

How things work

OK ... so I am a mum. I have spent the last 4 years and 11 months finding out how things work and what I have learned is that they work very differently than they did pre-children! It is fair to say that in that time I have also learned an awful lot about what does *not* work!

As someone who has taught in the UK education system for 20 years, I made a very clear decision to resist the temptation to engage my children in play that could be deemed educational. I have stepped away completely from teaching them to read or write and left that to their very good childcare providers, but what I have never ceased to be amazed at is how inquisitive they are about how things work. They want to take things to pieces, they want to build them up, they want to know how the apples are growing on the tree, and how the Moon changes shape. I wish, like many parents, I had a pound for every time I have been asked 'why?' or 'how?' This image (yes, I am taking liberties and including one of my two's first walk to school!) shows a discussion about how a nut and screw the children found shortly after leaving the house fit together and why the nut doesn't fall off. Children *want* to know how things work.

I am now looking at school life completely differently. As a teacher I know how things work in school and I know as much as anyone can about how children work; I think I can do a reasonable job of marrying those two things together. From the other side of the fence, as

a mum, I am seeing the world of the reception class teacher through completely different eyes (and have a great deal more respect for them!) and appreciating from a different perspective what life is like for the new-to-school learner who is immersed in an environment that is completely different from nursery. I have been thinking about how we might maintain this 'how does it work?' curiosity through the school years. Is this

something that is squeezed out of children and is perhaps, at least in part, contributing to the shortage of engineers and scientists that we have?

This issue of *Primary Science* addresses a wide range of 'How things work' topics. I think we have the most diverse range within a theme I have yet seen as Editor, with an international piece, an early-years perspective, and a hands-on 'let's get a model electric train in the classroom' piece amongst them. I think as teachers we spend quite a lot of time explaining how things work

to children, but how much time are we able to give them to explore and find things out for themselves? We saw in the last issue of *Primary Science* (154), a range of articles that identified how science capital can be developed in the primary classroom. Would children being enabled to continue with their investigative and 'how?/why?' approach more often also add some value? The challenge, I guess, is squaring the circle of assessment and accountability with fostering innate inquisitiveness.

