

Working together: motivating and enhancing students' passion for learning



“Working together as a school, with our students, teachers and parents all involved in supporting learning, is the most effective way of ensuring every child makes even greater progress. Parents have asked the school for advice in understanding how they can support their children in achieving the best learning possible, and we have produced this guide to help, particularly with supporting learning and assessment at home. I hope that you will find it useful.”

Mr Brian Conway – CEO, St. John the Baptist Catholic MAT

Introduction

You do not need to be an expert in any subject to help your child enjoy learning and do well at school. By doing just a few things at home you can greatly help your child.

At Notre Dame, we believe that anyone can master any subject, provided that:

- work completed in class and at home is **challenging**, and pushes a student to the limit of what they can do;
- students get **feedback** from their teachers on how they are doing, and what they need to do in order to improve
- students have the right **mindset** for learning, including knowledge of how their brain works
- students have **motivation** to learn and do their best

We have developed a summary of the traits which successful students display, which we aspire to develop in all our learners. We passionately believe that these traits, if worked on by young people, will lead to them being successful and happy in adult life. We refer to the summary as our 'learner profile'.

We celebrate when a student shows a trait of the learner profile using our rewards system. Parents can help to reinforce this message through how they praise and celebrate their child's achievements at home.





The Learner Profile



1 Ownership

- I am punctual.
- I bring the right equipment.
- I keep going and finish tasks.
- I do homework.

2 Know thyself

- I know how the brain learns.
- I manage my emotions.
- I know when best to work independently or in a team.

3 Skillful

- I memorize new knowledge using a range of techniques.
- I develop my use of vocabulary and numeracy.

4 Creative Enquirer

- I read and research ahead.
- I am resourceful.
- I share different ways to solve a problem with others.

5 Resilient

- I am brave and challenge myself in lessons.
- If I fail I just keep trying.
- I share my mistakes to learn.

6 Good communicator

- I contribute and cooperate.
- I explain my ideas to others.
- I adapt my behaviour to suit different roles and situations.

7 Reflective Learner

- I seek and act on feedback.
- I set myself learning targets.
- I can clearly state WWW & EBI for each of my subjects.

8 Community Spirited

- I listen and show respect.
- I support and motivate.
- I am open to working with new people and am friendly.

You can help at home

1. Things to look at regularly with your child

- **Using MyChildAtSchool:** your child's timetable: so you know what lessons they've had that day and what is coming up tomorrow;
- **Using <http://www.ndhs.org.uk/page/?title=Subjects&pid=7>,** find out what your child is studying in each subject throughout the year;
- **Using the student planner + MyChildAtSchool:** your child's homework, credits awarded and negative events;
- **Regular talking:** which subjects your child is currently enjoying most, and which they are less confident / happy about;
- **Talking and looking at books together:** what your child is doing well and what they need to improve, so you can talk about things that can make a difference.

2. The language of learning and praise

Talking things through and learning together can make a difference. You are not expected to be an expert, but someone to share ideas with or help think something out.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- What sort of day have you had?
- What did you learn in History?
- You were a bit worried about your homework in Maths – what did you do well and what do you need to do to improve?

Try to praise effort and techniques which they use to overcome challenges, rather than 'how good' they are at certain things. Research suggest that praising outcomes develops a **Fixed mindset** in people, whereas praising effort and techniques develops a **Growth mindset** in people. Having a Growth mindset will help your child to make better progress at school, and develop their resilience and wellbeing.

Refer to the following table for examples of the type of language we recommend that you use with your child, compared to that which we would advise against using. This can be very challenging to start with!

Growth Mindset checklist

Sometimes we don't realise that words that we think encourage and praise can actually undermine a child's ability to become the best learners they can be. Every word or action sends a message. Are you sending messages that support them to grow as resilient learners? **Consider this:**

Do	Do say	Don't	Don't say
Praise effort rather than focus on outcome	<i>I'm very impressed by how hard you are trying and how much you are learning</i>	Praise their intelligence and talents – as if they are fixed	<i>You must get 10/10 – it's the only result that matters because you are so bright</i>
Give lots of feedback about how they have done and what they could do next – without criticising and making personal judgements.	<i>You have written such an exciting story – how about redrafting and checking some of the spellings I have underlined?</i>	Judge their outcomes – either good or bad – without giving points for improvement. Mix up judgements of outcomes with personal qualities	<i>You are so talented, I expected more from you</i> OR <i>This is full of mistakes you can do better!</i>
Focus on what they are learning and developing and celebrate that	<i>You have really tried hard with those problems – how do you work them out?</i>	Make them feel all that matters is their scores and grades	<i>You got an A that is brilliant</i> <i>You need to get good grades if you are ever going to be successful</i>
Help them realise that mistakes are part of learning and you only learn by sticking at it until you can make progress	<i>Did you find that text hard with all that difficult vocabulary – just think how much you are learning if you get through it all</i>	Get irritated if they can't do it – and show you think they are useless or 'thick'	<i>There's no way you will be able to read that – it's much too difficult.</i>
Model growth mindset yourself by sometimes getting it wrong and showing how you learn from it	<i>Who can help me with this tech/maths/spelling problem as I'm struggling and I need to get it right. I need to learn something from you!</i>	Demonstrate you are stuck in your ways and nervous about learning new things	<i>I don't do technology/maths/spelling- never have been able to....</i>
Praise them for specific achievements and persistence	<i>I'm impressed with how you have found a new way to understand algebra. You stuck at it and didn't give up until you found a way.</i>	Only praise when they get it all right. They should be tackling work that is hard enough to get some things wrong.	<i>I want to see an A* from you every time.</i>
Help them fix it when they make mistakes. Make sure they are willing to challenge themselves, not opt for guaranteed success	<i>Hey you got it wrong – that's good because it shows you can keep learning.</i>	Make fixed judgements about their ability and compare them with other children	<i>You should be coming top of the class with your ability.</i>
Talk to them about the learning process and journey	<i>What have you learnt today that has really pushed your comfort zone?</i>	Let them think you can learn and make progress without the pain of hard work!	<i>All that matters is the exam grade you get, I don't care how you get there.</i>
Help them choose challenging tasks that stretch them even if they may not get everything right	<i>Isn't it exciting when you are working really hard on something and it's so very hard but eventually you get it!</i>	Allow them to just do the things they know they are good at.	<i>Stick with what you know then – at least you will get a good mark.</i>

Remember:

- All subjects are important ... try to value them all when you talk about them. Your child can improve in every subject ... help them to believe this.

3. Helping your child become an independent learner

Examples of how teachers develop students as independent learners include:

- *Help children develop different skills for learning. As they become more independent they should be able to decide for themselves which skills to use in different subjects at different times.*
- *Ensuring children work together so they can help each other*

These independent learning skills will not only help pupils make better progress in school, but will also help them learn outside school and later on at work and in their lives as adults.

Ways you can help:

1. The most obvious starting point for this will be helping your child with their **homework:**

- Resist the temptation to 'help too much' and do it for them – ask questions which will help them find the answer for themselves. **Use the table on the next page to help you to reflect** on when you may have 'sabotaged' rather than 'supported' learning, by doing too much for your child. This tool can also help you to reflect on your use of language.
- Encourage your child to work with or talk to a friend.
- Encourage your child to complete homework tasks soon after they are set, rather than on the evening before the deadline. In this way, they have time to act resourcefully (e.g. read the textbook, go over class notes, contact the teacher) if they struggle.
- Doing homework well can take up a lot of time but it is important that you encourage your child to keep a balance between work and play. Encourage them to seek help rather than spending too long on an individual piece of work.
- Find out if the school recommends any books or software you can buy or borrow from the library which will help your child work at home. The school and subject teachers may be able to recommend some useful websites.

Parent reflection grid: support vs. sabotage / the right kind of praise

Scenario	Prompt questions	Your notes
Example of when you sabotaged rather than supported your child	What happened	
	Why you felt the need to 'spoon feed' them the answer	
	How you could do it differently next time	
Examples of good ways to phrase a question which..	..you respond to your child's question using, when you feel that they need to be more resourceful	
	..extends your child's thinking when they have finished work early	
	..gets them to reflect on a mistake they have made	
Examples of ways in which you as a parent can develop your child's resourcefulness	What if they struggled with something taught in a lesson that day?	
	What if they say that they can't do their homework?	
Examples of the language you can use as a parent to	Praise effort rather than levels / grades	
	Praise a technique over task completion / levels / grades	

2. Pupils receive **written feedback** periodically from their teachers, as well as more frequent verbal feedback. It is important that your child acts on any such feedback.

- Encourage your child to read through work in their exercise books with you as a routine.
- Look for the letters **WWW** (What is going well), **T** (Target) and **EBI** (Even better if). Ask your child about how they plan to act on their targets, and check that they are responding in blue pen to any EBI comments, which are essentially personalised tasks for them to complete.
 - What does this target mean?
 - What do you need to do to achieve it?
 - Which target is the biggest challenge?
 - Why do you think that is?
 - What could you do to get around the problems so you can achieve it?
 - Here's a target we talked about last time. How's it going?
 - This target 'needs to contribute more to discussions in lessons' seems to come up in French, geography and history...why are you finding that difficult?
 - Let's see if we can think of some ways to help you improve it.
- Each term when the school issues a progress review or written report, take time to read through these together with your child. Encourage them to reflect on their attitude to learning, using the self-evaluation tool available in the planner.

3. Parents are often unsure about how to support their child when they are **revising for a test or exam**. Even diligent students can sometimes lack effective revision strategies, meaning that they can invest significant time without significant improvement in their understanding.

- Get your child to start by identifying exactly what information they need to revise. This is easily done using the learning checklists found on ndhs.org.uk under the **subject** pages;
- Encourage your child not to spend time (at least initially) making extensive notes, or highlighting text: this is not effective;

- Instead encourage them to self-test, then self-mark. This is easiest if they have a source of exam-style practice questions to hand. These are commonly found in revision guides, or in past exam papers;
- Reading and note taking should follow and be informed by mistakes highlighted by self-testing. Mistakes may also show the need to seek help: e.g. from you, a friend or the teacher concerned.



Imagine your child has 10 hours for revision. Your job is to encourage them to get the balance of time spent optimised:

- Reading, note taking and similar activities should only represent 1 hour of the 10 hours spent, as part of the process of acting on mistakes*



Frequently asked questions

What do 'internal' (school-set) tests tell us?

Such tests summarise what your child knows, understands and can do at a point in time. We often use these to help us estimate ('forecast') the grade which your child is in line to attain, if they keep going as they are. Your child is entirely capable to exceeding our forecasts with the right approach and attitude to learning.

How else do teachers get information about how well my child is doing in lessons?

As important as tests are, most assessment information that teachers use is gathered from everyday lessons:

- From your child's answers to the questions asked in class.
- From things your child says in discussion.
- From their class work or performance and from homework.
- From how hard they try and want to learn.

What should I do if my child cannot do their homework?

We recommend the following steps:

1. Train them to do homework in advance of deadline, not on the night before.
2. Get your child to study their class notes – is there information here which helps?
3. Get your child to be resourceful:
 - a. Do they have a revision guide they can find the information in?
 - b. Is there a reliable website e.g. BBC bitesize which they can find the information on?
 - c. Can they contact a friend who might know the answer?
4. Allow your child to struggle: learning isn't easy. Don't spoon feed them with answers. Equally, **do** monitor how long they spend on homework, and stop them if this becomes excessive.
5. Encourage your child to contact their teacher for help / guidance, if you feel that they have exhausted the above steps. This needs to be in advance of the deadline.

My child really doesn't believe that they can 'do' Maths. Do you have any tips?

Try reading the following guidance by Professor Jo Boaler. More information and ideas can be found at: www.youcubed.org

Do you remember how excited your children were about maths* when they were young? How they were excited by patterns in nature? How they rearranged a set of objects and found, with delight, that they had the same number? Before children start school they often talk about maths with curiosity and wonder, but soon after they start school many children decide that maths is confusing and scary and they are not a "math person". This is because maths in many schools is all about procedures, memorization and deciding which children can and which cannot. Maths has become a performance subject and students of all ages are more likely to tell you that maths is all about answering questions correctly than tell you about the beauty of the subject or the way it piques their interest.

Given the performance and test-driven culture of our schools, with over-packed curriculum and stressed out students, what can parents do to transform maths for their children? Here are some steps to take:

1

Encourage children to play maths puzzles and games. Award winning mathematician, Sarah Flannery reported that her maths achievement and enthusiasm came not from school but from the puzzles she was given to solve at home. Puzzles and games – anything with a dice really – will help kids enjoy maths, and develop number sense, which is critically important.

2

Always be encouraging and never tell kids they are wrong when they are working on maths problems. Instead find the logic in their thinking – there is always some logic to what they say. For example if your child multiplies 3 by 4 and gets 7, say – Oh I see what you are thinking, you are using what you know about addition to add 3 and 4, when we multiply we have 4 groups of 3...

3

Never associate maths with speed. It is not important to work quickly, and we now know that forcing kids to work quickly on maths is the best way to start maths anxiety for children, especially girls. Don't use flashcards or other speed drills. Instead use visual activities such as <https://bhi61nm2cr3mkdkg1dtaov18-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/FluencyWithoutFear-2015.pdf>

4

Never share with your children the idea that you were bad at maths at school or you dislike it – especially if you are a mother. Researchers found that as soon as mothers shared that idea with their daughters, their daughter's achievement went down.

5

Encourage number sense. What separates high and low achievers is number sense – having an idea of the size of numbers and being able to separate and combine numbers flexibly. For example, when working out $29 + 56$, if you take one from the 56 and make it $30 + 55$, it is much easier to work out. The flexibility to work with numbers in this way is what is called number sense and it is very important.

6

Perhaps most important of all – encourage a "growth mindset" let students know that they have unlimited maths potential and that being good at maths is all about working hard. When children have a growth mindset, they do well with challenges and do better in school overall. When children have a fixed mindset and they encounter difficult work, they often conclude that they are not "a math person". One way in which parents encourage a fixed mindset is by telling their children they are "smart" when they do something well. That seems like a nice thing to do, but it sets children up for difficulties later, as when kids fail at something they will inevitably conclude that they aren't smart after all. Instead use growth praise such as "it is great that you have learned that", "I really like your thinking about that". When they tell you something is hard for them, or they have made a mistake, tell them: "That's wonderful, your brain is growing!"



** I use maths, rather than math, partly because I am from the UK and we say maths there and partly because maths is short for mathematicS, it is a plural noun. Mathematics was chosen to be plural to reflect all the many parts of mathematics - drawing, modeling, asking questions, communicating, etc. Math sounds more singular and narrow (Do the math, usually means do a calculation!), and I prefer to keep the idea that maths is a multidimensional and varied set of mathematical forms and ideas.*