

You
Wouldn't
Want to...

BE A

VICTORIAN SCHOOL CHILD

Modern
day school
doesn't
seem so
bad!



Written by John Malam • Illustrated by David Antram



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Introduction

It is the year 1887 and Her Majesty Queen Victoria has ruled the United Kingdom of Great Britain for 50 glorious years...

You are fortunate to be living in this modern age. It is a time of rapid progress, when steam trains cross the country at terrifying speed, towns are growing into great industrial cities and you have the right to be educated. If you had been a child from an ordinary working class family at the start of Queen Victoria's reign, education would have been the last thing on your mind. You would have been expected to earn your keep, working for a few pennies a week. The chances are you wouldn't have learned how to read, write or count.

However, in the 1870s, laws were passed stating that all children – not just those from upper class families – should have a proper education. Thousands of new schools were built and in 1880 it became compulsory for all children between the

ages of 5 and 10 to go to school. You have to go because it is now the law of the land. It's no use thinking you can sneak off from school – the teachers have ways of catching truants. And if it is your bad luck to have an incredibly strict headteacher, then you wouldn't want to be a Victorian schoolchild at all!



School – the place for you



Ready for school:



Sleep well
the night before school starts so you don't come to lessons tired. Yawning in class will land you in trouble.



Wash properly
before you come to school. Scruffy urchins will be sent home.



Eat a good breakfast
An empty stomach is as bad as an empty head at school.



Don't be late
School starts at 9 o'clock sharp. If you're late you'll be sent to see the headteacher for a telling-off.

Listen out for the school bell at the start of each new day, calling all children to their lessons. Your brand new school is called a Board School because your town's Board of Education built it. The school is a modern red brick building with room for around 1,500 pupils. Boys and girls don't mix much at school so they have separate entrances. It's almost like two schools in one building – one school for the boys and another for the girls.

School pence
Education won't be free of charge until 1891. Until then you'll pay 2 pence (2d) a week.



Victorian pennies

I won't go!

Get into that school, now!

Girls' classrooms

DING!
DONG!

School bell

Boys' classrooms

Handy hint

Know where school is as you might have miles to walk. If you get lost, ask a policeman.



School begins at 9 o'clock!

Who's who:

Headteachers

There are three: a headmaster for the boys, a headmistress for the girls and a head of infants.

Teachers

Men teach boys, women teach girls. You call a male teacher 'Sir' and a female teacher 'Miss' or 'Madam'.

Pupil teachers

Older pupils sometimes help to teach younger pupils.

Attendance officer

If you play truant, this is the man who will catch you.

School inspector

He visits the school to check up on the teachers and pupils.

Once you're through the school gates you will be in school for the rest of the day. If you get there early, you'll have some time to meet your friends – and enemies – in the playground. As 9 o'clock approaches you are called into the school building by a teacher ringing a handbell. Get a move on – don't dawdle! The first thing you must do is go to



the school hall for assembly. There are separate assemblies for boys and for girls. Stand still, stand in line and most of all, be quiet! Face the front and pay attention as the headteacher leads the assembly. You will say the Lord's Prayer and sing some hymns. If there are any announcements to be made, this is when the headteacher will make them.

Handy hint

There are no smelly toilets inside the school building. They're outside in the fresh air. It's a good idea to go before lessons begin.



What a lovely bunch...

BOING!

twang!

Nit nurse

When assembly is over you'll be inspected by the nit nurse. If she finds lice in your hair, she will shave your head.



Illness

Don't come to school with infectious diseases such as chicken pox or measles. If you do, you'll be sent straight back home.



Cleanliness

Make an effort to look clean. If you insist on looking like you've been rolling in mud, you will be sent to the washroom or maybe even home.

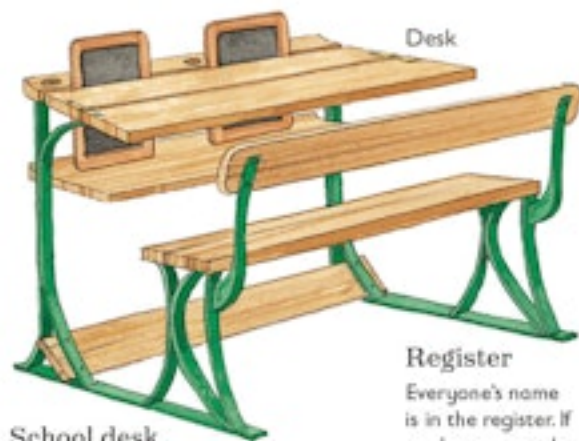


'Here Miss!' In the classroom

Around the classroom:



Blackboard



School desk

You have to share your desk with another pupil. It's made from wood and iron.

Assembly finishes at 9.30, and you file back to your classroom: boys to their room and girls to theirs. Go straight to your desk and sit down. Be quick and don't make a noise! When everyone is in place your teacher will call out the class register in alphabetical order. When you hear your name, answer in a loud, clear voice: 'Here, Miss!'. If you mumble or if she sees you fidgeting, messing with your inkwell or fiddling with your desk, she'll shake the school signal to attract your attention. When the register has been called out, it will be time for the first lesson of the day to begin.

Blackboard

The teacher writes on the blackboard with chalk. It's on wheels and can be moved around.

Writing equipment

You do most of your schoolwork on a piece of thin slate, which is a type of stone. You write on it with a slate pencil. Young children learn to write using a sand tray.

Slate pencil

Slate

Register

Sand tray

Register

Everyone's name is in the register. If you're present, the teacher writes a ✓. If you're absent she writes a X.



School signal

You'll know when the teacher uses the signal because you'll hear the sharp clicking sound it makes. The headteachers' signals make the loudest clicks of all.

Signal



Handy hint



Stand up as soon as an adult comes into the classroom. This shows respect for your elders and betters. If you don't stand up, you'll be in trouble.



'Open your readers!' The reading lesson



Are you ready for this?

Learn by heart

You have to learn pages and pages of text off by heart, especially poems. Then you'll be asked to recite them from memory.

Know the alphabet

You should have learned the alphabet at infants' school, from A to Z. If you didn't, you'll struggle with the reading lesson.



After the register has been called, the first lesson begins: reading. It's one of the lessons known as the 'three Rs', reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. They're the most important parts of your education.

Speak up, boy!

S-s-sorry,
S-s-s-sir!

What a
d-d-d-dimwit!

Hee hee!

At the beginning of the lesson, a monitor will hand a book, called a reader, to everyone in the class. It's written especially for children, with lots of short, simple sentences. You might be called to the front of the classroom. Take your reader with you. The teacher will ask you to read out loud to the class and the other children will follow the story in their books. Read clearly and carefully – if you make any mistakes the teacher will tell you to try again until you get it right.

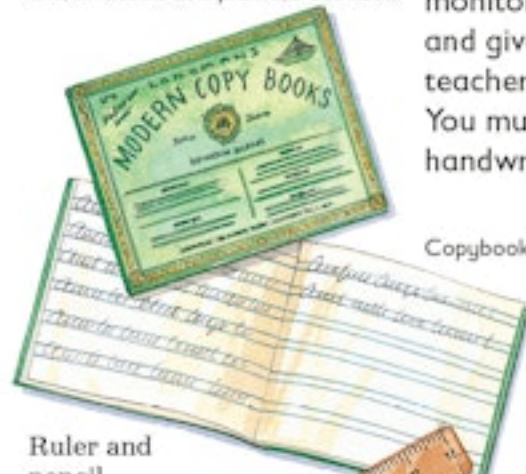


'No blots!' The writing lesson

What you will need:

Copybook

This is what you write in. It might be especially printed for schools, like this one, or it could be a plain exercise book.



Copybooks

Ruler and pencil

Make sure your pencil is sharp and your ruler straight.



Pen and ink

You write with a pen that has a hard, steel nib which you dip into your inkwell. Ink is messy stuff – try not to get it on your hands or clothes.

Each lesson lasts about half an hour. When the reading lesson ends, you are told to get ready for the writing lesson. You'll need a ruler and pencil, a pen and, most important of all, your writing book or copybook.

The teacher tells you to open your copybook at a clean page and rule some neat, straight lines on it. A monitor fills a tray of inkwells with bluey-black ink and gives one to each child in the class. Observe the teacher as she writes a sentence on the blackboard. You must copy it word for word in your best handwriting into your copybook.



Handy hint



Don't put too much ink on the nib of your pen. If you do you'll blot your copybook with ink spots.



Sit up straight

If the teacher thinks you're a lazy child who is not trying hard enough, she might make you sit with a back straightener pressed into your back. It'll make you sit up and concentrate.

'Times tables!' The arithmetic lesson



Teachers will tell you that arithmetic is the most important of the 'three Rs' but you may not agree with them. They want you to be able to add and subtract, divide and multiply. Most of all they want you to do sums in your head, which is why it's called mental arithmetic. You'll also learn about

fractions, percentages, decimals and something called interest, which is very important if you want to make lots of money when you start work. And if you think this lot sounds difficult, just wait until the teacher starts filling your head with algebra and geometry!

It's all part of the lesson:

Abacus

You do your sums using a ball frame or abacus. You can thank the ancient Greeks and Romans for this counting contraption – and you know what happened to them!



Mental arithmetic

Your fingers will come in handy for this!



Maths book

This is the exercise book you write in.



Know your numbers.

You are expected to use numbers up to one million!

Bad luck, boys!

The school rules say that boys should be given harder arithmetic than girls.

Dunce's cap.

D is for Dunce. If your brain can't cope with 'What is 9 times 12?' (can you find the answer on this page!) you'll be made to wear the dunce's cap until the lesson is over.

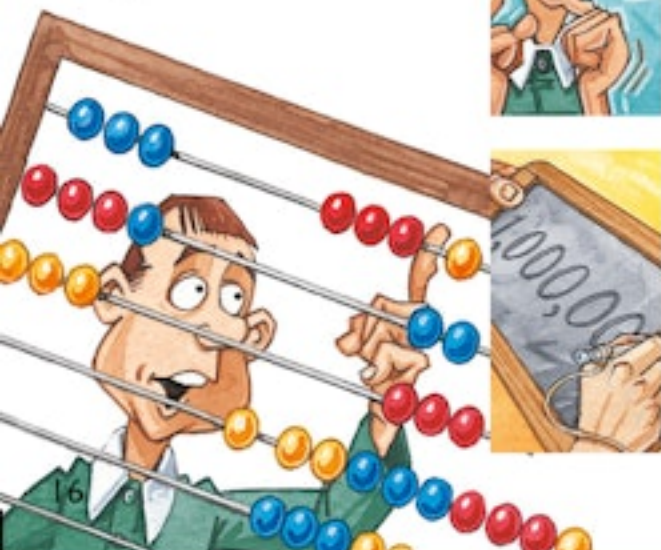
Handy hint



Make sure you learn the 12 times table. It is very useful, because Britain's currency is based on the number 12. There are 12 pence in one shilling.

Rather him than me!

eeerm...well...



'What is it?' The object lesson

The world is a big place, but you've probably never been further than the edge of your town. That's why you have an object lesson, when your teacher tells you about the world you live in. The school has a specimen cabinet, which is a wooden box filled with lots of objects, from rocks and minerals to dead insects and dried plants. In the object lesson you learn what things are made from, how they work and what they feel and smell like. It's a science lesson.

General knowledge

In this lesson you are taught some totally useless facts, such as: a duck's quack doesn't echo and starfish don't have brains.



Other lessons:

History

Colourful wall charts help you learn what life was like in the past.



Geography

Globes and atlases are used to teach you about the countries of the world and Britain's great empire.



Wall chart



Handy hint

Which animal has no brain?

You have textbooks called catechisms which have no pictures in them, just lots of questions and answers. Memorise them all. You'll be asked about them in your tests.

Please can I hold it?

Yuk - it's disgusting!

Specimen cabinet



'Hooray!' It's lunch time



Watch out:

School bully

Every school has a bully – an older boy (or girl) who picks on children smaller and younger than themselves. Keep your distance is the best advice!

Morning lessons finish at midday. You'll know when that is because monitors walk along the school's corridors ringing handbells. When your desks are tidy the teacher tells the class to leave the classroom – lunch time then begins. You will now have two hours to eat your lunch, play games and if you're not careful, get picked on by the school bully. Most children go home for lunch but some bring sandwiches and fruit to eat.

Lunch time is when you can meet up with your friends and your foes. It's a time of fun and fights, bumps and bruises. A teacher will be on duty in the playground. If he sees anyone misbehaving, he'll blow a whistle.

Who wants to play?

Chase

Anyone can join in – it always ends up with boys chasing girls.

Marbles

This is a game of skill – if your marble hits your opponent's, you keep his.

Hoop & stick

You roll an iron hoop around the playground – see who can keep it going longest.

Handy hint

The bully might be after your food. Make sure you eat it, not him!



Skipping

This is a game for girls – they chant rhymes as they jump up and down with their skipping rope.

Football

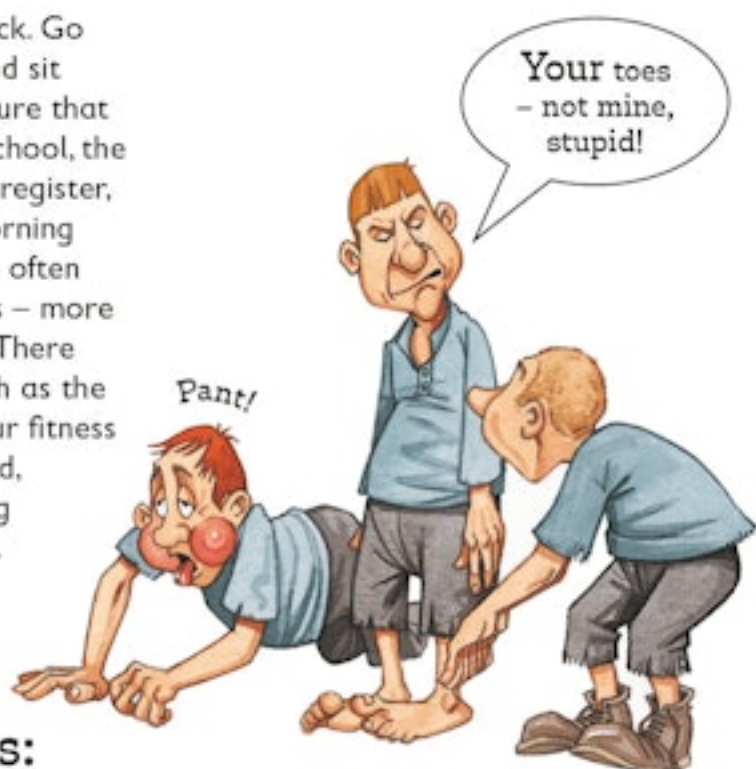
Boys play this with a hard, heavy ball made from leather.



'Back to school!' Afternoon lessons



Lessons start again at 2 o'clock. Go straight to your classroom and sit down at your desk. To make sure that everyone has come back to school, the teacher will call out the class register, just like at the start of the morning lessons. Afternoon lessons are often the same as the morning ones – more reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. There are also practical lessons, such as the drill lesson. It will improve your fitness through lots of running around, jumping up and down, climbing ropes and touching your toes. On your marks, get set, go!



Afternoon lessons:



Three Rs again
Stop day-dreaming! If you can't read, write or add and subtract then you won't do well in your tests.



Hygiene
You're taught about personal hygiene – how to keep yourself clean and why it's important to do so.



Housework and cookery
Girls are taught 'domestic science' which is how to look after the house and home.



Singing
In this lesson you will learn traditional songs and hymns, as well as all five verses of God Save the Queen.



Drawing
This is a technical subject, for boys only. They're taught how to make drawings of buildings and parts for machines.



Prizes and punishments



Afternoon lessons finish at 5 o'clock. Monitors walk along the school corridors ringing handbells to announce the end of the school day. Inside each classroom, ink monitors collect inkwells from the desks and you are told to tidy your writing slates and books away. Then you stand, say prayers, leave the room in a quiet and orderly fashion and go home. However, if you've been naughty during the day you'll be told to stay behind. Off you'll go to the headteacher's study to be punished. He'll write the details of your bad behaviour and punishment in his log book, which is like a diary.

The bad are punished:

The tawse

In Scotland, teachers use a leather strap called a tawse to give out 'six of the best'.



The cane

In England and Wales, naughty children are whacked on their hands and bottoms with a cane.



Lines

This is a much less painful punishment! You'll be told to write the same sentence out 100 times or more!



The good are rewarded:



Good attendance

If you've not missed a single day at school in the whole year, you'll be given a medal.



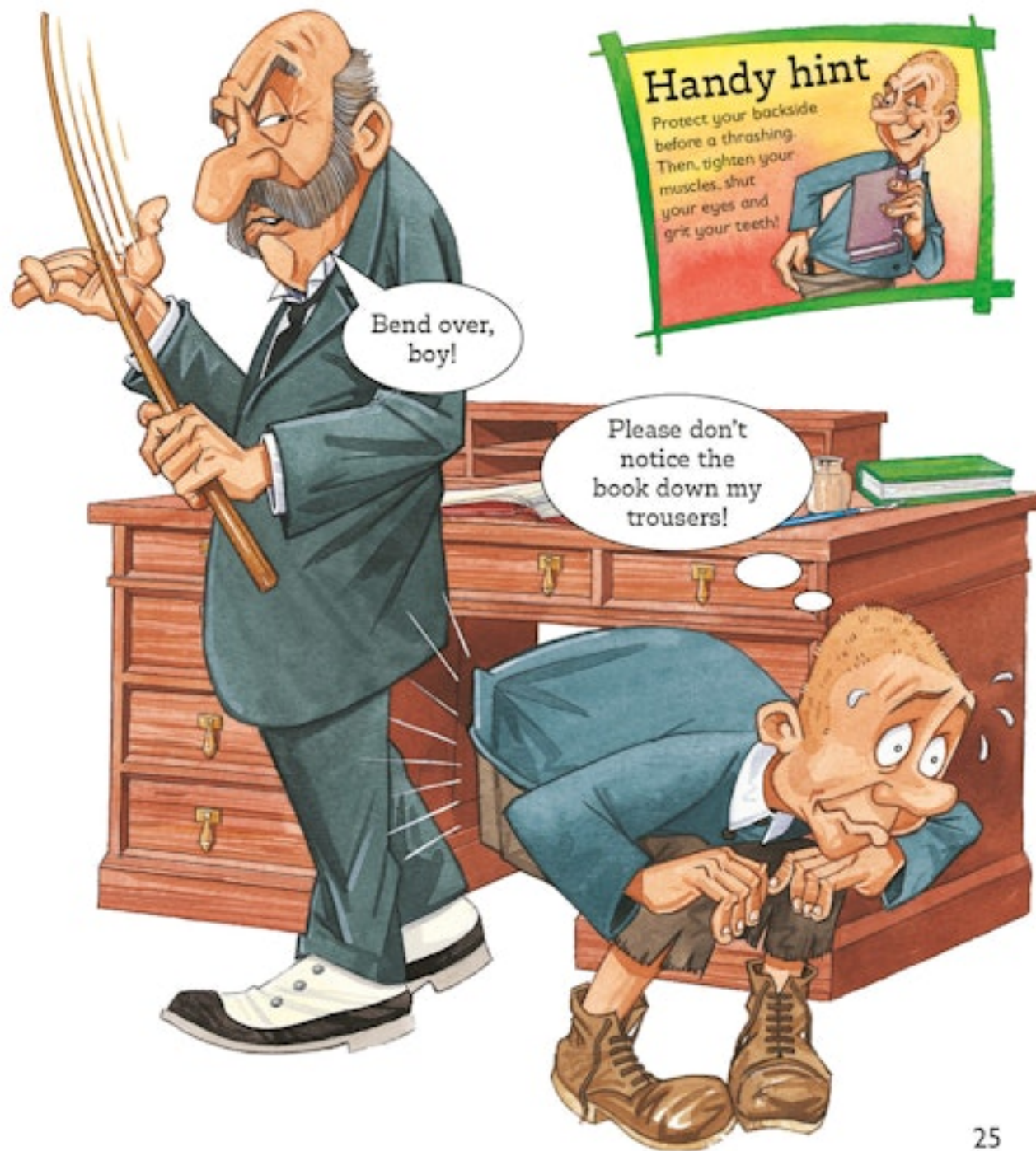
Certificates

If you've done good work you'll be rewarded with a certificate.



Books

Once a year, there is a prize day, when books are given to children who've done well at school.



Handy hint

Protect your backside before a thrashing. Then, tighten your muscles, shut your eyes and grit your teeth!



'Test time!' Inspection day

One of the school's most important days is inspection day. It's not just pupils that are inspected, but school buildings, equipment and, most of all, how good the teachers are at their jobs. How do the inspectors check the teachers? By giving you a test! If lots of children fail, the teachers will be in trouble.



Children are tested one at a time. You're called to meet the inspectors and they ask you some tricky questions about the subjects you've been studying. If you've worked hard all year you should have no difficulty with the test. But if you've been absent a lot – because of illness or because you've played truant – the test won't be so easy.



Have you passed your tests?

Yes

Well done! You'll be given a certificate that says which subjects you've been tested in and have passed. You can now move up to the next Standard or class.

No

Bad luck. You'll have to stay in the same class until it's time to take the test again in a year's time. You might be the oldest child in the class.



One day I'll get out of here...



End of term treats

Here's the good news – school is not all hard work. For a start, you have Saturdays off (on Sundays, you go to Sunday school, organised by your church). You also have two weeks holiday at Christmas and Easter and six weeks in the summer, as well as time off for May Day and Whitsuntide.

The end of the school year is a busy time. There will be sports day, an outing, and visitors will come to the school with puppet shows. The end of year highlight will be the school play – perhaps you'll be picked for a starring role. One thing's for sure, children everywhere will be heard chanting, 'No more Latin, no more French, no more sitting on a hard school bench!'

Fun at school:



Sports day

You'll take part in games such as the sack race and the egg-and-spoon race. Do your best to win!



Magic lantern show

A projector, or lantern, will shine colourful pictures of faraway places and animals onto a screen. It'll seem like magic!

School trip

If you're really lucky, you'll be taken by steam train into the countryside for a picnic, or to the seaside where you can make sandcastles on the beach.



Punch and Judy

A puppet theatre might visit the school. A little booth will be set up in the playground and you'll gather round it to watch the show.



I think I'll be an actor when I grow up.



Handy hint

In the summer holidays you might have to help with the harvest. Make the most of it before the new term starts!

I need a holiday, too!

Glossary

Abacus A frame with balls that move along wires. It is used for counting.

Atlas A book which has maps of all the countries in the world in it.

Back straightener A device worn by children to make them sit up and pay attention.

Board School A school built as a result of the 1870 Elementary Education Act (England and Wales) and the 1872 Scottish Elementary Education Act. Thousands were built across Britain.

Cane A stick used to beat a child.



Catechism A book without pictures, or a method of teaching that uses questions and answers.

Copybook A book in which a schoolchild wrote sentences copied word for word from examples. Copybooks could also be used to copy drawings.

Currency The money which is used in a country.

Drill The name given to the PE (physical education) lesson.

Dunce A person who is slow to learn something.

Empire A group of countries which is ruled by one other country or State.

Foe Another word for enemy.

Handbell A bell that is small enough to carry and ring with one hand.

Hygiene The things you should do to stay clean and healthy.



Infectious The word used to describe a disease which can easily be passed from one person to another.

Inkwell A small pot for holding ink.

Log book The school diary, filled in by the headteacher.

Mental arithmetic Working out the answers to sums in your head.

Monitor A child who is given a duty to perform, such as filling the class inkwells.

Reader A textbook which helped schoolchildren learn how to read.

School signal A rattle used to attract a child's attention.

Shilling An old coin which used to be used in Britain.

Standard The name for a class, such as Standard 3, Standard 6 and so on.

Truant A child who misses school without good reason.

Urchin A young, mischievous and messily dressed child.

Whitsuntide A religious holiday approximately seven weeks after Easter.



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