Teaching the National Curriculum at Thornhill Primary School

At Thornhill, we teach the national curriculum creatively through our carefully mapped out curriculum maps. They have been written to engage pupils in a variety of ways and provide a rich and exciting stimulus for learning.

We believe that high quality learning is much more than learning facts and information, but is about the development of lifelong learning skills such as the ability to collaborate effectively, take risks, show resilience and persevere.

Our creative curriculum provides a myriad of opportunities to develop these skills that will benefit their lives in the future. Our curriculum supports pupils as they develop their creative thinking attitudes such as seeking connections, taking risks, being curious and challenging the usual. The curriculum is arranged in Learning Questions. These have been designed to be interesting, challenging and relevant and to allow important learning to take place across the Thornhill Toolsets and subjects.

Project Based Learning

Over the course of each academic year, children explore Learning Projects such as What is London like? and What is conflict? This project based learning encompasses the whole curriculum (wherever possible) and all that the children need to know. Children are involved in planning and sharing ideas with the teachers to ensure maximised participation, engagement and enjoyment. This planning is developed using the Thornhill Toolbox, where key skills are discussed and developed. The areas of the toolbox are:

- Communication
- Physical
- Creative
- Thinking
- Social and Emotional
- Learning about learning

Skills are taught discreetly through the use of learning questions, and then planned opportunities for the pupils to apply these skills are developed. This is seen within Thornhill's Enrichment programme. As a Silver Skills Builder school, we explicitly and discreetly develop these transferable skills in order to support pupil's futures.

The Learning Questions

The Learning Questions are based on four themes: People and Life; Places and the Environment; Change; and Food. All children explore all these themes every year (slightly different in EYFS). Each Learning Question is treated as the starting point for a Learning Project. Outcomes from each Learning Project have been carefully mapped to the national curriculum, and pupils will learn a project either over a half term or up to a whole term depending on the scale of the Learning Question.

Initial experiences are a crucial part of planning the learning project with children. Each child is involved in having an influence on what they learn and how they might learn it. This supports pupils in developing their leadership skills, taking an active role in their learning and developing focused learning habits. Our pupils care about their learning and strive to achieve their best.

English

Reading

We use diverse and inspiring core texts to lead our reading and writing outcomes. These texts draw together the year groups' learning projects, allowing for both a cross-curricular and more creative approach. For example, Y6 will draw on The Children of Willseden Green for historical diary entries, letter-writing, rationing in Maths and history, and then cooking in D.T. Through their involvement in the planning process, pupils must think creatively about how to document their learning, use technology, and make connections to the wider world. The number of books a class will focus upon will vary across the school as the material becomes more challenging.

At Thornhill, we have a newly built and well-stocked library where the pupils are able to select their own books to read for pleasure. They visit at least once a week and our librarian encourages them to diversify their choices and to discuss the literature. Children are expected to read at home daily, responding thoughtfully to the stories in their Reading Records. We promote a love for learning through our library, regular author talks, World Book Day, book fairs and more.

Guided reading

Every day, pupils take part in guided reading. In this time, pupils get to read a variety of text types, both for pleasure and to develop core skills such as extracting information, inference and deduction. Guided Reading is taught whole class in KS2 to promote speaking and listening skills. Our core texts provide the stimulus to support the learning projects, allowing teachers and pupils to plan collaboratively.

Core Texts

Each year group has carefully chosen quality core texts (including fiction and non-fiction texts). These act as stimuli for teaching pupils to speak, read and write fluently. The texts motivate them to communicate their ideas and emotions to one another. Having engaging and challenging core texts allows pupils to develop a love of literature, extend their vocabulary and read for enjoyment.

Writing

Through writing at Thornhill, we help develop pupils' competencies in two key areas: transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing). Carefully planned, regular writing opportunities also allow the pupils to develop their stamina, ensuring all pupils can write at length. Each half term, there are at least two writing outcomes, with the opportunity to write an extended piece for a range of purposes and audiences. The pupils are taught to understand how these influence the form the writing should take. Pupils are inspired to develop their ability to think aloud, explore and collect ideas, draft, edit and publish their writing.

Pupils are also taught the importance of proof-reading and monitoring their own or a peer's writing to ensure it makes sense. Every year, pupils write poetry that they then perform in the Poetry Competition. We provide regular opportunities to write for purpose within our curriculum, i.e. Newspaper Project, letters to MPs/PM about Climate Change, Black History Month teaching etc.

Handwriting

We follow the Nelson Handwriting scheme to teach handwriting explicitly from Nursery to Year 6. Every two weeks, pupils "publish" their writing using a handwriting pen, when it is age- and ability-appropriate to do so. Throughout the year, their Published Books act as a portfolio, showing amazing progress.

Literacy across the curriculum

Pupils rehearse, apply and consolidate their literacy learning in all other areas of the curriculum. Where possible, pupils will complete an extended creative writing piece linked to their current Learning Project, which they themselves would have planned. For example, in a geography lesson, pupils might produce a tourism brochure based on a geographical study of a chosen country.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG)

Spelling is taught through the Ruth Miskin "Read, Write, Spell" scheme, where there are weekly spelling rules which are revisited in Home Learning. Punctuation and grammar lessons are embedded into the sequence of learning for writing.

Maths

At Thornhill Primary School, we deliver our daily mathematics sessions supported by NCTEM

The programme emphasises conceptual understanding, skills proficiency and focuses on mathematical problem solving. It provides teachers with a clear framework for progression in maths across the whole primary age range. The expected methods in calculation, models and apparatus which are suitable at each level of a child's mathematical understanding are outlined for each of the 4 operations in the programme.

By the end of Year 6 children are equipped with mental and written methods that they understand and can use correctly. When faced with a calculation, children are able to decide which method is most appropriate and have strategies to check its accuracy.

At whatever stage in their learning, and whatever method is being used, children's strategies must still be underpinned by a secure and appropriate knowledge of number facts, along with those mental skills that are needed to carry out the process and judge if it was successful.

The overall aim is that when children leave our schools they:

- have a secure knowledge of number facts and a good understanding of the four operations;

- are able to use this knowledge and understanding to carry out calculations mentally and to apply general strategies when using one-digit and two-digit numbers and particular strategies to special cases involving bigger numbers;
- make use of diagrams and informal notes to help record steps and part answers when using mental methods that generate more information than can be kept in their heads;
- have an efficient, reliable, written method of calculation for each operation that children can apply with confidence when undertaking calculations that they cannot carry out mentally;
- use a calculator effectively, using their mental skills to monitor the process, check the steps involved and decide if the numbers displayed make sense.

Science

Whilst being a vehicle for pupils to build a knowledge of scientific concepts, Science also provides opportunities for pupils to predict, explain, analyse and to develop a sense of excitement and curiosity about natural phenomena. Pupils are taught specific vocabulary and misconceptions are addressed. Alongside this, pupils are regularly involved in actively pursuing lines of enquiry in order to answer scientific questions (working scientifically).

Investigations provide opportunities for pupils to apply mathematical skills in meaningful ways such as taking accurate measurements or presenting findings in graphs.

Science lessons are taught discreetly on a weekly basis in Key stages 1 and 2, following the science National Curriculum programme of study. In Nursery and Reception, classrooms and outdoor areas are set up to allow opportunities for pupils to understand the World through exploration, play, active learning, creating and thinking critically. Wherever possible, science teaching is related to learning questions. For example, inheritance is taught as part of the “Who Am I?' topic in Year 6.

Computing

We teach computing from Switched on Computing programme, which follows the national curriculum’s programme of study. At Thornhill we also have a Virtual Online Learning platform called Seesaw where pupils can continue their learning at home. Children are able to take part in forum discussions, independent learning activities, view pictures from the school life and interact with targeted learning games. This also acts as an online platform for us to capture teaching and learning across the school.

The teaching of digital literacy computing is enabled through our learning platform. Children safely explore activities highlighting awareness to online safety and cyberbullying. Our Learning Platform also provides a home-school link for parents where they can view and celebrate their child’s learning and have a wealth of resources to help support them at home.

Foundation Subjects

These subjects include Geography, History, MFL, R.E, PE, PSHE, Art, D.T. and Music. These can be taught in a variety of ways, such as theme weeks, continuous weekly teaching and wherever possible, through the learning projects (Cross-curricular). Please see the specific subjects to read more about how they are taught at Thornhill.