

Governor Visit to Holly Class (Foundation and KS1)

Wednesday 19 January 2011

Focus of Visit

The school felt that the lack of space for independent, creative and extended play in the Reception classroom may have been having a negative effect on the children. So after the relocation of Maple class in the summer of 2010, the large room next to Holly class became available for groups of F/KS1 children. This new area for learning is named the 'Space Place' (SP). I last visited Holly class in March of 2010, so the focus of this visit was to observe how significantly the learning environment has changed for the children in Holly class.

There are 26 reception children in Holly class and only two Year 1 children.

Observations

Visually, my immediate impression on seeing Holly class was how much more space there was. The play shop and computer had been moved to the SP, and this had made the following improvements:

- There is a lot more space around each table; the children don't seem to be as squashed in.
- The whiteboard can now be seen clearly from all angles of the room.
- The room is noticeably lighter now there are fewer obstacles in front of the windows.

Classroom Displays



The curriculum topic this term is Home and Away and Holly class are using the Katie Morag books by Mairi Hedderwick to find out about life on the fictional Isle of Struay on the West coast of Scotland. On the classroom wall was a large display showing Katie's island and the children had handwritten labels showing different places on the map. The display also had information on how you could get to the island and by which mode of transport.

Other displays around the classroom included a table with numerous objects such as feathers, springs, a log, and sponges. There were words written on cards describing the objects; rough, squashy, bumpy etc.

There were also texture mats on display, these were collages the children had created using different materials.

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Children at Work

The children started their morning with Letters and Sounds. Using their whiteboards they were asked to think about the phoneme 'ZZ'. They were then given a sentence with a word using that sound. All the children concentrated very well. Inevitably some children were able to write the sentence quicker and more accurately than others. Upon completion the children were asked to swap their whiteboards with a partner and they did a 'peer review' of each other's work. I heard one boy tell his friend he had *written his 'Z' backwards and it look like an 'S'!* The children were then asked to practise writing some 'tricky words' that Mrs Brawn had given.

Choosing Time

A selection of choosing cards depicting different activities was on display so that children could easily identify what their options were regarding 'Choosing Time'. This is an opportunity for children to use play to help them become independent learners. A small group of pupils went outside to play in the 'builder's yard'. They took clipboards and had to wear hard-hats. I understand that they work in a group and use the sand and tools to build things, and that they were supervised by a parent helper.

Other choosing time activities located in Holly class included cutting paper and colouring, Lego construction and role play in the playhouse.

Whilst observing these children, I noticed how differently the environment was compared to my last visit. Although the children were communicating with each other, it was less noisy and all were cooperating well during their activities.

The 'Space Place' (SP)

I then observed a small group of children playing in the pretend post office, now located next door in the SP. They were able to write letters, use envelopes, stick on stamps and then use the post box, normally used at Christmas time for the children's cards.

Mrs Brawn explained to me that since Christmas they had not had time to put up new displays in the SP, but were planning on using the 'Three Little Pigs' story as a theme for future display work. Later she explained that they would be constructing houses from different materials and the SP will be an area where they can work on them over a period of time.

I asked Mrs Brawn why Maple class had become the SP and not Holly class, as Holly class had the least room, but it was clear that Holly class needed to remain close to outside access, and it would have proved too disruptive with children accessing the new area via Mrs Brawn's class.

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Mrs Brawn explained that she and Miss Bush were planning to use the SP for an ‘artwork afternoon’, so that split year groups could be brought together, and work as a team to produce a significant piece of work.

I suggested that the staff let me and/or Mrs Thomas know when this art event is likely to take place as I thought it would be a good opportunity to carry out a follow-up visit.

ICT Suite

After free-choice play the children went to the ICT suite for their ICT lesson linked to maths. Mrs Brawn recapped that in a previous lesson the children had been folding and cutting paper to make different sized squares. This time she demonstrated on the overhead screen how to use the graphics package ‘Dazzle’ to create differently sized squares. The children then worked in pairs to draw, colour and arrange shapes on-screen, and then they printed their designs. This all went very well, and I noticed how the children were all ‘scarily’ competent using the PCs!

Indeed, Mrs Brawn commented on how much the children enjoy using the more simply designed computer programmes such as ‘Dazzle’ and another PC package the children had used recently, where the children had to construct a house. From observing this session it *was* apparent that in an IT environment at least, the reception children are very independent, and they like to be able to do things for themselves. I wondered if some computer packages used elsewhere by the children were not always aimed at their specific age group, and that this was why they enjoyed these simpler school programmes.



Group Work

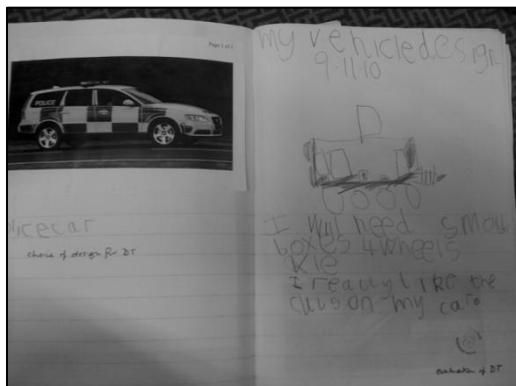
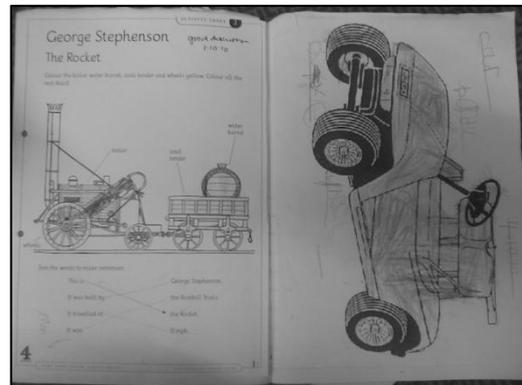
Back in the classroom, I sat with a group of seven children who were given a box of Connectagons to make 3D shapes only using the number of Connectagons shown on a card. One girl made a wheelchair from her shapes explaining that a fellow pupil had broken his ankle and may have to attend school in a wheelchair! Some of the children got carried away with their shapes i.e. making the shape and then counting the Connectagons rather than keeping to the limit, but when reminded of the task in hand, they had another go. Those children that completed the task well received a sticker.

Examples of Topic Work and Writing



Whilst the Reception children were choosing and looking at reading books I took the opportunity to look at their Topic books. As it was early in the term, they had completed only a few pieces of recorded work, one of which was on magnets. The children had been asked to categorise whether an item was magnetic or not and they recorded their practical investigations.

One of the subjects of last term's curriculum was Vehicles and Transport. I was shown some examples of work from the Year 1 children in Holly class, and Mrs Brawn explained how much they had enjoyed the topic.



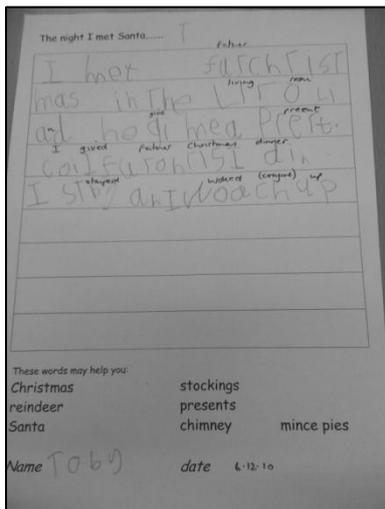
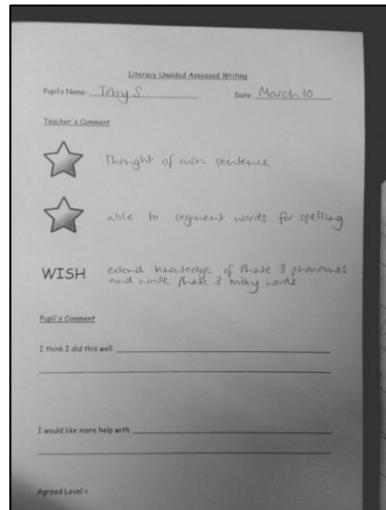
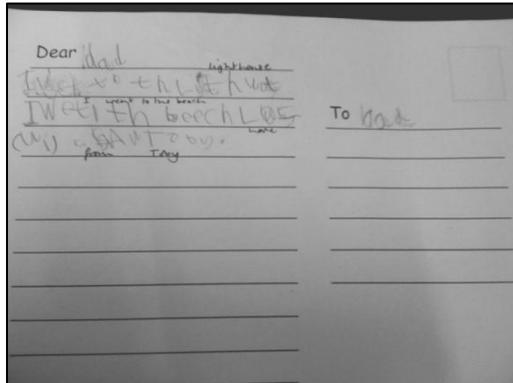
The children are encouraged to evaluate their own work as seen in this piece of work about a police car. The pupil has designed and then built his own vehicle in DT. He has then written what he likes about it, "I really like the colours on my car".

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Here is an example from Assessed Writing Books of pupils in Year 1. As well as the teacher's assessment, the children are again given the opportunity to comment on how well they did with their writing, and whether they think they need more help.



Here is an example of some creative writing from a pupil in Year 1. Some words have been provided to help them with their vocabulary.

Discussions

Discussion with the Children

I decided to keep the group discussion with the children simpler this time, so we played a game using the 'Let's Talk about School Today' playing cards. The children each took it in turns to choose a card, and then they all had an opportunity to answer the question on the card. Some questions were relevant to their learning, some were just for fun. I spoke with three reception children.

Tell me about something that you are good at?

"I'm good at understanding what Mrs Brawn asks us to do."

"Listening"

"Tidying up – tidying up neatly."

What have you eaten at school today?

"Orange"

"Nothing"

What games did you play today?

"Mobilo"

What's hard for you at school at the moment?

"One of the girls in the playground is mean to me"

"I count up stuff and then get things in the wrong order"

"Writing...different...difficult words"

What's easy for you at school at the moment?

"Writing – we had to do a postcard for homework, that was really easy for me."

"Reading"

"Reading books"

What do you want to be when you are older?

"Rockstar...I'm very good at singing"

"A vet...or a doctor...or a mum"

"A mum"

What was most fun at school today?

"Playing outside and chasing my friend"

"Mobilo"

"Builders yard – wearing the hard hats and using the cement mixer"

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What's your favourite thing about school?

"Mrs Brawn"

"PE"

"Lunch"

Tell me about one thing you have done at school today that you feel proud of?

"How well I worked in number work today"

Have you helped someone recently? What did you do?

"I helped my friend to make their Ben 10 toy."

"A boy fell over in the playground and I helped him by giving him a tissue."

"I helped Mrs Brawn to tidy up and she thanked me."

Discussion with Mrs Brawn

Although I spoke with Mrs Brawn briefly throughout the morning, there were some other points that we discussed that were worth noting. Regarding the SP, she explained that it's been a great help to have a quiet area for children to become more immersed in role play. She stated that some pupils find it hard to be creative within role play and having the segregated space enables children to not be distracted.

She added that the extra space also means that there is more storage capacity for the 'wet play' and Golden Time activities.

On other subjects, Mrs Brawn mentioned how successful it had been inviting the pre-school children from Great Gransden Playgroup to the Christmas school nativity play. As well as watching the play in the hall, the PTA provided a drink and biscuit for the preschoolers in the library, and it was felt that the whole experience provided a great first introduction to school life. Mrs Brawn hopes to visit the pre-schoolers themselves again soon.

The recent Phonics Evening for Parents held on the 18th January, also went well, with 16 parents attending, including myself and Mrs Thomas. A very informative presentation was given by Mrs Brawn and Miss Bush, and each parent was given a comprehensive pack covering Phases 2 to 5 of the Letters and Sounds programme.

Summary

I didn't really get a chance to ask the children what they thought about the SP, but for this year group it's always been there for them. I felt it was more useful at this stage to get Mrs Brawn's perspective. I suspect that the Year 1 and 2 pupils in Maple Class would be able to provide more feedback as to the benefits of the SP. I'd like to suggest that this is something we should record in the next governor visit to Maple Class. As mentioned previously, I also think it would be a good idea to observe larger groups of children using the space, like the 'art afternoon' as suggested by Mrs Brawn.

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Mrs Brawn did stress that the SP is still in its infancy, and whilst she and Miss Bush are still finding the best way to logistically use the space, its advantages are already noticeable. Indeed I noticed that Year 1 guided-reading groups were also using the area, and it seems to be an ideal place for some focused, quiet reading.

Finally, I found the children in Holly class to be very polite and attentive, indeed one boy addressed me by title and name almost immediately, in a very respectful manner, and he'd never met me before. Other children approached me confidently, proudly showing me their work!

A big thank you to Mrs Brawn for giving me her time, and thanks also to Mrs Rastogi (TA) and Mrs Martin (parent helper) for allowing me to visit on again, a *very* industrious morning in Holly class!

Jane Hodges

(Link Governor – Early Years & F/KS1)