**Phonics discussion with Mr Ferris-Rice**

This afternoon, Mr Ferris-Rice and I met to discuss the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme. The programme was developed because it was identified that other validated Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programmes did not adequately cater to the diverse needs of the pupils at Orrets Meadow School. It is evident that Mr Ferris-Rice has put a considerable amount of time and effort into creating and maintaining a strong and effective Phonics Programme that will specifically meet the varied needs of the pupils at Orrets Meadow School. I fully support the implementation of the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme and believe it is a programme that the school should be incredibly proud of.

Since our previous discussion, Mr Ferris-Rice has made amendments to the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme based on feedback provided. Terminology used has been streamlined to ensure consistency across the school, including the terms ‘split digraphs’ and ‘consonant clusters’. Common Exception Words have also been highlighted within the initial assessment and are focused on separately within intervention.

One of the key features within the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme is that it follows a ‘two-pronged’ scheme. Unlike other validated SSP programmes that typically require children to move up ‘levels’ in relation to their chronological age and year group, the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme places focus on identifying gaps in the pupils’ skills and subsequently targeting these gaps. This allows for bespoke targeted intervention to be provided for Phonics, Reading and Writing, in line with the pupil’s identified areas of difficulty. This intervention may be delivered in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, depending on the optimum teaching style for the pupil. The intervention also follows a multi-sensory approach, which further caters to the needs of the pupils at Orrets Meadow School.

As a Speech and Language Therapist, I was impressed to learn that part of the Phonics, Reading and Writing framework places emphasis on the pupil’s comprehension. During reading tasks, pupils are asked questions based on the information they have read to assess their understanding of the language. This helps to identify gaps in vocabulary, which can then be addressed. As a baseline for reading, all pupils are assessed with the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA). If children do not register on this assessment, their comprehension is further assessed using subtests from the Assessment of Comprehension and Expression (ACE) and the Test of Abstract Language Comprehension (TALC) to highlight any barriers to their learning. The TALC assessment provides information on which Blank Level (level of language) the child can access and understand. This is then incorporated into their individual intervention and is considered when selecting reading material. Alongside this, WellComm screens are completed with the appropriate pupils and based on this, targeted groups are run to further develop the pupils’ expressive and receptive language skills.

One particular element of the framework that I enjoyed learning about was how reading skills are partly supported through encouraging the pupils’ ownership of books. Pupils are encouraged to hold their own books, turn the pages independently and read the title of the books themselves, rather than relying on the adult to read the title for them. These are skills that are commonly overlooked during reading sessions so I was pleased to see that they have been formally incorporated into the framework.

Mr Ferris-Rice and the staff at Orrets Meadow School are continually seeking feedback for the Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme and the Phonics, Reading and Writing framework implemented in school. The school have facilitated several visits from other professionals, including visitors from the Local Authority, teaching staff from other schools and the school Governors, to observe and provide feedback on Phonics lessons. Ongoing in-house support is also offered through peer observations, learning walks, observations with Mrs Duncan and moderation sessions held with Teaching Assistants. Any new teaching staff are also given the opportunity to shadow several Phonics sessions to build their confidence in carrying out the Phonics, Reading and Writing framework. Regular Pupil Progress Meetings are also held between staff to gain a whole school overview of progress for Phonics, Reading and Writing. Pupils making quicker or slower progress can then be identified and intervention can be amended in response. Parents and carers have previously been invited to attend a coffee morning focusing on reading so staff can provide reading support directly to families.

The Orrets Meadow Phonics Programme has received significant praise both within and outside of the school. Teaching staff from other schools have reached out and requested to shadow Phonics lessons in Orrets Meadow. I have also observed first hand how much the pupils of Orrets Meadow benefit from the Phonics, Reading and Writing framework and how engaged they are during these lessons, whether they are working as a class, in a small group, one-to-one or completing work independently. It has been refreshing to see children who previously struggled with Phonics, Reading and Writing, now eager to participate in lessons and feeling so much more confident in their abilities. The Orrets Meadow family, both pupils and staff, should be incredibly proud.

Bethany Hulmes