



Notes from a Governor Visit

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Purpose of Visit

- To observe the introduction and teaching of a writing task with all age groups, with particular emphasis on able boys and how well they perform in relation to their reading ability
- To consider possible strategies that may enable boys to produce written work of a higher standard that reflects their reading ability

Governor Observations and Comments

As always we were made very welcome by all the staff and children in the school. The visit was well organised with a fairly tight schedule to allow us to visit all classes during literacy time.

Firstly Jenny Jones gave us an overview of her thoughts on how well able boys in the school progress and achieve in the development of their writing skills during their time at Foxton School. We were also able to look at how Jenny and her staff monitor an individual child's progress. Many of these boys are advanced readers within their age group but this is generally not reflected in their written work. However it is worth acknowledging that this is not just an issue in Foxton School but is recognised as a national problem.

We were also given an opportunity to look at some of the written work of a cross section of these boys in all year groups. Some of this work was very impressive and reflected creativity in thought and a good grasp of language and vocabulary. Interestingly some of the boys who are now producing sophisticated written work at KS2 had not shown any particular talent in this area at KS1. This also reinforces the point that boys are generally slower at developing their writing and reading skills than girls. We had a short discussion on the reasons for this and reflected on the type of themes and topics that might encourage boys to approach a written task with more enthusiasm and how important it is for children to read a variety of genres. Jenny explained that the KS1 and KS2 staff had worked hard together to produce and implement a literacy curriculum to meet the needs of all children which was beginning to show some positive results. We also looked at some of the children's scripts from a KS2 Writing Test and it was interesting to compare the standards required for a level 4 and a level 5.

Classes 1 and 2: Phonics Group

We first observed Serena Wells doing phonics with a group of children from Class 2. This was a very well structured lesson during which children considered the different sound the letters "ou" made in a group of words. The children were very attentive and responded well to Serena's careful questioning and encouragement and it was apparent that the majority of the group had a good understanding of what was required of them and were making good progress. Another short discussion followed on the sound the letters "dg" made in words such as "bridge" and "badger". The lesson ended with the children using small white boards to practice writing the words they had been looking at.

Class 1: Emergent Writing

Class 1 were already busy working on this task when we arrived. Helen Waterson explained that the children had to write a postcard to anyone they knew – a friend, a member of their family - the aim being to encourage them to begin to express their thoughts and ideas by writing them down. They each had a blank postcard and the teaching staff spent time with each child discussing what they were going to write about. (I think they had to pretend they were a snail?) Some children quickly grasped the task and had definite ideas on what they wanted to write and how to write it. Others needed more coaxing and confidence building in expressing their ideas in writing. Everyone seemed engaged and it seemed a good route to introduce the children to writing as all of them would be familiar with postcards and their purpose.

Class 2: Writing a Recipe for a Pizza

All children had a sheet of paper on which they had to produce a recipe for a pizza which they had made several days earlier. The task was differentiated in that some of the children had worksheets with more prompts and possible vocabulary whereas others had worksheets which allowed them more freedom in what they decided to include in their recipe and the order. Caro Holloway and Serena Wells circulated around the class giving help where needed. Some children seemed to find this task quite difficult whilst others relished the idea of writing down the recipe for what was obviously a favourite meal and then having to devise a “good tip” which allowed for some creativity and imagination! The boys seemed as equally involved in this task as the girls and indeed some of the best examples I saw were produced by the boys.

Class 3: Poetry Discussion

When we arrived this lesson was in full swing. The class were looking at and discussing a humorous poem. The discussion with the children, led by Julie Bamborough, was quite lively and impressive as they were able to express observations and opinions on its structure, the language, the scanning of a line, the rhyming pattern, alliteration, metaphors etc! It was a well needed revision lesson for myself! The children were keen to participate and offer their thoughts. After the discussion Mrs Bamborough put the children in pairs and gave each pair a letter of the alphabet. They then had to think of a phrase which included a noun, a verb and two adjectives all beginning with the same letter based on examples in the chosen poem. The children were certainly very motivated and keen to come up with unusual examples. It was a successful way to introduce the children to poetry and will hopefully have encouraged them to produce their own and even read further.

Class 4: News Reports on Extreme Weather Events

This was our final class observation and the children were completing their piece of writing. The children had selected an extreme weather event as the focus of their news report and had been grouped together with others who had chosen similar events. This was to facilitate the sharing of resources for information purposes i.e books, newspaper and magazine articles. There had been some prior discussion with Kate Mottram about the linguistic style and presentation of a news report and some of the children had really taken this onboard with exciting, attention grabbing headlines. The boys in particular seemed to enjoy this task and also showed interest in what their friends were writing even offering advice on suitable vocabulary and phrases!. By allowing the children to select the event and work independently seemed to ensure that motivation and interest was sustained.

Summary

The visit was extremely interesting and a fascinating insight into the different techniques used by Foxton staff to motivate all children to successfully develop their writing skills from reception through to Year 6 in order to try to meet greater individual needs and interests. As would be expected the range of ability in all classes is broad but the most able students are producing outstanding work at all ages. I was encouraged to see that amongst this group of children in every year group, there was a fair representation of boys. Able boys at Foxton School do appear to enjoy writing and some are performing above average in guided class tasks. When speaking to boys they all have great, imaginative ideas but the enthusiasm of many seems to wane once they are asked to put these thoughts to paper. The staff in Foxton School are acutely aware of this and with commitment and hard work are finding topics and methods that will have wide appeal and allow all children to reach their potential.

Suggestions

- Perhaps set up a task/activity to be managed by a group of able boys i.e producing a termly newsletter/hobbies magazine with contributions from all children but they edit, proof read, etc and produce it
- Creative Writing group – could be cross phase; a theme for a Buddy Forum? – could include poems, riddles, short stories, factual writing i.e explaining the off side rule in football!!!
- Book Club