

Weekly Learning Reflections



Day 1

After what can only be described as a whirlwind of an afternoon, the children are very much ready for their first night's sleep at Marchants Hill.

Leaving the school, after a lovely send off from families, both coaches were buzzing with excitement; reaching a peak at the appearance of the welcome sign. Quickly and efficiently, the children brought all of their luggage into our accommodation for the week and got settled into their rooms. With a short amount of time to spend relaxing in the Chapel, our main communal space, the children had their lunch and got themselves ready for their activities.

Groups 1 and 2 faced the zip-wire first, an activity that is often a good starter for those who aren't the biggest fans of heights. It was brilliant to see the children supporting and cheering each other as they zoomed past, before helping each other unclip themselves from the wires and the harnesses so that each person was guaranteed a turn. At the same time, Groups 3 and 4 were completing Survivor, which saw them debating the appropriate resources that they would want in a desert island situation, before moving onto other key survival skills. Charlie impressed with his fire starting skills, showing his expertise in using flint and steel, and Luca's shelter was something to behold, created from some tarpaulin and rope. Tunnels were the focus for Group 5, and the weather didn't make them look the most appealing, however all of the children were happy to participate. To show them how it was done, Grace created quite the splash in the practice tunnels, to prove that weather was truly not an issue, before the rest of the group followed after. This activity did result in the group having to make a quick pit stop back at Bethany House to change their clothing into something a bit drier.

Midway through the afternoon, Groups 1 and 2 switched over with 3 and 4. A popular celebration of the day was Alfie, in Group 3, who initially wasn't planning on doing the zip-wire, and even made the journey up the stairs to the platform before deciding it wasn't for him. However, later on, he decided to challenge himself and have another go, which ended up with him zipping down the wire, accompanied by the symphony of cheers from his group. Group 5 tackled the climbing wall, which is a well-liked 'challenge by choice' activity, as the children are able to climb as high as they feel comfortable. A superb example of how this activity can bring confidence to those who might not have it at the start was Darcie, who claimed that there was 'no way she was climbing at all' but ended up making her way right to the top of the tower!

Returning back to base, it was time for dinner. The choices on the menu were fish fingers, vegetable chow mein or chicken in pepper and tomato sauce. The dining room saw an array of smiling faces as many children explained that they were pleasantly surprised by how tasty the food was, and the iced sponge cake for dessert was, as expected, a firm favourite.

After the children's appetites were suitably satisfied, there was little time to rest as we made our way for our Campfire session. The children were treated to numerous stories, intertwined with songs and dances (our Music Assemblies truly came in handy), and even toasted marshmallows! Kodi, Darcie, Olivia B and Emily were heard, and seen, putting in 110% in all of the singing elements, and sharing some very unique and creative suggestions for song lyrics. Oscar T and Dylan T were also talented assistants when it came to giving reactions and ideas for the twists and tales of each story.

As the first day came to an end, the children were eager to have a quick shower, before going to bed, preparing themselves to do it all again - and more - tomorrow. They have been truly amazing already and we have very high hopes for what the rest of the week will bring.

Day 2

Another sun has risen and set at Marchants Hill, and it's safe to say that the children have used every ounce of energy they have throughout the day. From scaling towering ladders and building buggies, to turning our hand to become swashbuckling pirates and Robin Hoods, the children have used numerous skills as the hours have passed.

A Marchants Hill breakfast is always a well-loved element of the trip, with hash browns, bacon, tomatoes and baked beans decorating plates to form culinary masterpieces. It is clear that the children understand the importance of breakfast during a trip like this, as many were eating their portions (with some being lucky enough to have a second helping of cereals) before topping up with some fruit before heading off for the first activities of the day.

Groups 1 and 2 started the day with Jacob's Ladder, another 'challenge by choice' activity. The children were tasked to use their collaboration skills to make their way up an 8-metre tall ladder, with rungs that get further and further apart as you climb, using only themselves, a help rope, and sheer will and determination to get them all the way to the top of the nine rungs. Both groups were incredible in their perseverance and attitude towards the task - made even more difficult with slippery logs due to last night's weather. Despite these barriers, we had many children make the climb to the top. Oscar T showed himself to be quite the spider monkey, making his climb to the top in about two minutes before high fiving that top rung. Additionally, Sophia proved her own worries wrong by challenging herself to get to the top as well, with some very creative techniques, no doubt influenced by her gymnastic talents. Groups 3 and 4 had fencing, where they were learning how to safely hit, lunge and defend themselves in a match one-on-one situation. All of these groups then switched over for session 2. For Jacob's Ladder this time, it was Robyn, Maya and Willow who were one of our big wins as they managed to reach that esteemed top ladder log. Additionally, in Group 4, Lydia showed off brilliant determination and focus to get as high as possible. Group 5 had their turn at Archery for their first activity of the day, before moving onto Sensory Trail (often a teacher's favourite), which involves having one of their senses blocked - blackout goggles put on - before being challenged with completing activities and trails. They have to work together and communicate effectively to be successful in this task, and to avoid any obstacles that might be in their way!

With a flying stop back at Bethany House to have lunch (a choice of jacket potato with beans and cheese or a vegetable chilli with rice), it wasn't long before the children were walking back across the site for their afternoon activities. Group 5 faced the Challenge Course, which saw them having to crawl through tyre tunnels (their practice from yesterday coming in very useful), before carefully tiptoeing over wooden beams, swinging across a shallow ravine using a rope, and making their way over a rope net pyramid - just to name a few! Of course it wouldn't be a proper challenge course without a little bit of competition, so the children agreed to time themselves, to see who could be the most efficient in completing the course (Parker, with a time of 43 seconds). Groups 1 and 2 had a very competitive session of Buggy Building, which further challenged their teamwork skills, as they were tasked to build a working buggy out of barrels and logs (the concept was initially explained using reference

to the Flintstones, but not enough children knew who they were, so other strategies had to be used). Once the buggies had been built, they were tested and fine tuned before being put to the test in a race. Both teams were very passionate, and, unfortunately it ended in a disqualification for Group 1, as their buggy went way off course, narrowly avoiding a collision with the other team's buggy - the braking systems were utilised in time to prevent any contact being made. Groups 3 and 4 became Robin Hood, as they took on archery. Once the essential health and safety talk was complete, each child was given a quick 1-1 session with the bow and arrows, ensuring that everyone was confident in how to be safe and successful with the activity. Reports back at the house detailed the expert accuracy from Darcie and Flo. Once again, the groups completed an activity switch halfway through the afternoon, and Group 5 had their turn on zipwire. A highlight of this session was Kodi's Oscar-winning performance of Defying Gravity as he went down the wire.

Macaroni cheese was on the menu for tonight, alongside chicken katsu curry with rice. To no one's surprise, the talk of the house after dinner was the dessert: chocolate brownie. The kitchen staff have already been praising the children for their wonderful manners when requesting their choices of food at every meal time, and being respectful when clearing up after themselves. This is in addition to many of our PGL instructors have also been singing our praises across the site, detailing our wonderful behaviour and consistent enthusiasm. Similar to previous meals, many children were eager to have either an apple or orange after the meal, a signal to how much energy they are using throughout the day whilst at Marchants.

The evening activity for tonight was PGL Games, which had the children completing a carousel of mini-games, including Tic-Tac-Toe, having to throw bibs into their desired square, the International Beanbag Flag Fling, where the children were split into two teams and had to work together to throw a beanbag from one flag to another, building up the highest rally. The children then made their way back to the base, ready for a well-deserved night's sleep.

All of the children have been so brilliant today, following all instructions and showing their best selves. They've all persevered and challenged themselves in a variety of ways, encouraging each other and celebrating each other's wins. We are looking forward to the wins of tomorrow, and the excitement of the highly anticipated evening activity...

Day 3

Bright-eyed and bushy tailed, the children shuffled their pyjama-clad selves to the dining room to start another Marchants morning. Breakfast included sausages, mushrooms, hash browns and baked beans, with toast if the children chose to. Once again, all children were keen to get their fill of calories and energy for the day's endeavours, and many chose to collect an additional piece of fruit to take with them for the morning.

The first activity of the day for Groups 3, 4 and 5 was Laser Tag, which saw two of the groups facing each other at a time in the woods, using communication and teamwork skills. Mr D.T. was flanked by the dream team trio of Frankie, Luca and Ray, as they stealthily made their way around the area before ambushing an oblivious Miss Whyte. Groups 1 and 2's agenda commenced with Challenge Course, in which the children were tasked with making their way over numerous obstacles whilst keeping a cup of water as full as possible (some children chose the tactic of lifting their cup to the sky and hoping that the heavy rain

would help their chances). The mid-morning changeover saw Groups 1 and 2 taking on Laser Tag, when the competitiveness of both groups really became evident (including their group adults) as they completed games such as 'Domination', and 'Tug of War'. Mia-Pearl and Holly were active members of their team, often seen sacrificing themselves for the good of the collective by running into the enemy fire for a chance to grab the win. Groups 3 and 4 had their chance to complete the Challenge Course, whilst battling the elements and showcasing their high levels of resilience. The enthusiasm and morale maintenance from Willow and Alfie was described as 'beyond incredible'. Group 5 became the first of the groups to tackle Trapeze, which can be some children's favourite, and some children's biggest challenge. Everyone showed perseverance and challenged themselves to climb as high as they could before taking that leap of faith.

After a soggy walk back to Bethany House, lunch was served, and it was a popular one. With a choice of beef bolognese with penne pasta or vegetable ratatouille, served with a slice of garlic bread, the dining room was filled with elation and contentment, as the children were keen to warm themselves up from the cold conditions outside. Then, it was time for a quick change of clothes, some layers added, and a walk back across the field for the afternoon activities.

Groups 3 and 4 turned their hand at rifle shooting, with Maisie and Tilly proving themselves to be quite the marksman, whilst Groups 1 and 2 faced abseiling. Melissa showcased herself as the next possible James Bond as she whizzed down the tower, to the amazement and cheers of the rest of the group. Rory had impressive 'grouping' skills with his bullets in rifle shooting, with many children improved significantly as the session went on. Throughout the afternoon, many people faced their fears of heights, including Bradley (Group 2), Romeigh (Group 1) and Declan, Darcie and Ethan (Group 3) pushing themselves to climb to the top of the abseiling tower. Group 5 got to experience Jacob's Ladder, with non-ideal conditions, but they still proved themselves to be the determined children that we know, as Mila and Amelia made their way to the top of the ladder, thanks to some impressive assistance from Miss Whyte.

This time returning to base, the kitchen had to match the positive response to the lunchtime servings, and they didn't disappoint. Tonight's menu centred around curries, with a chicken tikka masala and vegetable korma being served with rice. If those weren't to the children's liking, then cottage pie was also on offer; sides of vegetables being available for all meals. Continuing to prove themselves the gracious and helpful guests, the children were keen to pick up fruit on their way out, before relaxing and playing board games in the Chapel, or simply sharing their wins of the day with friends.

Tonight's activity was the long awaited Ambush, an event that is spoken about through the year groups as they return from the residential each year, so it would be an understatement to say that the children were looking forward to this. Making our way into the depths of the site's forest, the group was split into two groups, each being placed with a PGL staff member. One group was designated the hidiers, and had to search through the playing area for a suitable position to hide in as a group. As they found this spot, they were tasked with placing cones to give a trail to the seekers. However, each team was given two decoy cones, which they could use to throw their opposition off track. Once hidden, the seekers had five minutes to find the cones, follow the correct trail and find them. All of the children were brilliant at remaining calm, quiet and focused, clearly using the practised skills from Laser Tag earlier in the day.

Returning back to the house, the children took some time to have showers, and settle in for their third night. Spirits remain high, and the buzz around the tomorrow's activities remains consistent across all of the rooms. We shall see what the day brings...

Day 4

It was the uplifting tones of Rick Astley, Survivor and ABBA that echoed through the corridors this morning, as the children were woken up to a bit of a morning disco. Over the past couple of mornings, this technique has been utilised in some rooms, with positive feedback, so it was decided to implement it across all. This led to the children humming and boogieing their way down to the dining hall for breakfast. The smell of bacon, tomatoes, hash browns and baked beans once again graced the room, with the usual pieces of fruit being collected as they departed back to their rooms to get ready for the day.

The first session for Groups 1, 2 and 5 was the highly anticipated Giant Swing - often a popular favourite. In pairs, the children are fastened in and raised up to a height of a maximum of 10 metres. The method of lifting them up to the height? Their teammates. The children who aren't on the swing have the workout that is pulling their teammates up to their desired height, using every muscle imaginable, and pulling a rope as a group. This showcase of teamwork and collaboration is a highlight, and is often coupled with encouragement and support from every child in the group. For some children, this activity can be daunting, but so many challenged themselves to go higher and higher before pulling the dreaded rip cord, including Toby in Group 5, Olivia B and Oscar in Group 1 (who also chose to reenact movie scenes during the drop) and, in the second session, Darcie and Robyn in Group 3.

Groups 3 and 4 spent their first session experiencing the entertainment that is Sensory Trail. It is always relatively amusing to see how the children communicate with one another when their partner's sight has been blocked - let's just say the clarity and detail of the instructions improved as the session went on.

Halfway through the morning, Groups 3 and 4 then took on the Giant Swing, with amazing teamwork skills being shown throughout, and everyone managing to participate and experience that momentary feeling of zero gravity. Groups 1 and 2 had their turn on Sensory Trail, as they had to complete an obstacle course as a group, following a rope and clearly communicating to one another in order to succeed through each aspect. With a tunnel to crawl through, a rope net corridor to make their way through and simply being able to stay connected to one another, the photos and footage definitely come with some stories. Group 5 turned their hand to Buggy Building, with Marla and Parker taking a lead in tying the knots to complete the buggy before taking it for a test drive.

As the sun continued to shine on Marchants Hill, even if the temperature remained low, the groups made their way back to Bethany House for some lunch. Today's menu included cheeseburger and ziggy fries, with the option of sandwiches or salad also available. The kitchen staff continued to praise the children for their large appetites, and their consistent selection of healthy options.

Moving into the afternoon, Groups 3 and 4 had Tunnel Trails, in which Daniel was practically untouchable, being able to outsmart and outrun/crawl his opponents and was unable to be caught by the 'infected zombies'. Then, the two groups made their way to the Climbing wall, where every child challenged themselves to participate and reached at least the midway point. Daisy and Willow even gave each other some challenges, to see how far they could push themselves by scampering up the wall. Penny also received a special mention as she

showed courage and perseverance as she climbed. Groups 1 and 2 did the opposite of those groups, starting the afternoon with Climbing. Both groups showed brilliant participation and encouragement of one another. Romeigh pushed herself and, despite not making her way down the abseiling tower yesterday, she managed to abseil down half of the distance after each of her climbs. Bradley and Dylan T also tackled their dislike of heights as they increased their climbing distance every time they stepped foot onto the tower. Emily even challenged herself to complete the tower as fast as she could, and managed to ascend the tower in under 30 seconds! Group 5 had their turn on Abseiling, in which the cheerleading was out in full force. Felicity, despite being hesitant initially as she walked up to the starting point, even managed to take the step over the side and embodied her Mission Impossible persona to descend the tower.

This evening's activity was a Silent Disco, which is often a more chilled out evening considering it takes place at Bethany House. All of the children entered the Chapel and were given a pair of headphones, before dancing the night away to some classic party songs. Gangnam Style, Cotton Eyed Joe and Cha Cha Slide were all featured, and the children took part and gave it their all. Francesca was showing off some impressive dance moves, even in the pug slippers (Steve and Gary have become icons of the trip), as well as Jonty and Dexter throwing some shapes and covering decent ground across the dance floor.

As the night drew to a close, the children did some preparation for tomorrow's departure, before getting showered and settled into bed for their last night. Every instructor that we've had has been extremely complimentary of the children, mentioning their enthusiasm, participation and manners; we are looking forward to our final two activities tomorrow morning.