During my latest visit to Class 4 I was lucky enough to sit in on a phonics lesson. I received a lovely friendly welcome from the children whom I was very touched to learn remembered me from my previous visit. The interactive whiteboard was playing relaxing music very unobtrusively in the background whilst beautiful landscapes from around the world were shown on the screen – all in all a really relaxed way to start a lesson.

Despite all the normal ‘pupil wrangling’ that is necessary at the start of each day, all the children were ready to start work well by 9am. Mr Ferris took time to greet each child, and asked them how they all felt today – all said that they were at least at 8 out of 10, and most were actually at 10; it was reassuring to know that the first and most important thing was to know how the children were feeling.

And so to the phonics lesson – today’s session focused on a new sound, ‘qu,’ which fitted in perfectly with their English lessons, in which they were learning all about The Queen.

I was very interested to see that the children had all learned ‘shorthand instructions’ for tasks that are repeated on a daily basis; “Put your books landscape,” meant close your book, turn it round 90 degrees, move it to the top of your desk and put your pencil case on top of it. Lots of time was saved and the children were able to execute a string of instructions without even realising.

The children started off by learning how to write ‘qu’ – Mr Ferris explained how they needed to start by writing an ‘a,’ then continue straight down and then go back up to write the ‘u’ – ingenious! Having established this, the children got moving, all standing up and drawing ‘qu’ in the air with their writing hand whilst saying the keyword and sound (“qu, queen”).

Next they got their medial motors going, by tracing the letters on paper. At all times the session was immensely fun for the children whilst the focus was drawn back to the task in hand so expertly by Mr Ferris that I don’t think the children viewed it as work at all.

This multi-sensory approach obviously really helped to cement the new information into the children’s’ minds, because next they traced the sound with a marker on their paper whilst saying the keyword and sound. Team points were awarded to the children who had put in most effort, and they were made to feel special but with the minimum of fuss, so no-one else felt unnecessarily left out.

Having written out ‘qu’ plenty of times, the children got to scrumple up their papers, after which there was a competition to see who could throw their paper most accurately into the bin – with more team points awarded to the winner. Such a simple exercise, but one which they obviously looked forward to enormously, and was taken as a reward for their hard work.

There then followed a series of flashcards showing all the sounds that the class had learned so far, including the new sound ‘qu’. The class then discussed how ‘qu’ is a combination sound. The flashcards had the keyword and the sound as a picture and the letters, reinforcing what had already been learned both today and in previous sessions.

The children then discussed the difference between the s sounds in ‘nose’ and ‘socks’ – apparently, the s in ‘nose’ is ‘voiced’, which means there’s a vibration in the throat – all the children were very authoritative about this, whereas it was all new to me!

The children then went back to writing different sounds in their books, with their cursive writing scrutinised at all times by Mr Ferris, Mrs Nicholls and Miss Deer, who gently but firmly insisted on re-writing whenever necessary. This was followed by writing ten ‘qu’ words, with excellent letter formation all round. Each child’s ten words were individually marked, and any corrections were discussed in full, so that by the end every child fully understood absolutely everything.

Once again I was very sad to leave the classroom and go to work – I was absolutely sure they would all be having much more fun than I was!