

Thinking about Politics

In September, you will begin to study Government and Politics at Hills Road. For many of you, this will be an entirely new subject, about which you know very little. On the other hand, some of you will no doubt already be very interested in the subject and probably already have some ideas about what it will be about. Either way, you have almost certainly had little formal instruction in the subject beyond what you may have studied in Citizenship lessons.

In order to get you all into a similar frame of mind, we feel that over the summer holidays, you should begin to **think** about just what the word politics, and therefore by extension what the subject is about. To this end we have devised a number of political thinking exercises for you to consider before you arrive at your first lesson. These cover various ideas within the subject and should give you a feel for some of the issues that will be analysed during the course.

Exercise 1

What is Politics?

The answer to this question might, at first glance, seem to be rather obvious. From what you might already have learnt from school or perhaps the news, is that it is about government. Indeed much of what is carried in the news about the subject concerns the government of the United Kingdom, its institutions (such as Parliament) and its personalities (such as the Prime Minister David Cameron or the leaders of the various parties). This is however a rather tight definition, that seems to exclude large parts of society such as people like you and me. Put more simply, is politics **only** about government? Does politics exist in your football or netball team? Does it exist within the school you have just left? Have you ever heard someone talk about 'office politics?' If the study of politics can extend to these areas, then what links them together?

For this exercise, you are required to consider two questions for discussion in September:

1. What do you think the study of politics is about? Should it be confined to the study of government or should we extend it to

other areas such as clubs and societies, the economy, or even families?

2. If we do extend the scope of our study of politics to a wide variety of different situations and organizations, what connects all of them together?

Exercise 2

Freedom

We have all heard of freedom, and we all probably have a good idea about what it means to be free. Put simply, if you are free then you have the power to do something without another person (or the government) stopping you. A good example is free speech. In a society where you are given the freedom to say whatever you want, then you cannot be arrested or imprisoned for putting that freedom into action and criticising either the government or perhaps other people. This does however raise a few questions. For example does the right to free speech allow you to offend other people? In most modern countries, freedoms are an important part of society, and one of the key debates in politics is what freedoms people should have, and whether the government should be able to place limits on them.

For this exercise you need to think about the issue of freedom in the United Kingdom and how it relates to politics.

1. What should we be free to do in the United Kingdom?
2. Should the government ever be able to limit our freedoms? If yes, in what circumstances (to protect lives for example) should this happen?

Exercise 3

The News

Much of what we study in Government and Politics involves current news stories. It would therefore be very useful for you to keep up with the news by reading newspapers or watching TV news during July and August.