

Focus of Visit

Being fortunate enough to attend the F/KS1 school trip to Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, and with Miss Bush and Mrs Brawn's permission, I decided to carry out an informal governor visit. It seemed to be an ideal opportunity to monitor and record the children's learning experiences away from the classroom setting.

Observations

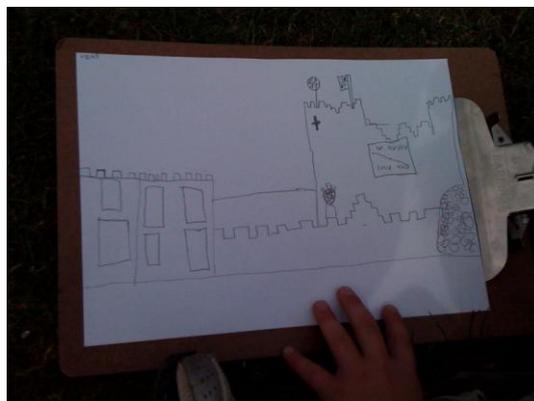
The children were put into small groups, each group consisting of Reception, Year One and Year Two children. Each group then took it in turns to complete four activities.

Our first activity was to walk around the outside of the hall, to look at the moat and to then make a sketch. I asked the children which parts of the hall they were drawing and most were able to name the features.



Sketching by the moat

A Year Two boy explained to me that he was drawing the battlements and he also explained how they were used in battle.



Sketch from a Year Two pupil

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Our next activity was a guided tour of the ‘towers and turrets’. Almost immediately the children were interacting with the Education Officer, and they were confident in asking questions. She often challenged the children to use their imagination throughout the tour. For example, she asked if the children thought it would be easy to negotiate the spiral staircase with a pike under their arm! Having walked up and down the narrow spiral staircase several times, the children were able to relate to the issues of someone attempting to storm the castle.



The children observing the machicolations or 'murder holes'

In the Queen’s chamber, the Education Officer explained the origins of the phrase ‘don’t let the bed-bugs bite’. She said that the holes in the side of the bed had ropes passed through them so that the maid could raise the mattress. This prevented the mattress being in contact with the vermin and bugs crawling around the straw and hay on the floor. After a pause a Year One pupil asked the question “Where are all the rats and bugs now...how did they get rid of them?”

A member of the public who had been listening to our group approached me. She commented on how impressed she was to hear such a question. Indeed, as I looked down at the pristine varnished floor beneath me, it did make *me* think! I think this perfectly demonstrates how a visit such as this encourages a learner to ask more pertinent questions, which may not have been raised in a classroom environment.



To conclude the tour, the children were asked to climb down into the concealed ‘Priest’s hole’. The children thought this was very exciting. They had obviously been learning about this in class. They were asked to imagine what it would have been like sitting in the small hole with the lid on in the dark! For their bravery, the children (and grown-ups) were rewarded with a sticker, which went down very well!

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Lunch was next, followed by a walk through the wood and meadow to observe the wildlife around the hall.



Lunch in the grounds



Photo opportunity in My Lady's Wood

Our final activity of the day was another guided session looking at Tudor domestic life. The children were given numerous objects to identify. Firstly, they had to touch and feel the object, work out what it was made of, and then identify what it was used for. Items included butter stamps, sewing kits, herb boxes, money pouches and eating utensils. The children learnt that some items that were designed by the Tudors are still being made today, but in plastics rather than wood.



Examining Tudor artefacts

Discussions

On our coach journey back to school, I asked the children if they had learnt anything new from their trip to Oxburgh. Many children referred to the Tudor artefacts, particularly the bleeding bowl. One child said he didn't realise how difficult it would be to climb the spiral staircase with a pike. Another said he didn't realise that the floors would have been covered with straw.

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When I asked the children what their favourite part of the day was, many said it was visiting the Priest's Hole. The children had already learnt about that feature of the castle in class, but many said they didn't realise what it was exactly until they experienced it.

Summary

From my brief discussions with the children, it was apparent they all enjoyed themselves thoroughly. As one pupil commented, 'There was nothing that was boring'!

Considering the mixed-aged groups, I think the children worked well, and although the older children may have asked more questions, the younger ones were certainly listening and observing their peers.

I'd like to pass on my thanks to Miss Bush for asking me to help on the day. As a parent it really opened my eyes as to the hard work and organisation that occurs for these trips to go ahead. As a governor, it emphasised to me the need for children to validate their learning with these real-life discoveries and experiences.



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