

**Gillespie School Learning Committee**  
**School governor observations: reading focus**  
**Minutes, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

Attendees: Jodie Reed (Chair), Claire Bolderson, Mandy Leatham, Shelley Wragg, Mark Owen.

Apologies: Bhavini Doyle, Dan Hamilton, Hafsa Abokar, Fin Craig, Katrina Moses

This meeting was an informal sharing and discussion based on governor observations and questions relating to reading. Reports are summarised below.

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Date:** 2 March 2023 (11.30am)

**Governor:** Ashley Smith

**Class:** Nursery

I observed a nursery session between 11.30am and 12noon. I also had the opportunity to speak to Ellen after the session.

Ellen led the session from 11.30am, with two other members of staff involved (Michelle and Karen) and with another adult working separately with a child who requires one-to-one interaction.

There were 8 children in the nursery. Ellen explained that this is lower than usual given that it is a strike day and some of the nursery children will be at home with their older siblings. There are 18 children who come into Nursery, although not all are full time.

Seven children had formed a circle for Ellen to read "The Little Red Hen", with Ellen reading aloud and the children interacting with her and making comments/answering questions. All children participated in the session and behaviour and engagement was very good. Ellen asked the children various questions, often linking back to other learning and work that had been done. The story was about the Little Red Hen making bread and Michelle showed me some photographs of a previous session where the children had themselves baked bread. These photographs would also have been available for parents to review on the Tapestry system.

**Overall:** I thought it was a really good and enjoyable session - it was interactive and the children were well engaged and well behaved; Ellen was effective at involving all the children in the discussions.

**Makaton:** during the session Ellen was able to use some sign language - she explained afterwards that this approach has been adopted recently. Michelle has done a lot of work/participated in training on this. As well as being effective for a child at nursery with hearing difficulties, it's a useful developmental tool, including for children who are not yet fluent in English.

The session ended after around 20 minutes and I had the opportunity to speak to Ellen afterwards, as well as to look at the outside play area. Ellen joined Gillespie in November 2021 when Laura(? spelling) went on maternity leave. Ellen is clearly motivated, very positive about her job and working for Gillespie, which was great to observe.

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Name:** Jodie Reed

**Date:** 21 February 2023

**Activity:** Observing pre-writing session and PSHE in **Reception**

Katie led a “Teach for Lessoning” lesson based around the “Sharing a shell” story. The class had were already very familiar with it and talked it through all together with exaggerated actions, with Katie drawing out key words. All the children seemed to enjoy the exercise and be very focused and actively participating. One child with additional needs was not able to sit on the carpet and participate – they were doing separate activity with TA. Two other children with additional needs remained on carpet and were participating positively, each with the support of a TA.

Katie then led a short PSHE session. Some children shared their lavender pouches. Katie introduced the glitter jar and explained that it is a way to represent feelings in your body when you’re feeling cross, sad, worried etc and then led the class collectively in “happy breathing” glitter settles. She used a short video clip to teach mindful breathing with a rainbow. Children were told they could come and use the jar whenever they want which seemed to be a popular idea.

At the end of the whole class sessions children were told they could “write” their own story on plain paper with pictures or read quietly.

In conversation with Katie afterwards, she explained that Teach for Listening is a useful technique for giving children the language for writing. At this stage they typically “write” using story boards and pictures. This works well as a whole class activity because does not require letter formation. Letter formation is where differences in skills/abilities open up.

In reception Katie’s policy is to engage children in more formal writing, but in small groups as a fun activity, motivated by their interests - for example they recently shared stories about Arsenal. They teach letter formation and do activities to strengthen fine motor skills as preparation for year 1. This is popular with children.

### **Questions arising:**

How does the school align and engage parents with the approach on developing pre-writing skills in reception – including not moving to writing too quickly (but also letter formation prior to year 1)? Are there misconceptions to tackle?

Do some children require more intensive support in nursery and reception to develop fine motor skills for writing? How is this approached?

Is the greater numbers of children with additional needs changing the way teaching is organised in any way – e.g. balance of whole class/group activity or use of TAs?

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Name:** Dan Hamilton

**Date & time of visit:** 1.30pm 21st February 2023

**Activities undertaken:** Observed **Reception class.**

Megan was taking small groups of the class outside and teaching them about things that are waterproof and things that are absorbent. This involved pouring a measured amount water over various objects held above a tray, then seeing whether the same amount of water could be recovered from the tray as had been poured in. The water would all run off something waterproof and be recovered, whereas an absorbent thing would soak up some of the water, leaving less to be recovered from the tray. Measuring the water that went into and out of tray introduced the children to some basics of scientific method. I also spent a little time inside with Katy who was with the majority of the class inside (with Pam and one other colleague who I did not get to be introduced to). It was shrove Tuesday, so most of the activities involved pancakes in some way, some helping mix a real pancake batter, some making their favourite virtual pancake on the iPad.

**Outcomes/findings/observations:** The children seemed to find Megan's lesson interesting and enjoyable. They all were keen to contribute and to take part in the exercise. There was a lot of energy and excitement in the classroom as well - pancake day seems to be popular. Today's visit was not focused on writing, as I believe the others were, but it was very helpful for me to see Megan's excellent approach to engaging the children in scientific discovery from the start of their school career, and to see how much it grabbed the children's interest. Also to see the variety of activities that can be provided to the Reception Class at the same time to keep them engaged and learning.

**Questions arising:** None ( if any)

**Action to be taken:** None

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Name:** Bhavini Doyle

**Date & time of visit:** Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2023

### **Activities undertaken:**

Afternoon observation of **Year 4** class teaching – topic was volcanos with written and reading comprehension activities undertaken.

### **Outcomes/findings/ observations:**

The teacher, Natalie, held the children's attention with an engaging lesson plan although it was the afternoon and many of the children were clearly starting to tire.

A nice balance of giving the children responsibility for choosing their own seats with gentle reminders to individuals that this was a privilege. It was clear the children understood that the expectation was to focus on the work if they wanted to sit with their friends.

Although Natalie is new to the class she seemed to have gotten to know all the children and who needed additional support or guidance.

### **Questions arising:**

( if any)

Does Natalie feel fully supported with the mid-year handover and understanding the culture of the school?

Does she have any suggestions on what the school could do better with this is anything?

### **Action to be taken:**

Nothing further

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Name:** Claire Bolderson

**Date & time of visit:** Monday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**Activities undertaken:** Sitting in on Year 5 English lesson

Outcomes/findings/observations:

This was a lively lesson on poems – specifically, rhyme schemes – building on work done before the half-term break. Children were prompted to recall their previous work with questions about rhymes, alliteration and assonance. They then practiced short rhyme schemes, first with the class teacher Chloe, and then with their talk partners.

The class having previously viewed and discussed surrealist paintings, two of these were then shown on the screen at the front of the room. Children were asked for their thoughts on the pictures. Very open questions allowed for a rich variety of often quite sophisticated answers demonstrating, for example, curiosity about the artist's intentions and inspiration.

Before writing their own poems inspired by the pictures, Chloe spent some time reminding children how to assess their own work in a meaningful way. It was good to see this relatively recent innovation in marking clearly explained and then, when the poems were completed, put into action.

Children are encouraged to ask their peers for help if they're unsure whether they have spelled a word correctly, and then to ask an adult (including this governor!) and if they are still unsure, to check a dictionary – which several children did do. Using green pen, they underline spelling and grammar they have been unsure of, and re-write any words that are written untidily.

Most of the children concentrated hard on their work and all responded quickly when Chloe wanted their attention and needed them to be quiet. There was a wide variety in the quality and styles of the poems produced but all pupils seemed fully engaged with the tasks, very keen to find words that rhymed, and just as keen to read their poems out to the rest of the class.

**Questions arising:**

All children, whatever their ability, appeared to be working on the same tasks throughout and to be included in the discussion and writing of poems. Was there any additional or differentiated provision for children with SEND or was this not needed for this particular lesson?

Action to be taken: To be discussed at Curriculum Committee

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR VISIT REPORT

**Name:** Mandy Leatham

**Date & time of visit:** 9.15-10.00 am, 21/ 02/2023

**Activities undertaken:** Yr6 Observation. The task was to understand the components of a newspaper report. This is a component of an ongoing piece of work; the class previously viewed 'The Lighthouse' and will be creating individual news reports based on this media.

### **Outcomes/findings/ observations:**

The classroom was well-organised and calm. There were 26 children in the main group and two children being supported exclusively by a TA and undertaking different work. A further TA who also supports year 5 joined for the activity to work with the children.

The children understood and were independently carrying out the tasks to set up for the lesson, which they settled down to quickly. The children's workbooks appeared to be well-ordered and I could see lots of lovely handwriting.

Hasan clearly explained what the children were expected to do, confirmed that they had understood by asking questions and gave clear time delineations. The task used various tools, definitions and techniques (e.g. 5 Ws) that the children were familiar with and introduced and teed up new concepts. They discussed and carried out the tasks in small groups.

This is a quieter class group in general and Hasan used different approaches to create energy and ensure that all children were able to contribute to the whole-class portions. This including directed questions, the lollysticks for random participation and an open floor for hands to be raised.

I was able to see the practical outputs of the approach that Lyn described in the Learning Committee on 7/02/2023 in the work of the two individually supported children. Each day's output included creative writing using key words and this has moved on from picture prompts with descriptions to only using written prompts.

There was one 'Wow' noticeboard for the children's work which had longform handwriting. Other noticeboards had resources to support grammar, writing and maths techniques and several posters relating to anti-bullying and wellbeing. I understand that year 6 is focused on readiness to move to secondary and the resources reflected that, but I would have loved to see a little bit more of the classwork on the walls.

### **Questions arising:**

What, if any, are the additional challenges from having class activities for the main group of children and for those that are individually supported? (For clarity, there was no disruption during the observation)