounds areas
- Visiting other classes

# Our Classroom Programs



As the children settle into school life and into their classroom, the teacher begins to introduce elements of our Literacy and Numeracy programs.

During the first weeks of school, the teacher will work with each child on a one-to-one basis, in small groups and also as a class group. During the children's Wednesday appointments with the class teacher, we complete early assessment tasks with each child. The English Online task looks at learning about the children's pre-literacy understandings and the Numeracy Interview tasks helps the teacher to evaluate the children's understandings in Mathematics. The class teacher is then able to identify individual starting points for each child and for the class as a whole.

**The daily Literacy program** builds up to a daily two hours' focus on Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening.

**The daily focus on Numeracy** will provide the children with experiences in number (counting out loud, counting patterns, counting items, number recognition and writing), space, shapes, colour, measurement and patterns.

In Reading, the teacher begins to focus on sense of story, the enjoyment of stories, predicting what may happen and on the 'concepts about print' (e.g. where do we start to read, which way does the text go, how do the pictures help us, and moving to lower and upper case letters, letter-sound connections and some commonly used words).



The teaching strategy of *reading aloud* is used frequently each day and the teacher models the behaviours of a skilled reader (e.g. using expression and reading fluently).

**Alphabet focus** is something we concentrate on with the children and this is one of the English Online assessment tasks that we do with the children. In teaching the children about the letters of the alphabet, we use a variety of strategies from teaching letters and matching sounds and related vocab, to playing recognition and Bingo games, making letter books and also strategies from cued articulation ('*a is for apple, a,a,a*'). Making and re-reading class alphabet books is also one of our strategies, where the children choose words to match each letter.

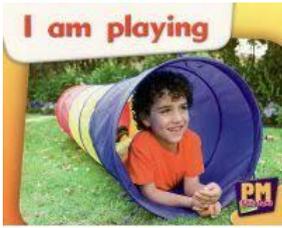
From the start of 2013, we have introduced a whole school program, '*Sound Waves*', into our classrooms. '*Sound Waves*' is a program which focuses on students' phonological awareness and its links to reading, spelling and writing. Hazel, our Speech Pathologist, will provide a session focusing on early language development on Tuesday 1 December for parents.

**The classroom Reading program** focuses on the early reading behaviours which form the foundations for our young readers, building on all the reading they have done at home and at preschool. We focus heavily on developing a strong sense of meaning, using the illustrations and prior experience (e.g. What happens if you put too much bubble bath in your bath? Oh, no, look at all the bubbles!!). Through reading to children using large sized books or eBooks on the Apple TVs ('*Reading Eggs*' and youtube have a wealth of large text favourite books), we teach the concepts about print (e.g. Where do we start reading? We read the first and then the second lines of text, the left page and then the right page etc) and then begin to focus on letters and words in text. Above all else, we hope to foster a love of reading and an enjoyment of the words and worlds to be discovered!



Our older students love to demonstrate their own reading skills by reading with their buddy classes.

**Take Home Reading** starts within a few weeks of school beginning and the focus is all on the sense of story and for the children to enjoy sharing it with you at home. The children will bring home simple books that are highly predictable, with a simple sentence structure (that is often the same on each page with a change in noun or verb) and easily identifiable vocab and pictures.



It's so important to find time every day for reading at home together with your child. Please read every night / morning with your child - and don't forget to read to your child. Before starting to read the book with your child, do a 'picture walk' through the illustrations of the book and encourage your child to talk about what might be happening, with predictions about what might be happening based on the illustrations, so ... **NEVER** cover the pictures !! The illustrations are such a source of meaning for young readers. When we read to children, we are modelling the way a good reader behaves and they learn so much from watching us read to them.

There's a lovely book for parents called '*Reading Magic*' by Mem Fox which describes how easily parents can help their child's reading development and love of books.



In **Writing**, the teacher models writing on a daily basis, using activities in the classroom / school as topics. The children help with making up the text and teacher talks out loud, describing the writing process ('I'm going to start over here on the left side and I write this way and when I get to the end, I'll come over here under where I started...'). The children begin having daily opportunities to write, often beginning with a picture. The teacher may write down the child's words for them, and a teaching conversation happens as this takes place.

We also begin to focus on letter formation, using the Victorian Modern Cursive Script and supporting a correct pencil grip and seating posture, which all assist the development of a personal and fluent writing style. The children love to take their writing to other teachers or school leaders for praise and stickers and an opportunity to share their achievements.

In **Speaking and Listening**, the teacher provides opportunities for the children to practise and extend their speaking and listening skills all the time. From the tried and true 'Show and Tell' to partner, small group and whole group discussions, the children are encouraged to develop their speaking and their listening skills. We also try to provide other experiences for the children to extend their spoken language vocabulary - for example the specific language of a particular subject e.g. a class unit on Animal Habitats and a visit to the Melbourne Zoo. Our Special Day activities are also a lovely catalyst for enriching the children's spoken language - e.g. 100 Days of School Celebration (it's huge!!), Loud Shirt Day, Footy Day, Book Week Parade etc.



In **Mathematics**, the children are involved in exploring numbers, colours, shapes and measurement through the use of materials, such as counters, blocks, tiles, clocks playing shops etc. There is little formal recording (e.g. children writing in their Maths books at first, as the emphasis is on exploring number, measurement and spatial concepts through the use of materials.

## **The Broader Curriculum**

The children will take part in units of study which integrate a number of other areas of learning, e.g. Science (which will have a dedicated hour per week), Civics and Citizenship and History. If you would like more information on the Prep / Foundation curriculum, please go to the Victorian Curriculum website <http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/> to learn more about the curriculum in the early years of schooling.

For example - Unit on **Animal Habitats** - may involve a day excursion to the Melbourne Zoo or field study activities within the school grounds. The children would learn about:

- Animal categories and their body characteristics (e.g. mammals, reptiles, birds etc)
- Animal habitats and the features of the habitats
- Interconnectedness of different animals and their habitats
- Conservation of the different animal habitats

## **Our Specialist Programs**

**The Arts** - the children focus on both the Visual (painting, drawing, media arts, models, pottery work, looking at different art traditions and artists) and the Performing (drama, music, dance and developing performances) Arts throughout the year. We have visiting performers attend our school to provide the experience of live performances for the children.

Performing Arts Headquarters (Bacchus Marsh) also conduct instrumental music lessons at our school for children (an enrolment form is available from the Office). This year, children can learn the following instruments: guitar, electric guitar, drums, violin and keyboard and can also have singing lessons. We also run 2 lunchtime Choir groups once a week.

**Physical Education** - the children do PE with their class on a weekly basis and also attend a Specialist PE lesson. They focus on ball handling skills, basic games, dance, Athletics, being good sports people and team work. There is also a focus on games, skills, fitness, agility and upper body strength through the specialist program with our PE teacher. We will provide a specialist Gymnastics program as part of the Physical Education program again in 2016; this program is part of our PE program and is reported against. The Gymnastics program runs during Term 1 every year, with the children having 8 lessons with trained Gymnastics instructors who bring all the specialised equipment.

**Languages - Australian Sign Language** - the children are learning Australian Sign Language . They learn greetings and vocabulary that they can use with some simple sentence structures. They also learn to sign the letters of the alphabet. Auslan is very supportive of understanding the language structure or syntax of spoken or written English compared with Auslan - where we would say in English, 'Would you put this book on the table, please?' in Auslan one would sign 'This book, that table, put please.' Being conscious of the way a language is structured is a very important understanding.

**eLearning** - our focus is for the children to use eLearning as a regular tool in their classrooms. We have Interactive whiteboards or Apple TVs, iPads, desk top computers and/or laptops in our classrooms. We currently have an eLearning room (class set of computers) but have very exciting plans to redesign our Library/eLearning rooms into an open space that will promote student collaboration and research skills using books and technology. We also have a class set of iPads that are able to be borrowed across the school for one-to-one eLearning lessons.

All students are enrolled in the online *Mathletics* program (this is subsidised by DET) and children work within it during the school day and it is used for Homework as well. It is a safe, online Maths portal for the children. Our Year Prep-2 children also have a subscription to '*ABC Reading Eggs*' which they use in the classrooms and at home.



### **Helping in your child's (or another) classroom**

We love having additional helpers in the classrooms and your assistance is a great support for the teacher.

There are many ways to assist in the classroom / school:

- **Hearing reading** - with an additional adult or two, each child can be listened to, supported to change their Take Home Book and then to have the new book prepared (e.g. a by doing a 'picture walk' and talking about the book before reading it to the child)
- **Being an extra helper in the classroom** - allows the teacher to focus on the teaching group whilst having adult input into small group learning activities. For example, if a group of Prep children are playing a number or letter recognition game, having an adult present to reinforce the learning activity is a great benefit.
- **Cooking / craft activities** - where having another pair of hands is always appreciated!
- **Making resources** - having support to make and prepare activities for the children and publish student writing

We will offer an information session for our new parents (usually early in March) once we have the children settled and comfortable in routines. We do ask that all Classroom Helpers provide a current Working With Children Check (volunteer status) and also that you sign the Exford PS Confidentiality agreement before commencing. Classroom Helpers remain in the classrooms and are always under the classroom teachers' guidance and supervision.