

Outdoor Learning Governor Visit

Report by MK following a visit on Thursday, 9th July '15.

- Introduction

- I met with Rebekah Jenkins, together with six very enthusiastic children from her class, to talk about Outdoor Learning. They then showed me the various Outdoor Learning zones. I was also given copies of the Outdoor Learning Reviews completed by staff following the re-launch of Outdoor Learning in June earlier this year.

- What is Outdoor Learning?

- Outdoor Learning (hereafter OL) is not simply doing a lesson outside because the weather is nice, but purposefully planning a lesson outdoors in order to enhance the children's learning. In other words members of staff must make a conscious decision to take a lesson outside and plan it properly. OL can be undertaken in any subject. Comments from staff (on their review forms) indicated that they had carried out lessons in numeracy, history, literacy, science, art and design technology. In future they would also like to take music outside as well.

- What opportunities are there for the children to be outside?

- Obviously children go outside at play time and lunch time, and for PE, but there are lots of different opportunities for learning both on-site and in the local area off-site. Becky said that staff have been much better this year at taking children off-site (for example, taking children into the Pits without a Ranger). They are also thinking



about how to use the different areas around the school building better. Staff have done INSET's on outdoor learning and been encouraged to build it into their planning. The new outdoor classroom has greatly helped with this. It enables a whole class to be outside and sat down whilst under shelter. Staff are also being encouraged not just to go outside when the weather is nice.

- **How are outdoor environments being used?**

- Two zones are currently up and running: the new outdoor classroom (known as the *Challenge Zone* - see previous page) and the conservation area (aka the *Discovery Zone* - see right). Mrs Anscomb and Miss Bolton run a gardening club on a Tuesday, which has started clearing the area around and making things for the *Discovery Zone*. A lot of people have used the *Challenge Zone* for planned activities. Staff also 'fight' over the field for PE. From the time that OL was relaunched in school, every member of staff taught at least one outdoor lesson in a 2 week period (from the 8th to the 22nd June). At the end of this period a feedback session was held with staff to find out their response.



This was very positive. To give an example of one outdoor lesson, Years 5 & 6 held a shelter building day, in which they had to build a shelter for a Lego person. Each shelter had to be of a certain height and had to withstand wind, water & weight. Following this someone then came into school to lead a special shelter building day for the children.



- The next phase is to build a *Storytelling Zone*, where stories can be told outside, with a storytelling chair and tree stumps for the children to sit on whilst they listen.
- The other two zones that are being worked on are the *Curiosity Zone* and the *Adventure Zone* (see left).
- Every class has been provided with a set of clipboards to use outdoors. These clipboards are called adventure boards in KS1.

- What impact does being outside have on learning?

- It has a number of clear advantages:
 - *Children have more freedom & space*, which is helpful given that we have a number big classes in school
 - *Children are enthusiastic* about going outside. This in turn makes them enthusiastic about about doing things that they might not otherwise be enthusiastic about e.g. measuring objects (such as leaves).
 - *Children behave well*. This was particularly picked up by staff in the feedback session.
 - *Children clearly enjoy it*. This was very obvious from the way that the children in Becky's class talked about it with me.
 - OL is different and, therefore, *draws in a different group of learners*.
 - *Lessons require less planning*, because the staff need to respond to what the children find or discover during a lesson, but the outcomes are usually the same, if not better. This has a positive impact on staff.
 - *Staff also enjoy being outside*.
 - *The TA's have also been leading OL*.
- The main disadvantage is that you can't plan the weather.

- Looking to the future...

- Becky remarked that thus far KS1 has driven OL. As children move up through the school, the hope is that OL will increasingly be embraced by the whole school.
- The expectation is that each class will have at least six outdoor lessons a year, and that staff will be encouraged to 'bring and share' ideas for OL in staff meetings. OL will also be included in the TOP and SEF, as a way of underlining that it is one of the school's priorities.

- My grateful thanks to Becky, and the six children in her class, for their help - and enthusiasm for OL!

M. Kendall