**Visit to Owls Class 8/12/23**

I visited Owls class to spend some time observing part of their Art Day. When I arrived in class the children were being asked about their feelings as part of a Zones of Regulation check in. Some were a little worried and Mrs Walsh talked through the worry and tried to reassure them. It was heartening to see the children being self-reflective about their feelings and exploring why they were a bit unsettled. They do properly think about how they answer. It was also lovely to hear from children who were excited about their weekend plans. I was particularly happy to see one child who, two years ago was really struggling in school, showing more independence and confidence by being able to verbalise his need to self-regulate but also being confident enough to leave the classroom and take the register back to the office.

I noted that some of the children used self-soothing objects to self-regulate. For instance, some children used headphones (which are readily accessible around the classroom), another used a wobble cushion and another blu tac to fidget with. One child had a number of laminated photos they used to visually calm themselves if feeling worried. Again, it was good to see the children confident in using methods to self-regulate if things get a bit too much for them in class, especially as this is transition year for some of them.

Mrs Walsh introduced the topic which was to make collages inspired by the artist Nijdeka Akunyili. Mrs Walsh showed the children some examples of her work. One of the children was a bit worried and Mrs Walsh put some visual calming items on the screen to help them self-regulate. She also provided them with a lot of reassurance and allowed them to pick some of the visuals themself. While this was an interruption to the class it was resolved quickly and the child was ready to learn again. The children were patient and understanding which was good to see. They appear very accepting and supportive of the needs of others.

Mrs Walsh explained the task to the children which was to use the paintings they had created in the morning as a background and to apply layered collages inspired by the chosen artist using various materials. Mrs Walsh showed the children highly patterned wallpaper, photos and fabrics that the children could use. I was sitting next to a child who was very enthusiastic about monkeys and told me all about Jane Goodall and the work she does. It was lovely to hear them use the art topic to tie in with a special interest.

The children were sat in pairs and there were two teaching assistants to provide support to Mrs Walsh. Each child was given the opportunity to pick some materials to create their layered collage. They used scissors to cut out patterns and animal pictures. There was no fighting over any of the materials and the children were patient with each other and took turns well. There was a lot of co-operation and discussion together. When one child lost a piece of work and started to get upset the other children helped them find it on the floor where it had dropped and got mixed up with other materials. It was a good demonstration of teamwork.

As this type of activity can be stimulating Mrs Walsh put on some calming music in the background while the children completed their work. Lots of praise and encouragement was given by the staff to the children. The children were competent with their scissors which I know can be difficult for some children. As the session started to reach an end Mrs Walsh allowed the children to take turns in the chill out room to decompress. Pictures were taken of the finished artwork and the children looked very happy and proud of what they had achieved. All the children completed the task and produced some lovely, layered collages which you can see on the school Facebook page.

After tidy-up time the children were allowed to choose some calming activities before the end of the school day. Some children chose to play together on the floor in a group and others chose to play on tablets. Two children were asked to fill out feedback sheets to evaluate how they had felt about the task and what they had learned. I also had an opportunity to see the sheets the children had filled out that morning setting out what they had learned about the chosen artist and her work.

I was impressed with the growing maturity of the children, their acceptance of each other and their teamwork. I have followed most of this group from last year (as in I was governor for their previous class) and it is lovely to see their confidence and independence increase.