



16th May 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

These are exciting times at Mill Rythe Junior school, and we are extremely fortunate to be part of such a progressive and forward thinking school.



In September we started our mission to provide our children with a truly exciting, experience led and enriched curriculum – one that will enable every child to succeed and thrive in our ever changing world. Today, we moved one step closer to achieving this when our pygmy goats, Stan and Ollie, officially joined the Mill Rythe family. Their paddock was completed during the Easter holidays, thanks to the hard work of local hero Mr Miles, and we have loved watching them getting to know our chickens today. Having our own farm will allow our children the opportunity to develop their confidence with animals and enable them to learn about and demonstrate care and responsibility beyond the class room. It is well documented that allowing children to interact with animals leads to stronger social skills within their peer group as well as reducing levels of anxiety and stress. We hope the children's new experiences in school will coax them away from the lure of social media and instead, install a love and enthusiasm for the natural world around us.

Whilst these are exciting times at Mill Rythe, they are worrying times concerning the world around us and the threat of climate change and the consequences this may have for our children. Although it is important for all children to be proficient readers, writers and mathematicians by the time they leave year 6, we also recognise that it is this generation who will be dealing with the mistakes of our own and previous generations. Through science, we hope to instil a sense of awe and wonder about the natural world that will allow our children not to just ask questions about the world around them but learn to answer them; to provide them with the tools to find solutions. As educators, we believe it is our duty to expose the children to these opportunities when they arise.

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One of the biggest crises affecting us at the moment, and one which we can have a direct and immediate impact on, is the plight of the honey bee. I have spoken to many children at the school who have a passion for gardening and bees and this has been highlighted as a real concern for them. We rely on bees not only for honey but for the pollination of thousands of crops that fill our supermarkets, homes and stomachs. Without the honey bee, we would struggle to feed ourselves and our families. Since the late 1990's bee colonies have been disappearing at an alarming rate and if they disappear completely, mankind will struggle to survive. Last year, I visited a primary school in Porchester and was astounded to find that they had a beehive on site. I spoke to the beekeeper who was there and they informed me that they not only keep and maintain their own hives, but they train the children up as bee keepers too. I was inspired. What an incredible and rich experience for the children. I decided to investigate whether this was something we could offer at our school. I later met with a beekeeper from the island, John Geden – a beekeeper with over 25 years' experience from Sinah Honey, and we spoke at length about the practicalities and implications of such an exciting endeavour. Together we put together a plan and we are now pleased to announce that we will be getting our very own beehive!

Myself and Miss Gilchrist have attended a beekeeping course and we will be leading and overseeing the whole project for the school, with the expert support from John who will always be on hand to help us on our apiary adventure. The hives will provide our children with an incredibly rich experience which will enable them to appreciate not just where all our food comes from but how they impact us locally and globally. For those children who would like to get closer to the bees and develop their own passion, we will be looking to train up five children every term (and they will have their very own suits) to produce and harvest their own honey. Children will be provided with their own bee keeping suits and once the honey is harvested we will sell this both from school and local shops on Hayling Island.

I do appreciate that there may be many concerns regarding having a hive of bees on site. With this in mind, I will try and cover what I think the main concerns will be within this letter. The bees will be situated in the outdoor learning area towards the very back of the school. They will be behind 1.8m fencing and will only be accessible through a locked gate. Children will only be allowed in this area of school under the direct supervision of adults and they will never be in the enclosure unsupervised and unsuited. The bees will fly out over the fencing and pollinate crops within a two mile radius of school heading towards the local farms and fields. There won't be an increase in bees around the school and buildings. Honey bees are also very docile and come from a friendly colony so they are highly unlikely to sting anyone who comes into contact with them.

If you were to go into the outdoor learning area in summer, it is already covered in hundreds of bees and you can actually hear the buzzing as they collect the pollen and nectar from the plants that our children have planted. The only difference now will be that they are 'our' bees. Full risk assessments have been carried out and procedures put in place to keep our children safe.

Bees are key to mankind's survival and I'm very excited to be offering this opportunity at our school to enrich an already incredible curriculum. If you do have any further questions or queries please come and find me so that I may answer them for you – my door is always open. Alternatively, email myself or Mr Bessant via farmschool@millrythe-jun.hants.sch.uk

Mr Darby
Science and Farm School leader