

Grade RR to Grade R shift

What is Grade R all about at Hurlyvale Pre-Primary School and what is expected of a Grade R learner?

At our school, we subscribe to two main Curricula, the CAPS, which is the Department of Education curriculum and the ISASA (Independent Schools Association of South Africa), which is the private school curriculum. We have used a combination of the two curricula, which we find gives us a sound foundation to build our own unique education programme. We also make use of the R Maths system, which originates from the Western Cape Department of Education as well as the Lego six bricks which is an excellent resource too.

Starting in the third term, we start implementing the Jolly Phonics programme with the children and the use of Jolly Phonics continues into Grade 1. We pride ourselves on the fact that we have a wide variety of resources available at our fingertips.

According to the CAPS document from the Department of Education, **“Grade R should not be a watered down Grade One. It has its own unique characteristics based on how children in this age group make sense of their world and acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will allow them to maximise the opportunities afforded in the formal learning years.”** This clearly indicates that a Grade R programme needs to be very different to a Grade 1 programme as the outcomes are very different.

Grade R is the last informal year of schooling before the formal constraints of “Big School”. Our main aim is getting the child’s body ready for formal learning. We believe, and this is supported by research, that a good Pre-Primary school will have prepared the brain and body through play and skills development, not desk and paper/book work, to be able to cope with the demands of starting to learn to read, write and manipulate quantities (numbers) in Grade 1.

So this then begs the question, is PLAY, the essence of body and school readiness? The answer to this, again based on sound research, is a resounding YES. A child who has been in an environment where there has been enough structured and unstructured play, engaging with other children, learning to take turns, sharing toys and constructing things using boxes, paper, straws and blocks and verbalising all of this, is SO ready for school.

The Pre-Primary year is not about teaching children how to cope with academics but rather to set up the brain’s neural infrastructure to cope with whatever comes their way in Grade 1. Pre-Primary must be about fun, play and meaningful 21st century learning. We need to expose their brains to creativity, innovation and big ideas. These are the skills that will equip them to cope with the demands of living and surviving in the 21st Century.

Having said the above, some children will learn to sound out and read 3 letter sounds, which is wonderful and we do encourage this on an auditory level.

By the end of the year, your child will be able to:

- write their name as per the CAPS document
- have had the opportunity to “write” stories and other words
- have contributed their ideas to endless class stories
- tell their own stories to their teachers.

They will have learnt to rhyme and manipulate the sounds they will learn later in the year. They will have had the opportunity to listen to countless stories and be able to answer and ask questions about the stories they have listened to, thus showing us they have an adequate level of comprehension.

They will have recited poems and songs, danced, jumped, rolled, skipped, climbed, run and played endless outdoor and pretend games.

They will have played with play dough, built puzzles, constructed structures, played with balls and bats, played in water and mud, drawn pictures, painted with hands and brushes and they will have created endless masterpieces during creative time.

They will have manipulated numbers and shapes, counted using concrete apparatus, collected data and made graphs for the data. They will have learnt some very abstract concepts such as more and less, bigger, smaller, before and after. They will sort objects into categories, their own chosen categories and those specified by the teacher. They will also problem solve endlessly doing all the above. This is but a taste of what happens daily and over the year in a Grade R classroom. All this will be done using concrete apparatus and their own bodies. We have such busy, productive days in Grade R and there is never a dull moment!

What can you as a parent do to help your little one be completely ready for Big School?

- Please ensure that they listen to you the first time you speak.
- Talk with your children about everything that is going on around them and use big words to help increase their vocabulary.
- Read to your children on a daily basis.
- Bake with them.
- Let them play with construction toys.
- Limit time spent watching TV and using iPads and mobile phones.
- Allow creativity to flourish by providing paints and paper on a regular basis.
- Eat meals around a table and let your little ones help set the table.
- Let them get out into the garden and play and encourage movement.

Children who are ready for Grade 1 are ready to tackle anything that comes their way. This happens when they feel confident, competent and worthy.

There are some key points that are considered important when we determine how “ready” our children are for Grade 1. We look at the following:

- Your child's posture - can they sit upright at a table and are they able to support their own body weight. This is an important skill for sitting in chairs for longer periods of time at Big School. Sitting up requires good muscle tone, which develops while our children are playing.
- Position in space - Using words like behind, in front of, left, right, over, under and being able to put themselves in these positions. This vocabulary helps with early reading and writing skills.
- Communication - Can your child communicate effectively, be understood by everyone around them and can they share their feelings and stories in a logical manner?
- Independence - Can your child dress themselves? Are they able to tie their shoelaces? Do they willingly separate from you in the morning? Are they helping to pack their bags, do chores at home etc?
- We encourage the children to be able to skip, with and without a skipping rope.
- Knowing their birthday, address and parents cell phone numbers are also an important skill to master.
- Can they STOP what they are doing if you request them to? This relates to impulse control, which is a very vital life skill.

We are very proud of the programme we run at Hurlyvale Pre Primary School. It ties in very well to what the Grade One programme at any public school expects from the children when they enter formal Primary school. Our children are always well received at any school they attend due to the effectiveness of our programme.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

HVPPS Management team.

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