

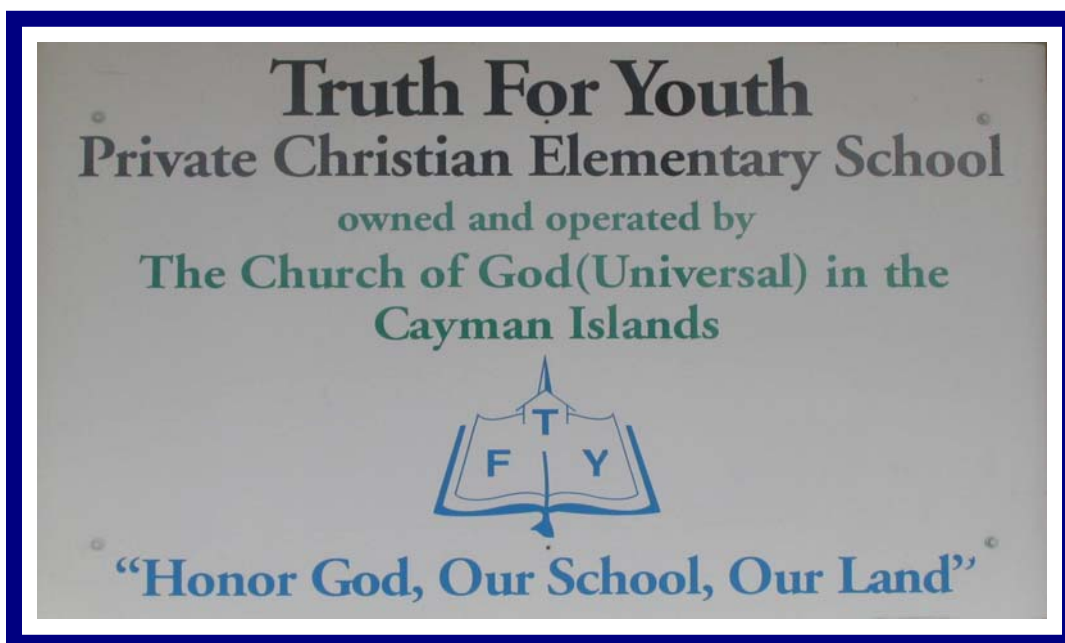


TRUTH FOR YOUTH SCHOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

NOVEMBER 2005

LEAD INSPECTOR: ROGER HOLMES



Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate

Working in partnership for high quality education for all students

Foreword

The aim of the Schools' Inspectorate is to contribute to continuous school improvement in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous external evaluations of schools and by providing high quality policy advice and training.

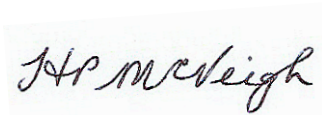
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to support the school in its own self-evaluation.

Inspectors are guided by the criteria in the Cayman Islands Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and Culture with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of inspection reports, inspection contributes to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

Self-evaluation by schools is considered to be an important part of the Cayman Islands school evaluation model. Together with inspections, self-evaluation provides a balanced system of internal and external accountability for schools.

The Inspectorate hopes that this inspection will contribute in a positive way to helping Truth for Youth School become more effective.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "HP McVeigh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helena McVeigh
Chief Inspector of Schools

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM

THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Private primary school
Age range of students:	3 years 7 months to 12 years 11 months
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	138
School address:	84 Walkers Road George Town
Telephone number:	949 2620
Fax number:	945 4617
Email address:	truthfys@candw.ky
Name of Principal:	Mr Viquez Miller

THE INSPECTION TEAM

Lead inspector:	Roger Holmes	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
Team inspectors:	Mary Bowerman	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Kate Marnoch	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Sandra Tweddell	Overseas Inspector

INTRODUCTION

Information about the school

Truth for Youth School is owned and operated by the Church of God (Universal). It was established in order to provide education with a strong Christian emphasis for its students. This is reflected in the school's objectives, which are described in the handbook as "(springing) from the moral basis of the bible". It sets out three aspects of its objectives:

- "Train up a child in the way he should go" from Proverbs 22:6
- Teach basic competence in reading, writing and mathematics
- Encourage students to develop an interest in other cultures, arts, sports etc.

The school teaches the Cayman National Curriculum within the framework of the United States Grade system. This means that children are a year older than the corresponding groups in other Cayman Islands schools. Grade 6 at Truth for Youth has children aged between 11 and 12, who would be in Year 7 in government schools in Cayman.

There are 138 students on roll, 69 boys and 69 girls. However, there is considerable variation between class sizes, ranging from 21 in Grade 2 (12 boys and 9 girls) to 11 in Grade 5 (four boys and seven girls). The great majority (82 per cent) of students are Caymanian. Following Hurricane Ivan, the school accepted some 21 extra students from government schools and many of them have stayed, even though their previous schools have re-opened. The school still has places for more students.

Three students have Spanish as their first language and are learning English as a second language (ESL). The school has not identified any students as having special educational needs (SEN), despite the large proportion who perform well below the level expected for their age.

The school site is just south of the business district of George Town. There is a school field, class rooms for each grade, dining hall, kitchen, auditorium, computer room, library and administrative facilities. The computer room has not become operational since it was damaged by Hurricane Ivan.

Information about the inspection

The inspection took place from Monday 21st to Wednesday 23rd November 2005. It involved a team of four inspectors, together with a trainee local occasional inspector. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at:

- Standards achieved by students in language arts and mathematics
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students' personal development
- Students' attendance and punctuality
- The quality of the curriculum and how students are assessed
- How well the school is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students, and the level of care for their welfare
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community

The team also evaluated how well teachers were helping students to use their literacy, numeracy and information technology skills across all of their school work.

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- 45 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, mainly language arts and mathematics, but including a sample of other subjects.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, were looked at.
- Students' work was scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke with students and took their views recorded in the questionnaires into account.
- Inspectors heard students read during lessons.
- Discussions with teachers and other members of staff took place.
- Comments from parents at the meeting before the inspection and from the questionnaires were taken into account.
- Information obtained through the regular link inspector visits was also taken into account.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

How effective is the school overall

Truth for Youth School provides a very caring environment with a strong Christian ethos, which supports its students' spiritual and moral development very well. As a result, students have very positive attitudes to their work and good relationships with the staff. However, students do not achieve as well as they should, particularly in mathematics, reading and writing. There are also significant weaknesses in the arrangements for teaching the children in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (K) classes.

The school received a short inspection in 2001. The inspection found much the same picture of effective personal development but under-achievement in academic subjects as this report has found. There is now a stronger determination to bring about the improvements that are needed, particularly for the youngest children. Despite this, the school will need help in moving forward.

What the school does well

- The school has a strong Christian ethos, which promotes students' spiritual and moral development very well and is much appreciated by parents.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work and generally behave well.
- Teachers work hard and are very committed to their students' welfare.
- The school's leaders have made the school a safe and secure haven, which provides the stability many students need.

What needs to improve

- Standards of achievement, especially in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The progress that students make, particularly those who need extra help and those who are capable of high achievement.
- Teaching in some classes, where it is not effective enough in helping students to understand their work and become more independent in their learning.
- The provision for children in pre-K and K classes, which is currently inadequate.
- Systems to measure and improve the school's performance, which are not effective enough.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the school's improvement plan. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing these issues.

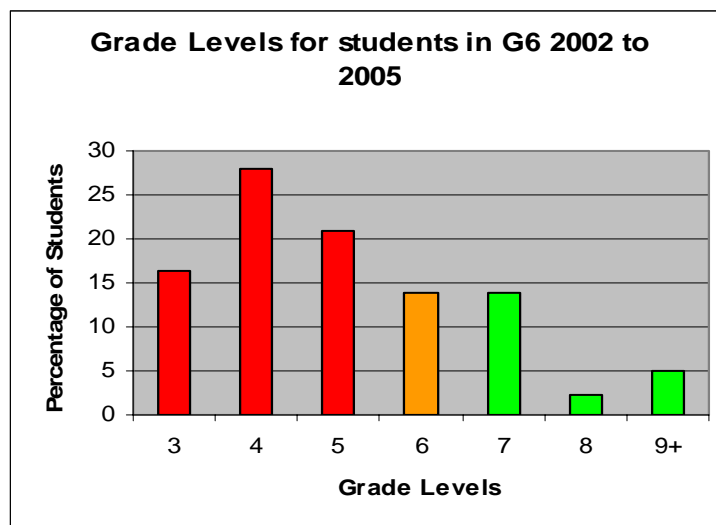
How high are standards at the school?

Many of the children join the K and pre-K classes with weaker social and language skills than are usually found at that age. Unfortunately, they do not make enough progress in these classes to compensate for this and so they move into Grade 1 still needing to learn how to behave properly and with some ground to make up in their learning. They respond quickly to teacher's successful class management in Grade 1 and their behaviour improves significantly.

As they move up the grades, children begin to make progress in their learning, but this is more rapid in some classes than others because the quality of teaching varies widely. Overall, students do not move on in their learning as well as they should, especially those who need extra help and those who are very capable learners. This is because the work in classes is often aimed at the students in the middle; it is too difficult for some students and too easy for others. By the time they leave school, students are not achieving as well as expected for their age.

Results from the national tests from 1999 to 2002 show the school performing well compared with other schools in Cayman. However, Grade 6 students at Truth for Youth are older on average than those who take the test in other schools.

Truth for Youth School uses the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to measure the performance of its students. The results show some variation each year, as would be expected with the small numbers of students involved. Combining the results together from the last four years gives the picture below of the school's performance.



Combined percentage of students from 2002 to 2005 at different grade levels

As the chart shows, of the 43 students who graduated from the school between 2002 and 2005, 14 per cent attained the expected level for their age, 21 percent were above and almost two thirds - 65 per cent - were below. Overall, these results suggest that, although there are a few students who achieve well, many students are not doing as well as they should.

The inspection findings reflect the picture presented by the test results above. Standards of achievement are lower than expected in language arts and mathematics,

because students do not make enough progress as they move through the school. This slow progress is particularly marked in reading, where it is, on average, less than half the expected rate. Students make better progress in speaking and listening and standards in this aspect of English are satisfactory. Weaknesses in reading adversely affect students' performance in other subjects; for example, students have difficulty interpreting word problems in mathematics.

How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?

Teachers have a very strong commitment to the school. They care for their students and want them to do well. They are respectful towards the students and teach them to respect others. This has created an environment in which most students work hard. They have the confidence to answer questions and are not afraid to make mistakes, from which they learn. A good example of this was seen in a Grade 3 science lesson, where students answered well and also felt secure enough to ask their own questions.

In some lessons, students' learning skills are developed well because the teachers' good questioning encourages them to participate and probes their understanding. In a few reading lessons, the teachers asked students to predict what might happen next or to build a picture of a character from the story. Too often though, the teachers do most of the work and do not allow students to make choices about how to present their work or which resources to use. Students are not encouraged to use their own initiative or to become independent. Students too readily turn to adults for help; for example, they tend to ask an adult to find a library book, rather than searching for it themselves.

Students are given some opportunities to undertake research, such as in Grade 2 where they complete a project and then present it formally to other students in the school. Generally, though, this is too rare. Students are not given opportunities to evaluate their own work, so they have few ideas of their own as to how they can improve it. They need to be given more opportunities for independent research and to work in groups to talk through, and find, their own solutions to problems.

In most classes, all students do the same work, regardless of their ability. More able students are often not challenged by the work that they are given. They finish it quickly and achieve little. As a result, they sometimes become bored and even distract others. The least able students often struggle as the work is too hard for them. They fiddle with objects, do not always complete the task and sometimes become disruptive. In some lessons, the texts that teachers choose do not appeal to boys, who soon lose interest. To their credit, in most situations, students usually remain well behaved.

Although there are strengths in some of the teaching, it varies widely in quality, and too much is unsatisfactory. Teachers rely on a narrow range of methods and pitch the work too low. Many teachers rely heavily on textbooks and fail to supplement them with other relevant and interesting resources or methods that would motivate students and appeal to their different learning styles and needs.

There are strengths in the teaching, which should be shared across the school. Some of the teaching is bright and lively and motivates the students to want to learn. In these good lessons, the teachers set time deadlines that help to focus the students and make them work hard. Many of the teachers use physical exercises within lessons, such as standing up and stretching as tall as possible and these settle classes down to a new

activity very well. In some lessons, the learning objective is clearly explained so that students know what they have to learn. Other teachers encourage the class to join in discussions. One excellent example was when a teacher asked a number of students to teach the class a Spanish word, which she claimed not to know. All enjoyed and learned from this, including the knowledge that teachers also need to learn, which was a good model for the students.

A number of these good features of teaching came together in one English lesson. The teacher began by reminding the students of the aim of the lesson. She then went on to ask a number of questions that challenged them to think about the story they had been reading. The excellent ethos of respect for one another and the care the teacher had for the students gave them the confidence to answer. A few boys were reluctant at first, but were gently drawn into the discussion. The teacher showed that she valued all of their answers. Students were then asked to monitor their own skills as readers and shown how they could do this. More importantly, they were given the vocabulary that allowed them to explain their ideas. The teacher made use of the textbook, but was not over-dependent on it. In this lesson, students' made good progress and were enthusiastic because of the love of learning engendered by the teacher.

What is the quality of the curriculum and how effective are the arrangements for assessing students?

The curriculum includes a broad range of subjects, but the amount of time spent on each varies considerably from class to class. For example Grade 6 has over two and a half hours devoted to Bible study each week while Grade 3 has just over one hour. The wide variation in time between classes reflects the absence of an agreed approach to curriculum planning in the school.

Class teachers teach most subjects themselves. Physical education is taught by a specialist teacher, who also organises games and other activities after school; this arrangement works well. The school has planned for information and communication technology (ICT) to be taught by a specialist teacher. This has yet to come into effect because the computer facility was damaged by Hurricane Ivan and the new computers have not been installed. Students are currently not taught ICT.

The curriculum for the pre-K and K classes is not matched to the way that children of this age learn. There are not enough opportunities for children to learn through practical activities or to develop their independence and imagination. They are taught as a whole class too often, with the result that they become frustrated and restless and learn little. The curriculum for these classes need to be re-organised so that it provides learning experiences that are more appropriate for children of this age, this will also involve having more staff working with the children.

The school collects assessment information from the ITBS tests that are taken by each class every year. The principal carries out some analysis of the results, to identify, for example, which questions that students found difficult. Too little use is made of these assessments to see how well students are performing and to plan how they could be helped to make better progress. In particular, students who are performing well below the expected grade level for their age are not identified as needing extra help or as possibly having special educational needs. At the moment, the curriculum is not modified for students with learning difficulties, who often struggle and do not achieve well.

How well is the school led and managed?

Truth for Youth School is controlled by the church board of the Church of God (Universal). Many of the functions of the school are the direct responsibility of the board and its officers. For example, the board appoints staff to the school and the treasurer manages the accounts and controls expenditure. The school's principal is responsible to the board for the academic performance of the school and for students' discipline. He presents reports to the board to keep them informed of the school's performance.

The board has been successful in defining the distinctive ethos that the school should embody in order to fulfil its Christian aims and objectives. The officers of the board also carry out their appointed roles effectively so that the school runs smoothly. However, the school is only one of the board's concerns and it is not clear that it plays an active role in setting targets for the school's performance or assessing how well it is doing.

The principal has been in post for some time and has successfully maintained the school's caring ethos and the pastoral care for its students. Parents particularly value this aspect of the school's work and the part the principal plays in this. His own approach to education is reflected in the encouragement he gives to students of all abilities and his willingness to help students settle into Truth for Youth after they have been excluded from other schools. The success of his approach in this area of work is illustrated by the school's absence of exclusions and the high levels of attendance of students. The same attention has not been devoted to measuring the academic performance of the school or for developing strategies to help students make better progress. Too many students are under-achieving at the moment and the school is not meeting its own target, set out in the Handbook, that "students should reach grade-level appropriate skills in reading, writing and mathematics.." . In order to do this, there needs to be a clearer focus on monitoring how well things are going and identifying how they can be improved.

Other staff in the school have limited management roles. Teachers have volunteered to take on the task of coordinating language arts and mathematics, but the purpose of these roles and how they will be carried out have not been defined. Without this clarification, the roles could just be seen as a chore rather than a way of helping the teachers to work more effectively together. No one is designated as having responsibility for students with special educational needs. Teachers are individually responsible for these students in their classes and there is no guidance or policy to help them. The principal withdraws a few students for additional support, in response to the wishes of parents.

The school runs smoothly and is managed well on a day to day basis. Procedures in the office operate well and the school's systems do not interfere with the core business of educating the students. Parents and students value the way that they can approach the principal for help and information.

The school benefits from the considerable teaching experience and commitment of its staff, all of whom are appropriately qualified. Staffing levels in the pre-K and K classes are lower than the recommendations and affect the work in this area adversely. The school has sufficient buildings and grounds for its work and could accommodate more students in the older classes. There are sufficient text books for the students, but not

enough of other resources for learning. This shortage is most marked in the pre-K and K classes, the library, ICT and for practical activities in mathematics.

How effective are other aspects of the school's work?

Students' personal development

The school provides a caring and supportive environment, which ensures that students feel secure. The staff are excellent role models. They know the children well and their relationships with them support the Christian ethos of the school very effectively. Parents see this as an outstanding feature of the school and value the spiritual and moral teaching their children receive. The personal development of students, including those with learning difficulties, is good because the caring ethos of the school supports them well.

Assemblies and class devotions are held regularly and provide opportunities for students to learn the stories of the Bible and understand how to apply them to their daily lives. Teachers reinforce these concepts in lessons with scripture verses and reminders of scriptural precepts. The children enjoy singing choruses. They know the words to most of them, and, even without accompaniment, sing tunefully and enthusiastically. Students regularly volunteer to help lead the singing or prayers, both in their class devotions and in whole-school assemblies.

Students are gaining a good understanding of moral principles through consistent Bible teaching, which is reinforced by teachers. For example, in a class discussion on how to handle some of the typical situations that children face, many students were open and honest and asked questions of their teachers and peers.

There is no written discipline policy and teachers decide how best to handle classroom situations. This works with most students, but not with all, and greater consistency is needed in this aspect of the school's work.

Provision for students' social development is not as well planned as their spiritual and moral development. Although there are opportunities to work in groups in some lessons, this is not done in a sufficiently directed way to ensure that students learn how to work together effectively. Some of the older girls volunteer to sit with younger children during assemblies to try to encourage good behaviour. However, students are not given specific responsibilities. There is no student council or prefect system and students have a limited voice in matters of concern to them within the school. Some students do take part in netball and football matches against other schools, which helps them learn how to work together in teams.

The school uses the Cayman Islands' National Curriculum for social studies. Some teachers supplement this with other material which enhances students' understanding of the background to these islands' culture and heritage. Students are taken on field trips to local places of interest connected to what they are studying. The National Anthem and National Song are sung regularly and confidently by students. There are fewer opportunities to learn about other cultures. Some textbooks include bits of interesting information from other countries, so children have some exposure to these, but there is no systematic planning for students' broader cultural development. From time to time, teachers encourage some of the Spanish speaking students in to use their own language in class.

Links with parents and the local community

The school maintains satisfactory contact with parents. Monthly newsletters are published and parents can pick these up at the school's office. Although there is no organized Parent-Teachers' Association, there are meetings for parents and teachers five times per year, where issues and concerns can be discussed and information about school events given to parents. If there are any concerns about particular students, parents are telephoned and teachers are always available to talk to parents.

Parents receive quarterly reports about their children's progress. Included with the last report of the school year are the grade-equivalent scores each student receives on the ITBS standardized test. This is not accompanied by any explanation of the scores, or any means by which parents can judge the progress their child has made. The school's report forms include an evaluation of academic, spiritual and social skills, attendance and punctuality and a brief comment by the class teacher. These do not offer an evaluation of students' strengths and any specific areas for development, or suggest ways in which parents could be involved in their children's learning. The principal is responsive to parents' concerns about students with learning difficulties and never turns one away. He has sought assessment of students in response to parents' wishes.

Links with the Church of God (Universal) are strong. The school has the same board and treasurer as the church. The pastor of the church is the chairman of the school's board of directors, which decides on the school's curriculum, dress code, budget, admissions and staffing.

The school gets involved in a range of community activities, for example the Lions' garbage collection, the anti-drug activities run by Cayman Against Substance Abuse and the police, and various spelling bees. Some members of the community are invited to talk to students – for example Red Cross volunteers come twice a year to talk about safety.

Although parents are in and out of the school on a daily basis, they have little actual involvement in the work of the school as volunteers. There is a group of past students called 'Helping Hands' that helps the school in various ways, especially with fund raising. They were especially helpful in restoring the school after last year's hurricane.

The support and guidance offered to students, and level of care for their welfare

The school's arrangements for caring for students and promoting their health and safety are generally satisfactory. Teachers know the students well and show great concern for their general well-being, but this concern is not focused enough on their progress as learners. The school has not identified any students as having special needs, because of a misunderstanding of what the term really means. There are students in most classes who are in need of extra support. For some, this is because there is a learning difficulty and for others, because English is not their first language. There are also some students of above-average ability who are underachieving because they are not being challenged. The management of the school needs to ensure that appropriate provision is made for all students.

Teachers record students' scores and grades in tests which they set internally, but these are not analysed or used to help teachers plan for students with differing needs. Students' personal records include the quarterly reports which parents receive as well as registration forms and health records. There are no student profiles which give an overview of achievements during their time at the school. This area of support for students needs to be improved.

Teachers work hard to encourage good behaviour, but there is no whole-school behaviour policy, and teachers are left to their own devices. Students are less secure when demands on them differ from teacher to teacher or are inconsistent.

Resources within the school are limited. The library is currently being re-stocked and the computers replaced. In the meantime, there is insufficient encouragement of reading for pleasure or opportunities to learn computer skills. Use of information and communication technology by teachers or students does not feature in the school. Equipment to encourage investigative science and mathematics is also very limited.

The school monitors attendance closely and most students attend regularly, though there are a number who arrive late in the mornings. Students are sent to the office for a 'tardy' slip and a record is kept of these. Attendance is generally satisfactory.

Overall, students are well cared for physically and emotionally, but there is room for improvement in the support for students' academic needs.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN LANGUAGE ARTS, MATHEMATICS AND IN THE K AND PRE-K CLASSES?

Language arts (English)

Students make slow progress from a low baseline in most aspects of language arts. By the time they reach Grade 6, their achievements are below what is expected for their age in reading and writing. However, students achieve satisfactory standards in the speaking and listening components of language arts. The good ethos of the school gives students confidence to talk out loud and to respond to questions.

Many students are confident speakers and most listen well, particularly in the older classes. Some of the teachers encourage students to give detailed responses to questions, which helps to develop their speaking and listening skills, but this does not happen often enough. Although students listen well, they are rarely encouraged to think critically about and question what is being said.

Some students read accurately and the more able, usually girls, read with expression. However, many others are hesitant readers and have few methods for trying to read words they have not come across before or to make sense of the text. They are too reliant on their teachers. This is particularly true of younger readers who often rely on memorising stories without being able to read the words. In a telling example, three students were asked to read from a book, which they chose to do together. One could not see the book but chanted the words perfectly. When this student was asked to read a simple book alone, he stumbled over every word, looking helplessly around the room for help. This student and others had acquired no strategies to help them decipher words on the page. Conversely, older students coped with a demanding book they had not read before and read mainly accurately. However, they did not read for meaning and had difficulty understanding what they had read. Older students talk with pleasure about books they have read, but their reading is within a limited range of fiction. Younger students appear not to read for pleasure and their diet is mainly the school textbooks. When they were given the opportunity to listen to a story that was read to them, they were entranced and joined in the refrain, following the pictures and the words.

Students' handwriting is good. Boys and girls write neatly and take pride in their writing. Most students write from personal experience and some pieces are lengthy. However, the choice of vocabulary is unimaginative and there is little awareness of the audience. Students rarely redraft their writing to improve it, by, for example, changing the order of the ideas or improving the choice of vocabulary. Teachers correct spelling, but do not give ideas as to how the writing might be improved.

The standard of girls' reading and writing is generally higher than that of boys. In many lessons, boys are not motivated by the choice of texts and so switch off, although usually they behave well.

The work that teachers ask students to do does not match the different abilities in each of the classes. More able students do not make the progress they should as the work

does not challenge them and they often finish quickly and mark time. The least able often struggle and do not complete work as they do not understand what they have to do. The few students who are not confident English speakers sometimes have difficulty in understanding the work. In a good example, the teacher used a book written in both English and Spanish and asked Spanish speakers to teach the class and herself, a Spanish word.

A strength of all lessons is the caring environment that fosters students' confidence well. Many students are courteous and are eager to respond in class because of this. Some teachers, but not all, use this to challenge and extend students' skills by encouraging them to extend their answers and to participate in discussions. In these classes, students' learning develops well. Very often, students are too reliant on their teachers and do not think for themselves or investigate and solve problems. They are not independent enough, although the school's strong ethos sets a good foundation for such independence to be developed. Some of the teaching is slow and the materials dull, but many students still respond eagerly because of their positive attitudes.

The teaching across the school is quite variable from very good to weak, but too much is unsatisfactory and students do not make the progress they should. Consistent weaknesses are: the match of task to the ability of the students; failing to use information from assessment to plan lessons that challenge all; and too great a reliance on the textbook which does not always motivate, particularly the boys.

There is some good practice in the school, which needs to be disseminated more widely. For example, some teachers adopt a lively approach and use time deadlines to encourage students to work hard and insist that every student takes part in the lesson. In one lesson, the teacher was very responsive to the contributions that students made, which encouraged most to want to take part. She quietly took note of the shy reluctant ones and skilfully drew them in. Learning and progress in this lesson were good. Teachers sometimes set challenging homework. For example, after a lesson on verbs and tenses, a teacher asked students to find a paragraph in the local newspaper and underline verbs and name their tenses. Most teachers use physical exercises to regain the interest of students when they have been sitting for a long time and this is successful, especially when the pace of the lesson has been slow. Some teachers are careful to teach students specialist language so that when the students answer, they can do so precisely. In another example of good teaching, the teacher gave students the method and vocabulary that enabled them to reflect on their reading and to improve it.

The textbooks cover the range of understanding, knowledge and skills for language arts and reading but they are followed too rigidly and there is little progression between the classes. One example of this is that the teaching of inferential skills (the ability to use information from reading to draw conclusions) does not develop across the grades. Resources are poor but the teachers have done the best they can by trying to create attractive book displays in some of the rooms.

The co-ordinator has attended courses and visited other schools to gain information about language arts and reading, but does not have an overview of the subject in the school. No time has been given and there are no mechanisms for the coordinator to be able to monitor what is going on in other classes or to take a lead in the subject.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

There are some opportunities for students to use and develop their reading and writing skills through projects in social studies, but too often work is downloaded directly from the Internet or copied from books. On occasions, students present their research to their fellow students, which develops their oral skills well. The textbooks for science have some exercises to raise awareness of the type of writing used by scientists. Students wrote about animals of the sea in science and in one class, produced their own class reader, *A Book of Creatures*. There is little attempt to teach students about the different approaches to reading and styles of writing that are needed, for example, by science or social studies.

Mathematics

Standards of achievement are not high enough in mathematics. By the time they leave the school, students have a satisfactory grasp of calculations in mathematics and most have memorised the multiplication tables. Many, however, do not use numbers fluently, particularly in new and unusual situations. This, together with the low standards in reading, result in students not tackling mathematical problems well. Students also lack confidence when dealing with shapes and angles. Most know the names of the common two dimensional mathematical shapes and recognise a right angle, but they cannot describe angles that are about 30 degrees or 120 degrees.

This situation in mathematics, where students have a sound knowledge of some of the facts, but cannot use them effectively enough in new situations, comes about because of the way the subject is taught. In many classes the teacher relies very heavily on the text book to provide the work for the lesson. This often results in all the students working through the same set of tasks, which are too easy for some and too hard for others. There is also a shortage of equipment to support students' learning in mathematics. Even simple counting aids are absent in most classes and this has an impact on the way the younger students develop a feel for number and an understanding of processes such as addition and subtraction. In one class the teacher has collected plastic knives to serve as counters. She used these very effectively to support a lesson on subtraction; handling and seeing the counters helped the children to develop an understanding of subtraction and also to become more familiar with the pairs of numbers that add up to 10. In too many lessons, students do not have the opportunity to handle apparatus and extend their learning through seeing and feeling real objects as well as the symbols that we use for numbers.

The way that teachers use questions also has an important impact on the way students learn in mathematics. Some teachers ask questions very skilfully, using students' replies to assess their understanding and identify any misunderstandings that they have. In one lesson about multiplying large numbers, for example, the teacher collected responses from several students before asking the whole class to suggest the correct answer and to give reasons why some people had given a wrong one. This very effective technique was supported by the excellent relationships between the teacher and students, which gave them the confidence to offer a range of answers. Too often, teachers ask closed questions, take the first answer and ignore opportunities to explore and discuss mistakes.

Students behave well in almost all lessons and want to please the teacher. They listen and settle quickly to the work that they are given. When asked question, they are keen to answer, but because they are seldom asked, they are not used to explaining how they have carried out a calculation or how it could have been done another way. This restricts their ability to handle numbers in new situations. Older students, for example, being introduced to indices made some good progress in understanding that 4 to the power 3 is $4 \times 4 \times 4$, not 4×3 , as a result of lively teaching, but they ran into difficulties in working out and checking their answers. They were not able to spot short cuts or ways of estimating the outcome. In tackling 7 to the power 3 almost all used their knowledge of multiplication tables to get $7 \times 7 = 49$, but no one saw the possibility of carrying out the next step of 49×7 as (7×50) minus 7. Encouraging students to talk about the subject and to explore alternative approaches would help to develop this sort of facility with number.

At the moment there is no plan for teaching mathematics across the school, other than the sequence set out in the text books. This means that teachers are not aware of what is happening in other classes and so miss opportunities to plan together and reduce their work load. The idea of co-ordinating the subject has only just been introduced and the co-ordinator has not yet had time to have any impact. There are significant opportunities to spread the effective approaches to teaching the subject to all classes, to plan together following an agreed approach across the school and to identify what apparatus and resources are needed in each class to help students learn more effectively.

Numeracy across the curriculum

Very little use is made of mathematical concepts in other parts of the curriculum. Little use is made of numbers in classrooms, apart from number squares 1 to 100 in some classes. Graphs are used to display data in the K, but this good practice does not continue into the rest of the school, as it could do in, for example social studies lessons, or to compare students' attendance.

Provision for students in the K and Pre-K classes

Many of the children start pre-K and K classes with poorly developed social and language skills. During their time in these classes, children do not make enough progress and they move into the main school with skills and knowledge lower than expected for their age. The children are not given the necessary solid foundation for their learning in these early years. An inappropriate curriculum and shortage of key resources have led to teaching that does not match the children's needs.

There are 21 children and one teacher in each of the pre-K and K classes. Neither class has a teacher's aide, although both have about one hour's support every morning from another teacher. Relationships in these classes are kind and caring and staff are very committed and hard working. However, the ratio of students to adults is too high, so that children are not getting enough individual attention. Neither pre-K nor K classes meets the Education Council's recommendations for staffing levels, which are:

One adult to 10 children aged three to four years old

One adult to 12 children aged four to five years old.

The teachers attempt to teach the whole class together for much of the time. This is not an appropriate approach for such young children and is not effective. In both classes, the mornings consist mainly of children sitting and listening to instructions and signing songs and rhymes. Children display a high level of restlessness and irritability during

these sessions and at times the noise rises to an unacceptably loud level. Teachers employ good strategies to try to keep the children's attention, such as singing songs and doing action rhymes, but the children do not always respond well. Both classrooms have children who are finding the transition from home to school difficult and are reluctant to sit and listen. Teachers use gentle persuasion, but spend a lot of time attempting to control children's difficult behaviour.

When the children are split into groups for practical activities, they calm down noticeably and look forward to doing their work. However, they are all usually given the same activity to do, which does not sustain their motivation and interest. For example, all children were asked to count six objects and match them to a written numeral six. Many completed the task quickly and easily; they then became restless and noisy. Children need to be given different tasks according to age and ability to help them to concentrate for longer and work more co-operatively.

In the afternoon there is some opportunity for children to learn, explore and discover through activities that are more appropriate for their age, such as *play dough* and painting. The end of the school day is 3 pm, but some of the children in pre-K are collected up to half an hour before this, which reduces the time that they can engage in these good practical activities, and undermines their value.

The rooms are bright and have attractive posters and displays on the wall, showing children's art work. There is very little space in each room to provide for a good range of learning areas that these young children need, such as a book corner, writing table, or sand and water trays. Without these different areas it is difficult for children to practice the skills they need to develop their concentration, language, independence and fine motor skills. There is a good size outdoor area immediately outside both classrooms, but it is under-utilized. Children are not given enough opportunities to develop their physical skills and coordination.

