

Governor White Court Visit - 12th February 2016

I visited White Court Foundation Stage and Year 1, with Martin Blagrove, in order to observe steps that have been introduced to encourage independence in children's problem solving abilities, and the impact the new cursive writing is having in the lower years.

In Foundation stage, the classroom and outdoor areas are split into distinct learning and role playing activities, including a challenge table. Children are actively encouraged to complete challenges in multiple focus areas, and a book to record these achievements has recently been introduced. The children appear to enjoy earning stars for their achievements and taking on challenges to earn more stars. We listened to two children reading to a very high standard and were shown their achievement books. I also observed children using scissors to cut out days of the week and then stick in the correct order to a worksheet.

The children were gently directed, as appropriate to their abilities, where required by both the teacher and teaching assistants but in all cases the children solved any difficulties without being told the answer.

It was noted by the teacher that since these are children of a digital age, it would be beneficial to have more tablet devices available in the Foundation stage since there are some excellent "apps" that would facilitate learning. This is something that we should refer to the Curriculum Committee to discuss further.

In year 1, we observed an interactive class lesson in cursive writing. This was lead by the teacher whilst the teaching assistants read with individual children and undertook phonic sheet checks. The level of support given was good, with limited evidence of answers being given without appropriate guidance to help a child solve independently.

We also reviewed the progress books for writing, which demonstrated consistent good progress.

We witnessed similar activities in the other year 1 classes and I discussed with pupils how they handle problem solving. The children were very confident and unanimous that they tended to solve problems amongst themselves before approaching a teacher or assistant.

In summary, my observations lead me to conclude that we are building a better foundation of independent thinkers. We need to continue to reinforce the principle of independent problem solving amongst the support staff, and ensure they are confident and have the tools to do so. We should also discuss the feasibility of providing tablets to the foundation stage.