

Dear families,

At Kings we are always striving to facilitate the best possible learning opportunities for all children. It is with this in mind that I would like to share with you some of the exciting things your child's teachers have been working on.



Research shows that pupils who raise their hand to participate in class are significantly more likely to attain higher grades in school. This is because as the participation ratio increases, so does the thinking ratio. In other words, students who are participating more are thinking more, and students who are thinking more are learning more.

Of course, we know that there is more to school than just good grades. Please see below for the many other benefits of children raising their hand in class.

15 Benefits of Participating in Class



1. **Active Engagement:** Class discussions encourage students to actively engage with the course material, promoting a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
2. **Critical Thinking:** Students are challenged to think critically and analyse different perspectives, fostering the development of analytical skills.
3. **Communication Skills:** Participating in discussions helps students improve their verbal communication skills, including articulation, expression, and clarity.
4. **Confidence Building:** Regular participation in class discussions can boost students' confidence in expressing their ideas and opinions in a public forum.
5. **Collaboration:** Discussions provide opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers, share knowledge, and work together to solve problems.
6. **Active Listening:** Students learn the importance of active listening, as they need to understand their peers' contributions and respond thoughtfully.

7. **Cognitive Development:** Engaging in discussions helps students develop cognitive abilities such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information.
8. **Enhanced Memory Retention:** Actively discussing topics helps reinforce learning and memory retention by encouraging students to revisit and discuss the material.
9. **Preparation for Real-World Situations:** Effective communication and critical thinking skills developed through class discussions are valuable in real-world situations, such as professional meetings and collaborative projects.
10. **Diverse Perspectives:** Class discussions expose students to a variety of perspectives, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and encouraging tolerance for diverse viewpoints.
11. **Feedback and Reflection:** Through discussions, students receive feedback on their ideas and perspectives, fostering a reflective approach to their own thoughts and beliefs.
12. **Participation in a Learning Community:** Active participation in class discussions creates a sense of community within the classroom, enhancing the overall learning experience for everyone.
13. **Preparation for Assessment:** Engaging in discussions helps students better prepare for exams and assessments by reinforcing key concepts and allowing them to clarify any misunderstandings.
14. **Development of Social Skills:** Class discussions provide a platform for students to practice and enhance their social skills, including empathy, understanding, and respect for others' opinions.
15. **Motivation and Interest:** Active participation in discussions can enhance students' motivation and interest in the subject matter, making learning more enjoyable and meaningful.



Overcoming Barriers

Your child's teachers also know that it's harder for some people to participate in class discussions than others. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as:

1. **Shyness/Introversion:** Some students are naturally introverted or shy, making it uncomfortable for them to speak up in a group setting.
2. **Fear of Judgment:** Students may be afraid of being judged or criticised by their peers for their ideas or opinions, leading them to avoid participating.
3. **Lack of Confidence:** A student may lack confidence in their ability to articulate thoughts or fear that they might not have anything valuable to contribute.
4. **Cultural or Language Barriers:** Students from different cultural backgrounds or non-native English speakers may feel hesitant to participate due to language barriers or cultural differences in communication styles.



5. **Processing Speed:** Some students may prefer to process information internally before expressing their thoughts, making spontaneous class discussions challenging for them.
6. **Lack of Preparation:** Students who are not adequately prepared for the discussion may feel unprepared to contribute, leading them to stay silent.

Your child's teachers have been further educating themselves on how to best help students overcome these barriers. As a staff team, we are focusing on three fundamental strategies with a proven track-record around the world.

Strategy 1: Using ‘Cold Call’ questioning

‘Cold Call’ is an academic technique designed to engage all students in the academic discourse of each classroom. It’s a systematic, strategic approach to asking questions to students regardless of whether they’ve raised their hand. Teachers have started routinely signposting certain times in lessons to implement ‘Cold Call’ during which pupils are asked not to raise their hands when a question is asked, but rather wait to be called upon. The philosophy behind this strategy is that it encourages everyone be thinking hard about the question, since the teacher may choose to call on any student. In the short term, a wider range of students are asked questions by the teacher. In the long-term, more students will choose to raise their hand as answering questions becomes embedded as ‘normal’ or ‘routine’. Teachers will use Cold Call strategically by asking questions to students which are challenging, but not too hard or too easy.

Strategy 2: No ‘opt out’

One of the most consistent findings of academic research is that high expectations among teachers are the most reliable driver of high achievement among students, even students who do not have a history of strong achievement. Within these high performing classrooms, the most common element is that teachers eliminate the option for students to ‘opt out’. In other words, there are clear expectations that it’s not okay not to try. For example, students who answer ‘I don’t know’ will be given opportunities to practice getting it right. After all, getting it wrong before getting it right is one of the most fundamental processes of learning.

Strategy 3: Building a ‘culture of error’

As pianist Jeremy Denk poignantly said, ‘The hidden challenge of teaching is that while the teacher is trying to discover what is working, the student is in some ways trying to elude discovery, disguising weaknesses in order to seem better than they are.’ Your child’s teachers are using Denk’s observation as a reminder that there is sometimes a gap between I taught it and they learned it, and that bridging this gap is far easier to accomplish if students want us to find the gap, they are willing to share information about errors and misunderstandings – and far harder if they seek to prevent us from discovering them. The goal of this strategy is to socialise students to think positively about mistakes. After all, mistakes are an integral part of the learning process. To do this, teachers at Kings are working to build a distinct culture of error in each classroom where mistakes are appreciated, expected and openly studied in order to move learning forward for all pupils.

These are just some of the exciting things going on in your child’s classrooms each and every day. Please do discuss them at home as we are keen to have as many voices speaking up to answer questions in class as possible since we know how positive the long-term benefits can be.

Yours sincerely,
Mr D Ferguson
Vice Principal