

BASELINE INSPECTION REPORT

George Town Primary School

1 to 2 December 2014

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Introduction

The Honourable Tara Rivers, Minister for Education, has requested an inspection of all government schools during the 2014-15 academic year. The purpose of these inspections is to provide a baseline assessment of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning, the progress students make and the standards they achieve, the effectiveness of the leadership and management of each school, and the standards being achieved in English and mathematics.

The resulting inspection report provides a clear understanding of each school's particular strengths and weaknesses, and makes recommendations for improvement where necessary.

Information about the school and the inspection team

Information about the school

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Type of school: | Government primary school |
| Age range of students: | 4-11 |
| Gender of students: | Mixed |
| Number on roll: | 268 |
| School address: | 168 School Road P.O. 1099 Grand Cayman KY1-1102 |
| Telephone number: | 345-949-2689 |
| Email address: | Marie.martin@gov.ky |
| Name of Principal: | Marie Martin |

George Town Primary School is situated on the outskirts of George Town. The demographics of the school intake have changed considerably in recent years and most students are now drawn from the local area.

The school has 268 students from the ages of four to eleven. Students start in Reception at the age of four, and a number of students join Year 1 when they are five. There are 12 classes in Years 1 to 6, with an average size of around 20 students. Additional support is provided for 46 students who are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Ten students have been identified as having English as an additional language (EAL) and all are supported in learning English. The principal has worked at the school for nineteen years and the vice principal for sixteen years, although only in her role as vice principal for the past few years.

The school aims to provide a stimulating and caring environment where the natural functions of growing and learning can proceed unhindered, and to foster in its students attitudes, values and work habits which will allow them to derive maximum benefit from their environment in school and beyond.

The ability profile of the school is below the UK average. Most students have ability that is below average, although there is a fairly wide spread of abilities.

Information about the inspection team

Lead: Linda Donowho

Team: Ann McDonnell
Kathleen Silvester

This inspection of George Town Primary School took place on 1 and 2 December 2014 and involved a team of three inspectors. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at.

- Standards achieved and progress made by students, particularly in English and mathematics
- The effectiveness of teaching and its impact on learning
- How well the school is led and managed

Reception was not inspected on this visit.

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways.

- Twenty-four lessons, or parts of lessons, were observed, particularly in English and mathematics
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum guidelines and school policies were looked at and students' work was scrutinised
- Inspectors listened to students read
- Discussions took place with teachers and with the principal
- Discussions were held with students and their activities in lessons and outside the classroom were observed
- Comments from parents and staff were taken into account from the pre-inspection questionnaires

Inspectors use the following grading scale to describe aspects of the school's work.

| Grade | | Description |
|--------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Very good | Good in all respects and exemplary in some significant areas |
| 2 | Good | Good in most respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas |
| 3 | Adequate | No significant weaknesses, but no major strengths. Improvement needed |
| 4 | Unsatisfactory | Some significant weaknesses that have a negative impact on learning and achievement. Cause for concern |

In the Cayman Islands, the key stages are defined as follows.

KEY STAGE 1 – Years 1-3

KEY STAGE 2 – Years 4-6

Executive summary of the report

The overall effectiveness of the school

The overall effectiveness of the school is unsatisfactory.

Although students make progress, particularly in Key Stage 1, they do so slowly and progress in mathematics is less than in English. Through careful evaluation of assessment data, including the tracking of students' progress year on year, the management has identified areas for intervention and improvement and the new school improvement plan reflects this through its specific initiatives. The school has been realistic in targets for improvement and has taken into consideration the ability of its students. Management has clearly identified the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and systems provide and support staff professional development that is specific to the needs of the students and the improvement of their achievement.

The school provides a welcoming and caring environment for students. Individual students' needs are known and there is careful monitoring of their educational and emotional development. Their overall welfare is paramount and the school makes every provision to include parents in the care and education of students.

What the school does well

- It has strong leadership and management.
- The school reflects on its own failures and shortcomings and actively seeks ways to improve.
- The school systematically analyses data to monitor teaching, as well as students' progress.
- The school provides identified specific training for staff to enable them to improve their support of its students.
- The school and its community nurture the students and provide a happy and secure learning environment.

What needs to improve

- Teachers lack knowledge and expertise in teaching mathematics.
- There is no established system of co-ordination between key stages in mathematics and English.
- In lessons, insufficient provision is made for students of differing abilities.
- There is no agreed marking policy that includes targets and guidance to help students improve.
- Lessons do not regularly include clear learning objectives and are not conducted at an appropriate pace.

Commentary on inspection findings

How well students achieve and make progress

Students' achievement is unsatisfactory.

Throughout the school, achievement is higher in English than in mathematics and students make better progress in this subject. However, students are not achieving as much as they should or could in line with their ability and age. Some year groups perform better than others, with Years 5 and 6 being particularly low from 2011 to 2013. The school has endeavoured to target the improvement of teaching in these year groups.

At the end of Year 6, students take Key Stage 2 tests in mathematics and English that are marked and moderated locally (apart from the grammar, punctuation and spelling sections). The results are low when compared with the UK average for maintained primary schools. There was gradual improvement from 2011 to 2012 in English but little difference in mathematics for students reaching levels 4 and 5. Results improved again in 2013.

Key Stage 2 results in 2014 showed a further small increase in the number of students achieving level 5 in reading and writing, but a small decrease at level 4 Mathematics showed an improvement in the number of students achieving level 5, although it was still low when compared with English. Standard tests in English (PiE) and in mathematics (PiM) results show an improvement once again in English and some improvement in maths.

When the results of cognitive ability tests are compared with actual attainment in English and mathematics, it is evident that students are achieving less than they should. This is particularly so for the more able students. The level of attainment at Key Stage 2 suggests that students are making insufficient progress in relation to the average for students of similar abilities.

Observations in lessons and the scrutiny of work confirm the results of assessments, showing attainment that is often one, and sometimes two years below expectations for the age group, particularly in mathematics. Teachers regularly assess students' progress and collate data. However, effective use is not always made of this when planning lessons. Consequently, tasks are not matched to students' ability and more able students are not challenged.

Students with special educational needs make some progress as a result of the extra teaching they receive in literacy, but this is not always sufficient to help them catch up. The attainment of boys and girls is similar in mathematics, but boys do less well than girls in English.

The effectiveness of teaching and its impact on students' learning

The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall but with some strengths, and it is better in English than in mathematics.

In lessons where teaching is good, teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of the different abilities within the class and students are encouraged to proceed at their own pace. The teaching captures the students' interest and is characterised by effective open-ended questioning to check on the progress being made as well as to encourage lateral and creative thinking. In these lessons, students behave and co-operate extremely well and demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning.

In the best lessons, students listen to their teacher and are keen to contribute to discussions. They co-operate well in paired work, when given the opportunity, and value each other's opinions. However, frequent lengthy introductions and explanations coupled by a lack of activity limit the time available for students to apply their skills independently and little work is completed.

Teachers' subject knowledge is variable and often stronger in English than mathematics. In a small number of unsatisfactory lessons, poor subject knowledge and unclear objectives greatly impacted on students' learning and enthusiasm, preventing them from being fully engaged in their learning.

Long-term plans are detailed and follow the required curriculum. However, the quality and detail of short-term lesson planning is inconsistent across the school. It does not, as a matter of course, take into consideration students' previous learning and needs and use is not always made of the wealth of data available from the regular assessments that are carried out; consequently, students are often set the same work and time is wasted, particularly for the more able students.

Students with special educational needs are withdrawn from classes for additional support or 'catch-up' literacy sessions. Support by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is usually classroom based. Individual education plans are drawn up and made available to teachers but they are not consistently used to inform the planning in lessons for these students. Consequently, teachers' expectations do not match the skills of these students and they make little progress in lessons. In the more effective lessons, work or questions aimed at students of different abilities in the class are well matched to the needs of the students.

Targets indicating levels to be aimed for are set for students, but these are often vague and do not guide students' work, or provide them with specific steps that they should take to achieve them. More specific learning targets are sometimes set for students in the teachers' marking of their work in English, with clear guidance for improving their work. Marking in mathematics, however, is often cursory and students are not routinely shown how to improve.

How well the school is led and managed

Leadership and management are adequate overall and have instituted helpful procedures to facilitate future success.

The principal provides strong leadership, and the senior management team sets a clear vision and educational direction for the school; this is loyally supported by staff. Students feel valued and a close relationship with parents and with the local community ensures that all students are well known to staff and encouraged to gain confidence both in their learning and in their social development. The buzz of activity after school and the presence of so many past students are a testament to the school's care of its students.

The changes in the demographics of the school and the turnover of staff in recent years have resulted in the need for a careful evaluation of the school's successes and deficiencies, and the school improvement plan clearly reflects the current needs of the school as well as including required Ministry initiatives. It has resulted from the strong vision of the leadership and regular whole-school staff meetings. Staff are very involved in the process of improving standards, and regular staff training, often led by members of staff, ensures frequent review of progress.

Staff are regularly appraised and specific targets set. This process includes lesson observations and scrutiny of assessment data, including the tracking of students' progress year on year. This provides a keen oversight and highlights any deficiencies in teaching. The management provides clear guidance and support including the sharing of best practice. However, in recent years, teaching has fallen short of requirements and the management recognises that this has impacted on achievement in some year groups. There is determination that this will improve but realisation that it can only happen over a period of time.

Staff give freely of their time before and after school to provide support for students and parents, and regular advice and information evenings encourage parents to be involved in their children's education.

The many changes in guidance and external requirements over recent years have been discussed with staff, and resulted in their being unsure of the direction they should take with regard to teaching. Senior leadership is determined to clarify and drive a way forward that is best for the students and the school.

The quality of teaching and learning in English

Standards of literacy are good at Key Stage 1 and adequate at Key Stage 2.

Over the past few years, students' literacy skills have benefited from the strong focus on improving standards in reading and writing. Language skills are often limited when students start school at the age of four and valuable opportunities are provided for students to increase their vocabulary and develop the necessary skills they need in order to explore and explain their ideas. However, on occasion, such opportunities are limited by teachers' closed questions and the lack of opportunities provided to practise

developing skills. Questions are not regularly crafted to elicit a deeper layer of meaning or understanding.

Students make good progress in their reading and it has improved for all age groups. Regular assessments identify any areas for concern. Reading is taught through a mixture of guided, shared and independent reading. At Key Stage 2, students are not systematically taught the skills they need to unlock the meaning of longer or more complex texts. The school uses phonics training as a major tool in the early stages of reading but many of the older students still experience difficulties in blending sounds and letter strings. Reading often lacks fluency and students do not always make use of contextual clues to decode texts. However, many students are beginning to read with expression and tonality. The library is a bright and attractive feature of the school, designed to encourage a love of books. It is well organised and books are arranged to enable teachers to use them, for example, for shared reading lessons. However, this leaves a shortage of books to be freely chosen by students. Although parents are encouraged to hear their children read and a range of books can be taken home, these are not structured to provide careful progression and build on current skills. A popular early morning reading class is held in the library when students can read and listen to stories on the laptops provided. Many students are further supported through the work of a group of volunteers who regularly listen to reading.

Simple comprehension skills begin to develop in the younger year groups, largely carried out in shared reading activities. In later years, written comprehension skills are taught, but this is not systematic. Some teachers are aware of the need to develop higher-order skills in reading comprehension, but this is not planned for in a schematic way, and so there remain large gaps in students' skills.

From an early age students are encouraged to write. However, in some classes writing is restricted to copying or heavily focused on discussing the features of writing rather than practising the skills. This limits students' use of writing as a tool for communication and free expression. In many cases, the volume of work expected from students is insufficient to develop writing stamina. Extended writing is not included in plans for subjects outside literacy, and so students do not acquire crucial writing skills.

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

Teaching and learning in mathematics are unsatisfactory.

Consequently, students' achievement falls well short of normal age-related expectations. More able students are given few activities to extend and use their mathematical knowledge, and this results in few students reaching high levels of attainment.

From a low starting point in Year 1, students make slow progress. By Year 3, interviews with students and scrutiny of their work show that they are able to count on and back, have some knowledge of angles and two-dimensional shapes, are able to add numbers, work with tens and ones and tell the time. However, they have difficulty explaining the work they have covered and are not highly confident in knowledge, understanding or skills. The volume of written work is low and the breadth of study is relatively narrow. Presentation is poor, with infrequent marking, which is, at best, cursory.

By Year 6, students have made more progress and can work with multiplication facts in areas such as money and decimal numbers. They have a much wider mathematical knowledge and can apply it to new concepts; for example, place value; odd and even numbers and number sequences. They use the terms 'parallel', 'perpendicular', 'horizontal' and 'vertical'; they recognise and classify triangles; they use data to create pictograms; they recognise symmetry; they use number bonds to 10, 100 and 1000; they perform simple money calculations; they add simple decimal numbers; they use basic fractions; they double and halve numbers; they work with three-dimensional shapes, perimeters and areas. The volume of their written calculations is appropriate and their work is more neatly presented, though marking is still cursory. Throughout the school, students use whiteboards for calculations in warm-up mental arithmetic starters, rather than readily applying mental strategies and instant recall of number facts.

In the best lessons, teaching is lively and well-paced, engaging students in their learning and they are seen to make progress and achieve appropriately for their ability. Many teachers lack subject knowledge and expertise in mathematics and lessons proceed at a slow pace, with too much direct instruction and too little opportunity for students to practise and apply their new skills independently. Teachers do not always utilise the extensive resources available via the interactive whiteboards.

Some professional development is being provided by the Department of Education Services, island-wide.

Appendix A

Recommendations

The following are some suggested ways that the school could try to overcome the weaknesses identified in the 'What needs to improve' section of this report.

1. Improve teachers' knowledge and effectiveness in the teaching of mathematics.
2. In lessons, ensure that appropriate provision is made for all abilities and that expectations match the ability of the students.
3. Provide regular practice in extended writing.
4. Extend the scope of students' reading.
5. Improve the pace of working in lessons and provide clear learning objectives.
6. Mark students' work consistently and promptly, providing them with clear guidance on ways to improve their standard.