Dear Parent and Student,

This week I have invited Mr Alabi to share some key information and very practical advice on the most effective approach to ensuring learning and also how to revise well and ensure that key information is retained in the long-term memory. Mr Alabi is a senior member of staff and Director of Learning and Achievement in Science. He is leading our focus on ‘metacognition’ and we can see from our students’ examination results that when the advice is followed and key strategies are used consistently at home and in school, their exam performance and outcomes are far stronger.

As we progress through the year there will be more sharing of key information via our weekly bulletin home. We welcome feedback and questions.

Very best wishes for an excellent week ahead.

Kathleen M Higgins
Executive Headteacher

Learning and Being Able to Remember What We Have Learnt

Working memory can be described as holding short-term (i.e. temporary) information in your mind while using that information to accomplish a task. It is also where we make sense of things. We use our working memory when we are being taught, to make sense of new information and carry out tasks, in lessons and at home.

The capacity of our working memory is quite small. This means our working memory suffers (we are unable to store and use knowledge in our long term memory) if it is made to take in lots of information. Most students wait until they have a test or an exam before they revise. Our working cannot deal with this rush of information as its capacity is quite small. As a result, students perform below the level expected of them.

Students sometimes forget what they learn at school. This is not unusual. Our brain forgets a lot of the things we see and hear every day. Our brain tends to remember things that are profound or experiences that are repeated over a period of time. Memory is the residue of thought- what we regularly spend time thinking about stays in our long term memory. Our brain remembers it better, for longer. When students revise at home, they are thinking about knowledge, this knowledge transfers to their long term memory.

Familiarity is an enemy of learning. Most students see re-reading their notes as revision. As they are familiar with their notes (they wrote them), they have a false sense of understanding of the content of the notes. This false sense leads them to believe they know and understand. The reality is that most times, they do not. It is like looking at the direction to a destination on a satnav and thinking you definitely know the destination and its surrounding areas.
What are the strategies that will help your child improve their long term memory?

- Retrieval practice: This means that instead of your child re-reading their notes or watching videos of topics on the internet, they regularly attempt questions on topics they have covered at school. Think of a walk through a dense forest. The first time you go through that forest, it’s difficult to find your way. It’s overgrown. Everything is unfamiliar. You quickly lose your bearings. But every time you take that route again, the route becomes increasingly familiar. You recognise that fallen tree, that odd-shaped branch, that tiny stream with the wobbly stone. Consequently, navigating your way through becomes easier and easier – to the point, in fact, that you don’t navigate at all, you just do it. It becomes an unthinking act. So it is with retrieval practice. Every time you retrieve a memory, the pathway to that memory becomes more established.

What resources are available to your child for spaced retrieval at home?

- Knowledge organisers: Your child will be given a list of keywords and their meanings for the topics they are learning by their class teacher. Your child should learn how to spell the words, how to pronounce them and what they mean. The best way to memorise their meanings is to attempt retrieving their meanings from memory and then using the knowledge organiser to check and make corrections.
- Spaced flash cards: Write the meaning of a keyword on one side of a flash card and the meaning on the reverse side. Have three boxes-labelled every day, Wednesday, Friday. On the first day, say Monday, work through answering the questions on the cards. If the answer is correct, move card to Wednesday, if wrong, leave in the box labelled every day. On Tuesday, do the same. On Wednesday, go through the cards in the boxes labelled ‘Everyday’ and ‘Wednesday’. If correct, move cards to Friday, if wrong, move to the box labelled ‘Everyday’. Do this every week.
- Practice booklets/questions booklet: Learners will develop fluency (the ability to automatically solve problems) if they spend time practising the topics they learn at school. This is even more effective if the practice is spaced out. Some subjects have these questions online, others give sheets to students. It is important that students work on questions on topics a day after they learned the topics. Then again after a week, 2 weeks and 1 month.

Word of the Week

transgress (verb)

trans-gres

Definition:
- to go beyond the limits of what is morally, socially or legally acceptable

Usage:
- In the play Macbeth, Lady Macbeth loses her sanity as a result of her transgressions.
- Christians are not supposed to transgress the moral laws of God set out in the Ten Commandments.

Synonyms
- infringe
- trespass
- violate
- disobey
- do wrong
- offend

Etymology
- Prefix - From the Latin, trans, meaning across, beyond.
- Root - From the Latin, gradi, meaning go.