Friday 25th July 2014

CATCHING ON EARLY PROGRAM

Dear Parents/Carers of students in grades three and four,

It has come to my attention that there are a few parents concerned about our current “Catching on Early” grade three/four Health program.

The program is developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and has been implemented in our school in both 2013 and 2014 following ongoing discussions with our school nurse Jenny Banks. The program is delivered at other local schools.

The program has been delivered by Mr Fearn (3/4B) and Mrs Vella (grades 3/4A and 3/4C). Mrs Vella has replaced Jodie Hempel who is currently on leave for the remainder of this year.

Parents were provided with a letter outlining the program last term; however it appears that this may have lacked some additional detail.

Thank you to the parents that have contacted Mr Fearn and been directed to the website to answer any additional concerns. We have made a few small alterations to the program you will see on the website - (moved some content into higher grade levels.)

The first three sessions of the program relate to human development – parts of the body, names of the reproductive organs and changes during puberty, whilst the remaining two lessons will focus on being good friends and gender stereotyping.

Next week we will be up to session three. This session is titled “Growing and Changing.”

Feedback from parents has related to some of the students being uncomfortable with a teacher of a different sex when discussing body parts (ie: discussing girls’ body parts with Mr Fearn or discussing boys’ body parts with Mrs Vella.) Whilst we have not noticed this in class, we are happy to take this feedback on board.

There have also been some questions raised about the content ie: What will be covered? Please see the following page for our content in more detail.

As next week is the final ‘human development’ session, Mrs Cole will take the girls from 3/4B (whilst Mr Fearn takes the boys) and Mr Potesta will take the boys from 3/4 A and 3/4C (whilst Mrs Vella takes those girls) for this session. This will assist in reducing any feelings of being uncomfortable during class discussions about human development.

“We make a difference.”
The content to be covered next week will be the following:

- Time machine activity: How do you look now? How will you look in ten years’ time?
- This will lead into discussion on how our bodies change over time
- Why does our body need to change? - because we could have babies when we are older (without going into detail about how babies are made.)
- Bodies are changing as we prepare our bodies for adult hood – discussion on puberty and the changes our body will go through - this will include naming organs (penis, vagina, mammary glands /breasts) and looking at a sketch of where these organs are on the human body. We will also discuss menstruation (how it happens and why) and sperm development being a part of our body changing. These are both needed for babies to be made in the future. Other animals also need an egg and a sperm – dogs, cats, cows etc
- Each body clock is different – some body’s change earlier than others and that’s OK
- Read the book “Hair in Funny Places” by Babette Cole (no relation to me!)
- After reading this book, discuss that hair grows on parts of our bodies during puberty.

(‘Erections/Wet dreams’ and ‘How babies are made’ are included in the WPS grade five/six program.)

Sometimes students ask questions during a session that may be above the level and maturity of their peers. To address these occurrences, students will be asked to write down any questions that do not relate to the above information and teachers will take these away and look at them after class. If we believe we can ‘safely’ answer these questions the following week without including information above and beyond what is planned to be covered, the teacher will answer the question at the start of the next week’s class. If not, we will put the question in an envelope and send it home to the parent to consider.

**Next week is the final session related to human development.**

The following sessions, after next week, for the remainder of this term, relate to “being a good friend” and “stereotyping” and these will be taken as a whole grade by Mr Fearn (3/4B) and Mrs Vella (3/4C and 3/4A).

I will assume that this information will allay any fears or concerns parents have had up until now and all parents will be happy for their child to attend next week’s sessions. This includes parents who have recently requested their child not participate.

If you still have a concern after reading this letter, please contact me on Monday morning.

**Please note:** If I do not hear from you then we will ALL go ahead as is planned above – you must see me (or contact me) on Monday morning if you do not want your child to participate in next week’s separate boys’ and girls' sessions.

Thank you for your feedback.

Rhonda Cole