**Easterside Primary Academy**

**Governors Walkthrough Autumn 2017**

A group of governors were joined by the headteacher and an external consultant to explore practice and provision in school. A morning was spent visiting every classroom with a particular focus upon collaboration and how children's ability to co-operate enhanced their learning. As the enquiry team explored what they were learning about classrooms in the school a number of themes emerged.

**Insistence and High Expectations**

Scanning the classrooms in Easterside, watching children's engagement, what was absolutely striking wherever we went was the absolute commitment of children to their learning. This was evident in the earliest years, where despite it being only a few weeks into the first term the routines already established meant children had purpose and focus. Further up the school we experienced a productive hum as children just 'got on with it'. They knew what they had to do, could see why it was important and had the skills and understanding to support one another when things got challenging. And they did get challenging. We could feel the high expectations of adults and how their gentle but insistent interventions projected those high expectations to children. Children had high expectations of themselves, not just of the quality of what they were creating, but also how they went about it. Children in Easterside have developed fabulous behaviours for learning.

**The Model Adults Present**

The idea of adults projecting their high expectations is a really powerful one. One of the enquiry team commented about the adults in one classroom;

*“They are kind, their questions are invitational but they are absolutely insistent”*

Eye contact was another aspect of the way in which adults projected their expectations on to children. Focusing their attention on individual children as they gently but insistently demanded a response. And not satisfied with the first response, they challenged children's thinking, challenging them to make a deeper response than the initial one.

We were also struck by the idea of adults consistently rehearsing their expectations as they moved around the classroom. Picking out positive responses and playing them back in a voice loud enough to 'stick' to others. Constantly modelling to children the right thing to do.

*“Well done, I like the way you........”*

*“That's brilliant, you've......”*

*“What did we say we would include?”*

*“You should be really proud of the way you have.....”*

What we could hear around classrooms were children playing back that language to one another in the conversations they were having about their learning.

**In It Together**

It would be easy to say relationships are fantastic in Easterside. However, perhaps a more descriptive way of expressing what it feels like to be in classrooms in the school is to suggest that everyone *is in it together*. Children are really skilful at supporting one another when they are unsure. They are able to work productively in groups to solve problems that would be too much for them to do on their own. And there is a sense, wherever you go in the school, That adults are in it with them. That learning is set up in ways that mean adults take on a role as co-enquirer. Exploring ideas, testing out theories, speculating about possible ways forward and posing inquisitive questions. And those adults throw themselves into it with such enthusiasm and commitment. Sometimes this might be to push and to challenge the whole class, however there were some absolutely striking moments when those interactions were much more intimate. Exploring ideas with groups and individuals in a much quieter, more reflective way.

**Seamless Learning**

The school calls them agreed practices, the expectation that these things will be present in every classroom. What we experienced were the outcomes of those agreed practices. One of the enquiry team described what we were experiencing as ‘seamless learning’. A feeling that as we progressed through the school, from the classrooms of the youngest learners to the oldest, everyone - adults and children - was aware of those agreed practices. What was fascinating was that although those commonly understood agreed practices lead to a consistency which is really apparent, there was no sense that this constrained teachers. Within those agreed guidelines there was ample space for teachers to create exciting innovative approaches to learning for their children.

**Ambitious Learners**

It was great to talk with children in the school about their learning. They were anxious to share what they were doing and so proud of what they were creating. What emerged from so many of those conversations was their awareness of what they were doing and why. The school uses success criteria really well. Children know what a great outcome needs to include and understand what it will take to create an outcome of really high quality. What also develops as they move through the school is the ability to critique one another's learning. To explore together in conversation what next steps they need to take if they want to create the very best outcome they can. What was really apparent was their ambition to achieve those high aspirations. What was also apparent was their generosity towards one another and their collective pride in what they were achieving. Proud of what they were achieving, but also immensely proud of what their classmates were achieving too.

**Resourced for Learning**

Throughout the course of the enquiry the conversation within the enquiry team kept returning to the quality of the learning environment in Easterside. The whole school oozes quality. Every classroom is a place where the quality of furnishings, the care taken with display, the attention paid to keeping those classrooms as tidy as having 30 enthusiastic learners in them will allow, creates the context for children to match that quality in the things they create. These are classrooms that are resourced for learning.

**Reflective Next Practice Questions:**

There is so much to be proud of in Easterside, but as with all ambitious schools there is a restless and striving to make things even better. Reflecting upon what we saw, heard and felt two things emerge with might help the team to think about next practice.

**Walls and Purpose**

Every classroom school is resourced to the highest standards. Classroom professionals put immense amounts of thought and care into the things they choose to put on their classroom walls. And there are some fantastic examples of 'learning walls'. One thought from the enquiry was to ask the question; how regularly do teachers scan their classrooms and ask themselves - what is the purpose of each of the things I have chosen to display on those walls? To explore both their purpose and whether that purpose has the intended effect. Perhaps to check out with their children what they find helpful, and what perhaps doesn't have the impact that was intended. To check out whether the things which are important to children being independent and interdependent learners are not as prominent as they might be because there are just too many other things for children to filter. And to ask the question when do some of those things on walls just become wallpaper?

**Critique for Quality**

We saw some great examples of children's emerging understanding of how to give and receive sensitive and effective peer critique. We could hear them using the language of peer critique, but wondered whether needed to be guided into being more specific about how that critique could lead to a higher quality outcome? Using the success criteria they have been given to describe what they could see and give their partners specific feedback about what they need to do to make it even better. Adults strongly modelling to children that the purpose of critique is generate high quality outcomes.