

Governor visit 18th July 2018

My focus for this visit was to observe and assess play within the school.

I met with Vicki Cowx as an initial visit to look around the outdoor play and learning environment.

What struck me at first was that sheer volume of noise coming from the kids that were outside playing. There were a lot of pupils running around in the sunshine laughing and screeching, obviously having fun.

I was shown around the zones of play and learning by Vicki who was extremely enthusiastic about her role in the promotion and development of this opportunity for the school. She talked openly about her desire to see less plastic in the outdoor leaning zones, hopeful that more natural materials can be installed over time.

We talked about perceived challenges to making this a success going forward and some of the things we talked about were staffing levels, appropriate use of the zones, equipment storage, identifying space for the pupils and ground rules.

On my walk around I observed pupil JL digging earth under a tree “looking for something Anglo Saxon”. During this activity this young person was communicating with several others who were also joining in the activity. What was also nice to see was other children who were watching being encouraged to join in too by staff and other pupils.

It was a pleasure to be have a walk-through the early year’s yard, which was also very active and noisy kids too!! 😊

Vicki talked me through the plans for further development in the sensory garden, she talked about the possible donation of a fishing boat which would take up a place in this outdoor area. Her ideas around fragrant planting were discussed and she shared her desire for this space to be used by all it age groups and not just the younger years.

My overall observations were of staff and pupils have all ages being engaged with one another. It was particularly nice to see the fantastic space the school has and the range of activities already in place.

Governor visit 25.01.19

The focus of today’s visit was to monitor progress of outdoor play within the school.

This return visit was an equally positive experience. It was Friday afternoon when I joined lots of pupils and staff outdoors.

An older group were busy clearing an overgrown area and what was lovely to observe was everyone working together on the task. There was lots of encouragement and “banter”, chatter and laughter.

Staff were engaged, helping out with the heavy work.

Younger children were using the play equipment and teaching staff were helping on the rope swing which had quite a queue. When a child was less confident, time, reassurance and encouragement was being given which with patience enabled the child to have a turn.

The fishing boat hadn't arrived but both the sandpits and water feature were in good use, and the fragrant planting area was just fragrant with an abundance of lavender plants.

Many parents I talk to reminisce about their own youth and how different it is these days with our own kids wanting to play on computer games more and more. They talk about how difficult it is to get their children accessing outdoor play in a safe way and it was a pleasure to have been able to see how much enjoyment these children were getting.

I can't wait for my next visit to see if the ages of pupils accessing these zones change and to understand further how Vicki and others have been able to enthuse a wider staff group.

I would be particularly keen to gather pupil and staff feedback as part of this.

I attended an OPAL planning review meeting towards the end of January 2019 which I found very informative. It was useful to understand some of the challenges that the staff who are dedicated to making this initiative work are faced with, and equally positive to hear the creative ways they were planning to encourage other colleagues into this opportunity for learning.

This meeting was focussed around the hopes and aspirations for the year ahead, with discussion around what would be achievable this term and beyond. Challenges and contingency plans were also considered and the level of enthusiasm for this development to grow was evident throughout the meeting.

Equipment and budgets were part of the discussions and what was nice to hear was discussions about recycling rather than buying new. My own thoughts on this is that in the current climate of budget cuts, this can only be welcomed and should continue to be promoted.

I got the sense however that the core team of staff who are motivated and enthusiastic, have frustrations about how easy it is or not, to engage more of the school staff team to become involved. This I am sure will be one of the biggest challenges ahead, but one I am sure the OPAL team will continue to promote.

Tracey Hogg

Parent Governor

22.03.19