

BASELINE INSPECTION REPORT

Sir John A Cumber Primary School

11-13 November 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:	559
School address:	44 Fountain Road PO Box 405 West Bay Grand Cayman KY1302 Cayman Islands
Telephone number:	345-949-3314
Email address:	joseph.wallace@gov.ky
Name of Principal:	Mr Joe Wallace

The school has 559 students from the age of four to eleven, with slightly more girls than boys. Students start in Reception at the age of four, and in Year 1 when they are five. There are 24 classes in Years 1 to 6, with four classes in each year group, and an average class size of around 20 students. A total of 106 students have been identified as having special educational needs. A small number for whom English is an additional language, mainly Spanish speakers, are supported in learning English. The school offers the primary years programme (PYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and in 2012 was the first school on the island to be accredited as an IB school. The principal has been at the school for seven years.

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, including a proportion with ability that is average or even above average. The ability of the current Year 6 is slightly higher than others, being broadly in line with the UK average.

Information about the inspection team

Lead:	Joy Richardson
Team:	Linda Donowho Mark Albini Kathleen Silvester Ann McDonnell

This inspection of Sir John A Cumber Primary School took place from 11 to 13 November 2014 and involved a team of five inspectors. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at.

- Standards achieved and progress made by students in Years 1 to 6, particularly in English and mathematics
- The effectiveness of teaching and its impact on learning
- How well the school is led and managed

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways.

Fifty-seven 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. Students make progress but do so too slowly, and are capable of achieving more. Although the best is very good, much of the teaching lacks pace and fails to engage students. Weaknesses in students' achievement have been recognised by the school's leadership and management and some steps have been taken to secure improvement; for example, in reading. However, plans for improvement are strongly reliant on external support and initiatives are not closely monitored to check their impact on learning.

The school has a wealth of data from assessment, but is not incisive in using this to pinpoint the action needed to accelerate progress. Targets are aspirational but unrealistic because of a lack of detailed planning about how to achieve them. Teaching is variable in quality and the pace of working is often slow. Few adaptations are made for students of different abilities and able students are rarely challenged. Students' basic skills are weak in English and mathematics. The PYP is encouraging more inquiry by students, which they enjoy, but they lack the skills required for this approach. The school is organised and administered effectively day-to-day so that it runs smoothly. It provides a friendly and supportive environment for learning, but expectations of students are set too low.

What the school does well

- The school is thorough in its collection of assessment data that is shared with staff, students and parents.
- It identifies areas requiring improvement and draws on external support to address weaknesses.
- Positive attitudes and values are being instilled to help students become effective learners.
- Younger classes are managed well so that students are focused on learning.
- In many classes, warm relationships between students and staff create a positive environment for learning.

What needs to improve

- Assessment is not used effectively to diagnose and to remedy specific weaknesses in learning by individuals and groups.
- Teachers lack knowledge and expertise in teaching mathematics, and students have a poor grasp of number facts.
- Students make too little progress in lessons because the pace of teaching is too slow.
- Work is not marked and corrected so that students know how to improve.
- Students do not write or read enough to practise and extend their skills, and so many fall further behind.

- Teaching does not take account of different abilities and there is insufficient challenge for the more able.

Commentary on inspection findings

How well students achieve and make progress

Students' achievement is unsatisfactory because their attainment is low, and they do not make sufficient progress from their different starting points.

At the end of Year 6, students take Key Stage 2 tests that are marked and moderated locally. The results have been low if compared with the UK average. There has been some improvement from 2011 to 2014, with the percentage reaching the level expected for their age (level 4) increasing from 14 to 37 per cent in English, and from 13 to 26 per cent in mathematics. In 2014, 16 per cent reached a higher level, level 5, in reading but only 2 per cent did so in mathematics. Standardised tests of progress in English (PiE) and progress in mathematics (PiM), taken annually, show that a majority of students in all year groups are achieving below the norm for their age, and this is particularly marked in mathematics. When tests of ability are compared with outcomes in English and mathematics, it is evident that students are achieving less than they should, and able students are not fulfilling their potential. 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 in the UK.

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. Teachers are assiduous in making assessments and collecting the data, but less effective in taking action to speed students' progress. Expectations are too low, and this becomes cumulative so that, rather than catching up, students often fall further behind as they progress through the school. Able students performing at an average level are not challenged to go further. Teachers recognise the need to aim higher and there is some evidence of improvement, particularly in reading, though overall standards remain low.

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 because it does not ensure that students learn effectively and make progress at an appropriate rate.

Highly effective teaching is evident in isolated lessons where planning is detailed, the pace is brisk and the level of challenge is high. Students in these lessons demonstrate the ability to focus, work hard, maintain self-discipline and produce a good volume of high quality work. In many other lessons, particularly in Years 3 to 6, students misbehave because they are bored and too little is expected of them. Where expectations are high, students behave extremely well and demonstrate enthusiasm for learning.

Often, the pace of teaching is slow and too little work is completed in the time available. This contributes, over time, to a widening gap between what students are and should be achieving. The planning of lessons follows the required curriculum but takes little account of students' prior learning, or of their different abilities. Time is often wasted in labouring small points that students have already grasped.

Students with special educational needs have helpful individual education plans and are withdrawn from classes on occasion for support in literacy. This is effective, but not enough on its own to accelerate their progress significantly. Usually in class all students do the same work at the same pace. Additional challenge for the most able is rare and so they often 'mark time' in lessons. Teaching assistants are not trained and deployed effectively to support students' learning.

Students listen to the teacher and are keen to contribute in discussion, but lengthy introductions tend to limit the time available for students to apply their skills. Independent work mainly consists of copying or completing worksheets, and the volume of work is small.

Teachers' planning and teaching do not draw on the wealth of detailed information available from assessment. Targets are set for students, but these are vague and do not guide students' future work. Marking is cursory and students are not routinely shown how to improve. Students enjoy the challenge, for example, of learning spellings, but homework is not set consistently across classes and the school's policy on homework is not clear enough.

Attempts are being made, through the PYP, to develop a more inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. Students enjoy working practically and pursuing questions, but teachers vary in their ability to extend students' thinking in the process and to build the skills needed for finding and presenting information.

How well the school is led and managed

Leadership is unsatisfactory because, although weaknesses are identified, action for improvement is not pursued consistently and effectively. The school is organised and administered well on a daily basis so that it runs smoothly.

The school is extremely diligent in collecting assessment data, and started this before it became a national requirement. It is less successful in making use of its data to bring about improvement.

The school follows national requirements in implementing new initiatives, but does not evaluate their impact on learning and attainment within the school. The school improvement plan includes ambitious but unrealistic targets. The aim is for students to move, for example, from more than one year to less than one year below expectations. This aspiration is not supported by any review of success in reaching previous targets, or a plan of action for accelerating progress.

Steps have been taken to monitor the quality of teaching through lesson observations, scrutiny of work and 'learning walks' that give an overview of teaching and learning. Some feedback is given to teachers but weaknesses are not consistently addressed, and examples of best practice are not widely shared. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to vary widely.

Much is left up to the individual teacher. There are no clear policies on homework, including reading, or on marking. The staff recognise that the provision for able students is inadequate, but have no consistent view on how to improve this. Some teachers offer extra sessions before school, but there are few planned interventions to help students who are falling behind or to challenge able students further.

The school draws on external support where this is available. It is less clear how responsibility is taken within the school for driving improvement and extending good practice.

The quality of teaching and learning in English

The quality of teaching and learning in English is unsatisfactory because less than half the students achieve the literacy levels expected for their age.

The school has had a focus on literacy and has seen some improvement. This is most evident in reading, and in the stronger foundations being laid in Years 1 and 2. However, the termly diagnostic reading assessments (DRA) show that many students in all years are reading at a level well below their chronological age, and the gap does not close significantly as they move through the school.

Skills of communication, as required by the PYP, are not yet nurtured consistently through the school, and students lack experience of addressing an audience effectively. Little attention is given to the correct use of English in formal speech.

The teaching of reading is based on the shared reading of a class book, and guided reading in a group with the teacher, usually once a week. This does not give students enough practice. Often, discussion about the book is given more time than the practice of specific reading skills. 'drop everything and read' (DEAR) ensures a period of daily silent reading, though students often choose books that are ill-matched to their reading level.

Students learn the sounds of letters, but are not confident in using their phonic knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words. A few children become skilled and enthusiastic readers, happy to become immersed in a book, but many are held back by their lack of basic skills. Many older students find it difficult to detect meaning beyond the literal, or to scan a page to find information. This limits their capacity for research, as is required for PYP inquiries.

Students generally take a book home with them on Friday. There is no school-wide approach to securing home/school co-operation in reading, though this is encouraged in some classes, particularly in Year 2. The limited choice of reading materials means that

many students are reading books intended for younger children. The spacious library is currently being re-catalogued to provide a better resource for reading.

Students make a slow start in learning to write, but they develop neat handwriting and become competent in spelling and punctuation. They frequently copy from texts, but cannot always read what they have written. They have few dedicated opportunities to write creatively or at length. The school is concerned to develop different types of writing, but discussion of the features of writing too often displaces time for writing and limits students' fluency.

The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

Teaching and learning in mathematics are unsatisfactory. As a result, students' achievement falls well short of the normal expectation for their age. There is little opportunity for able students to excel in mathematics, and few do so.

Younger students learn to count, order numbers, add on, take away and use mathematical vocabulary securely and with enjoyment. However, their skills are not reinforced and extended as they move through Years 3 to 6. They do not sufficiently practise the speedy recall of number bonds and multiplication facts. This makes it difficult for them to calculate accurately in their head, or to tackle problems involving several steps.

Much time is spent in learning strategies such as the use of a number line, or a multiplication array, without encouraging mental calculation as a first resort. Students find it hard to read and interpret worded questions and to decide for themselves what strategies to apply.

Lessons proceed at a slow pace, and too little time is allowed for practice and the independent application of new skills. Students complete too little work and, in most cases, all work at the same level, with few adaptations for those of lower or higher ability.

Homework is not regularly set to consolidate learning. The marking of work, when this takes place, is often cursory, with little advice to students about making further progress. Corrections may be demanded but without any follow up by the teacher. Some voluntary sessions are offered before school to give extra practice in mathematics, and some staff have been trained in offering 'maths recovery' sessions.

Many teachers lack subject knowledge and expertise in mathematics. Measures are being taken to try to improve the outcomes for students by further training for teachers, particularly those least knowledgeable and confident in the teaching of the mathematics curriculum. Professional development has been provided through a period of intensive support from an external specialist, and by the school's mathematics co-ordinator. This has been having a positive impact, as seen in the youngest classes.

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. Follow assessments through into teaching, by identifying specific weaknesses and paying attention to these in the planning of lessons.
2. Track the progress of year groups over their time in school to monitor and accelerate the overall pace of progress.
3. State plainly what students are expected to learn by the end of each year and take speedy action if students are falling behind.
4. Plan the use of time in lessons to maximise learning, and teach at a brisker pace.
5. Develop a school-wide marking and feedback policy to ensure that students learn from their mistakes and are guided in improving their work.
6. Take account of different abilities in the planning of lessons, and raise the level of challenge for more able students, building on from what they already know.
7. Train and deploy teaching assistants so that they support students' learning.
8. Plan professional development focused on what makes a good lesson, and increase opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from the most effective practice.
9. Ensure that new initiatives are rigorously evaluated for their impact on learning.

English

1. Ensure that every student reads daily in school, and encourage daily reading at home, monitoring what students read, and matching books to reading level.
2. Teach students how to apply their phonic knowledge in reading and writing.
3. Build students' skills in reading for information.
4. Provide opportunity for writing at greater length in English and within PYP inquiries.

Mathematics

1. Audit teachers' subject knowledge and expertise in teaching mathematics and continue to support them in improving their teaching.

2. Introduce frequent 'quick fire' practice to improve recall of number facts, and set goals for the learning of number bonds and multiplication tables.
3. Develop greater facility in mental calculation as a basis for problem-solving in mathematics.