Visit to Tiger class – 7 November 2022

This was my first visit to Tiger Class. I attended an interactive maths session in the morning. My first impression was that the classroom had a lot of space for the children and direct access to a toilet and sensory room. I arrived before the children came in from their break. I was impressed with how well the children entered the classroom and settled after break. They all had a quick drink and sat down quickly ready for their lesson. Mrs Gordon then carried out some transition work in readiness for learning by putting on calming music, scented vapour and videos of bunny rabbits and then carrying out some breathing exercises with the children. It was a very peaceful start to the lesson.

The first task the children were asked to do was to get up and move around while singing times table songs. The children were clearly familiar with this and really enjoyed singing the two, five and ten times tables. There were some very groovy moves! I was impressed with how engaged the children were and how eager they were to participate. The repetition of the times tables is a good way to embed learning and making the activity fun and playful and allowing the children to express themselves freely while doing the activity makes the learning more likely to stick. There was plenty of room for movement for all 11 children and lots of smiling faces. The children were particularly engaged when doing times tables to 100 as the excitement built up like a rocket taking off before they reached 100. They used their hands to flash fives and tens.

After the more lively session the children settled down to do table work. There were four tables, three with teaching assistants helping some of the children with specific needs. I sat with a table of three children first all of whom were new to the school. They seemed very happy and settled already and were confident enough to tell me where they were from and which schools they had attended before. The children worked on a five times table wheel to reinforce the learning they had just done in class. Once time was up they placed their table wheel in their trays and settled back to table quickly. Mrs Gordon confirmed that this was the mental maths section of the lesson completed

We then moved on to understanding money and coins. Mrs Gordon asked the children to think about money and what you need it for. There was a lively discussion on all tables as children contributed their ideas and chatted together about what they use money for and why it is important. They then wrote their ideas on post it notes, asking for help if they needed it with spellings. Mrs Gordon asked them to put their hands up if they wanted to volunteer their contribution and it was lovely to see nearly all the hands shoot in the air. Most of the children were very comfortable reading out their ideas and then placing their post it note on the cupboard. One child even flossed his way to the cupboard and back which allowed him to express himself and also have a mini movement break. There was also some discussion in class about different currencies including reference back to stories they had been told where rupees were used so they could have context for currency and reinforce previous learning.

The children then used large plastic representations of different coins. They spent some time feeling the shapes and looking at them. Mrs Gordon then asked them to order the shapes by value. Some of the children thought the size of coin must dictate the value but of course that is not correct with 5p and 20p so this was a learning point. Once everyone had ordered the coins correctly the children played a fastest finger activity where they had to lift the correct coin in the air as quickly as possible based on the question on the screen. The children really enjoyed this activity and it was interactive and playful. I sat on another table of three for this activity and again the children were happy to talk to me and share their ideas and learning. I was particularly happy to see one of the children on another table, who had been more reticent to participate before, smiling during this activity.

After this task was completed the children were allowed a three minute sensory break outside where they followed the sensory path and did wall pushes. I know from my own child how one of the barriers to maths can be the length of the lesson as my child finds it very tiring, from a working memory point of view to retain, learn and re-use new concepts and he finds maths lessons too long as a result. Maths can be challenging for children with additional needs so breaking up the lesson in this way is very helpful to allow them time to take a brain break before re engaging with the subject.

After their sensory break the children took some time categorising the coins. I sat on another table for this activity and the children were again very welcoming and happy to share their ideas with me. There was class discussion about categorising and what that meant and how the coins could be organised into different piles by colour, shape or numbers. One of the children referred to the 50p as a “spiky” shape which was a wonderful description. The task now was for the children to categorise their piles of money how they wanted to and then afterwards share with the class how they had done so. Again there was lots of participation from the children and eager hands in the air.

Mrs Gordon then introduced some learning through play by allowing the children to play shop keeper and customer and the children were given money of a certain value and allowed to pick something from the shop. They had to correctly answer which was the next coin in terms of value starting at 1p to get a chance to buy something. Role play is another good way of the children retaining and applying knowledge they have learned and virtually all of them participated in this fun task. It is also a good way to check their understanding of what they have learnt and listen to them use the correct terminology for the coins they were using.

The final task was to match the coin value with the image. This task introduced notes that hadn’t been studied yet in class so gave the children more of a challenge and they had to problem-solve to match the pairs correctly.

Mrs Gordon is a very patient and calm teacher and creates a very calm classroom environment. I also noted how she skilfully dealt with one instance of interruption by saying “I can’t hear X who is talking to me” and the child in question said sorry and was quiet and respectful. This was an indirect way of achieving the aim of silencing the interruption without making the child feel bad. It worked very well. Mrs Gordon was well supported in class by three teaching assistants. At different times they left class with a child they were supporting if they appeared to be struggling or losing focus and needed an extra mini sensory break. Again this seemed to work well and did not disrupt the class in any way. The children seemed very engaged in the activities and enthusiastic to participate and share their learning.