Class Visit Wolves 18.10.24

I arrived while the class were watching bubbles on the screen and listening to calming music. They were practising deep breathing techniques in readiness for their first lesson.

The children were sat at desks ordered in a U shape with the class teacher sat in the middle (able to move quickly from child to child) and LSA support behind or next to the children. I noticed immediately that the whole environment was very calm and low arousal. The walls were clear of everything other than a large visual timetable with green arrows indicating what parts of the day had been completed, a reminder of the school rules (Be Nice, Work Hard and Never Give Up) and the zones of regulation board.

The zones of regulation board is divided into four zones as to how the child is feeling: Green = happy and calm; Yellow = silly or worried; Blue = sad or tired; Red = angry or scared. I saw how this was already imbedded into the class as I will mention later

The class teacher integrated visual prompts throughout the lesson. Each table has visual prompts on the desk and on the back of every chair is a personal folder for each child with a Now and Next board and lots of visual picture tiles.

There are “Quiet Voices” “Good Sitting” “Good Listening” and “Good Looking” cards which are shown during the lesson while the words are being said to help reinforce the instruction.

A number of the children use fidget toys spinners and chews to self- regulate, one child wore a pressure vest, and a few children used feet support under the desks.

The children did not appear to be concerned by my presence. During the lesson they were curious and asked questions. One child asked me to help them with some spellings during the lesson and another asked me to help them put their work in their book bag. For such a young group it was lovely to see their confidence already developing.

Miss Dunning is very skilled in how she interacts with the children in a consistently positive way. She will give feedback to reinforce behaviours. For instance, she said to one child “Thank you for listening, do you know how that makes me feel?”. The child replied “Happy?”. “Yes, Happy in the Green Zone”. Not only does this make the child feel positive and rewarded for their contribution but it also reinforces the Zones of Regulation, and the impact behaviour can have on another person’s mood. Throughout the lesson Miss Dunning would say things like “Great sharing” “super kind” “we are doing so well” “super job” constantly reinforcing positive interactions and using more passive language like “show me your good sitting” rather than “Sit Down”. It was very non-confrontational language at all times to help the children feel safe and comfortable.

The first part of the lesson was Phonics. The children split into groups. The middle ability group remained in the classroom and the children that need more intervention or more challenge went out in groups with a LSA. Four children remained on the carpet to do the Rainbow Alphabet. On the screen the alphabet is shown in order and on the floor there are physical letter tiles that the children are to sort into order. They took it in turns to pick the next letter and there were lots of sounding out the letter over and over to ensure the knowledge embedded in the memory. There was also a lot of singing alphabet songs, including an alphabet rap, to make the task fun. Throughout the task they also practiced deep breathing when a bit of calm was needed.

After Rainbow Alphabet, the children sounded out some specific letters with the help of visuals. For instance, for the letter A there was a card with a picture of an apple with A a and apple written on it. These cards were shown again on the screen to the children if they were struggling with letters in the words they were trying to form. Each child was asked to sound out **sat** and they all volunteered to do it. Miss Dunning would reward them with a clap or a high five and say encouraging words like “superstar”. The next word **tip** was a bit more of a challenge, but all the children attempted it and were not upset if they found it harder or of they needed more help or took a little longer showing good resilience forming.

After this part of the lesson was completed, the children sat back on their “Red Chairs” at the tables. Miss Dunning made sure those that need footrests had them before the next part of the lesson started. The Now and Next cards were used: Now = Red chairs, Next = phonics to provide clarity of the next steps.

The children were then given their books to practice the letters **satpi** and at the end to write a three-letter word using those letters. The children worked independently to practice their letters. One of the children said “Green Happy” when asked how he was feeling. It was lovely to see them embracing the zones of regulation so well.

Once the children had finished their piece of work, they would have a choice of sitting on the floor to do a jigsaw or to use the glitter sand to trace letters with their fingers. It was good to see choices given because some children may have sensory issues with sand and glitter but also it gives them a sense of autonomy and control. Choices were also given about where a child wanted to sit to do the activity, “Do you want to sit with your friend X?”. I noticed the use of “Your friend X” often during the lesson which reinforces to concept of friendship and school rules.

Miss Dunning was very patient and encouraging throughout using lots of repetition and positive feedback. Lots of visual thumbs up given also.

When the task was finished there was a one-minute timer on the screen and calming music to transition to the next task. After this, one child was given the task of tidying the letters into a bag and another was asked to put the glitter trays away. They both did their tasks happily. Miss Dunning asked “Is X feeling ok?” and he replied again “I am Green Happy”. Again reinforcing the zones of regulation. All the children stayed focused and worked really hard. I also noted one child using the toilet independently.

The other groups now rejoined the class. One child who had struggled a bit in the intervention group immediately said to Miss Dunning “I am a little bit sad”. Miss Dunning replied telling them she was here to help them, asked if they needed a hug and helped them take some deep breaths, promising to have a one-to-one chat in a bit to try and understand what was making them feel sad. It was positive to see a child trusting their teacher enough to voice their worries and a teacher validating those worries and taking steps to address them. Building trust with key staff in school is very important to make children feel safe and comfortable and ready to learn.

The next lesson was English. Miss Dunning asked if anyone wanted a drink of water before they began and made sure everyone who needed a footstool had one under their desk. Everyone did deep breaths again and calming techniques before starting the English lesson.

The class was split again into groups. Some of the children were going to work on fine motor skills and others taking a sensory break. There are children who are academically able to do work but whose fine motor skills can impact their recorded output so these children are given extra time to develop their fine motor skills.

The six children that remained made a circle singing a song “make a circle now sit down”. They talked about sentences starting with a capital letter and demonstrated this physically with hands like a roof over their heads. Miss Dunning talked about how we build sentences and how they finish with full stops. The subject was dinosaurs. Miss Dunning used phrases like “Can you help me?” “Can you copy my capital on the whiteboard?” “Show me good sitting” which is less direct demand communication and more of a collaboration approach. The children took turns to write parts of the sentence on the white board. At the end Miss Dunning gave positive and enthusiastic feedback saying, “Guys we made a sentence, you are superstars”.

Miss Dunning then assigned different tasks to the children. Some were allowed to draw on white boards while she was helping other children write sentences about three dinosaur pictures. Some children chose instead to practice more writing and making words which was lovely to see. The children then swapped over their activity. At the end of the task the children were asked to self-evaluate how they found the task red = hard, Green = easy and amber = ok. This is a really important technique for the teacher to understand the child’s confidence level but also for the child to be able to learn to voice their feelings about a task through self reflection.

Then came the transition to break time and again some calming music was played in readiness for the change of activity. The children then lined up and put their coats on for break time. They sang a “Stand in a line” song and clicked their fingers before filing out to the outdoor playground.

I was so impressed by how well the children worked in class during my observation. They responded so well to the lesson and were all happy to get involved, collaborate with each other and interact. The enthusiastic energy Miss Dunning brings to the lesson, her constant positive feedback and use of language of choice and low demand to achieve participation is very impressive. It was a very happy nurturing atmosphere, varied and fun with good use of music, songs and breathing breaks to create a calm environment. The LSAs were equally supportive, and you can see the children have already developed close trusting relationships with the staff. I would have liked to stay all day!