

# Inspection 2004

## Introduction

This review was commissioned by The British Schools of America. It had a dual purpose:

- To support the school in its drive for improvement
- To provide assurance to the various stakeholders that the school is providing high quality education.

These two aspects have equal importance meaning that the review was intended to be both supportive and rigorous.

The review was conducted by Fieldwork Education. The team consisted of two people, Graham Reeves and Howard Marshall.

**Graham Reeves** is Director of Fieldwork Education Services, a division of Fieldwork Education. He was formerly headteacher of a large primary school. In the UK where he has also been an inspector for the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), a member of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, visiting lecturer at the universities of Greenwich, London and East London and an Acting Regional Secretary for the countries. He was responsible for the early development of the International Primary Curriculum and has provided training in many locations throughout the world. He has been editor of Primary File, the Home School File and the SEN Coordinator's File. He conducted reviews of international school in Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Austria, Malaysia, Brunei, Nigeria, Gabon, Russia, and Syria.

**Howard Marshall** is an independent education consultant. Until recently he was a principal adviser for the London Borough of Bromley's Standards and Effectiveness Service. He has 18 years experience of working with both primary and secondary head teachers, teachers and governing bodies on issues such as school improvement planning, target setting, data analysis and school self-evaluation. He is an accredited primary and secondary inspector for the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, and as such has experience of conducting inspections of schools in England on behalf of the UK government's Department for Education and Skills. He is also an external adviser for performance management. As school improvement adviser to schools he has been involved in reviews, headteacher and deputy headteacher appointments, governor and Board training and post-review action planning. His recent key responsibilities include leading the Primary and Key Stage 3 Strategies for a London Borough, On behalf of Fieldwork Education, Howard has conducted reviews of international schools in the Netherlands, Sweden, Malaysia and Russia.

We spent some time before the visit reading documents sent to us by the school. The actual

review was held from Wednesday 6th to Friday 8th October 2004. During the course of the review process we:

- observed lessons for a total of almost 16 hours
- looked at samples of children's work
- met with the headteacher
- met with the deputy headteacher
- met with the staff team
- talked with individual teachers
- talked with children
- read a range of documentation
- observed other activities including an assembly and after-school clubs
- met informally with parents, including the Chair of the Consultative Board

The framework for this review has three main sections: Learning, Teaching for Learning and School Conditions.

In this report ó after a brief description of the school ó there is information about our findings in each of the three sections. There is also a statement about what we consider to be the key recommendation and finally some concluding remarks.

## **The School**

The British School of Boston provides an education, utilising the National Curriculum for England, for children of all nationalities. The school, a non-selective independent school which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Education Overseas Ltd., opened in September 2000 and has seen a rapid growth in the number of children and students on roll. At present the school accepts children from 3 to 14 years of age (Nursery to Year 9) and there are 238 children and students on roll. The future aim of the school is to provide an education for 3-18 year olds. In 2003 the school relocated from its start up location in Dedham to its permanent home on the site of the Showa Women's University campus. The school will move into its new purpose-built accommodation at the beginning of the next academic year.

Apart from the headteacher and deputy headteacher, there are 22 full-time teachers and 1 part-time teacher. The current teachers are mainly British. There was a substantial turnover of teaching staff at the beginning of this academic year. The current head teacher has been in post since January 2003.

During the review we found that children and students' results in English, mathematics and science are high. The school is well led and managed and the teaching we saw was of a high standard. We noted that a particular strength of the school is the atmosphere for learning and personal development.

## **Learning**

Schools exist to promote children's learning, so this was the main focus of the review. We considered learning in its widest sense, including such things as academic, personal, social, moral and physical development. Throughout this report we will refer to attainment and progress. Progress is more objective judgement of a school's performance than attainment. Children's attainment can be put down to a wide range of factors including the innate ability and experiences they bring from home. Their progress, on the other hand, is directly related to how well the school is organised and to what teachers are doing in the classroom. Also, children can have high attainment due to their innate ability without making much progress as a result of their schooling. A school is responsible for the progress of children of all abilities, not for those abilities themselves.

Language and mathematics are taught using the literacy and numeracy strategies of the English National Curriculum. These subjects, and science, are externally assessed using end of key stage assessments (known as SATs) and we therefore have benchmarks so that we can judge standards in comparison with expectations in England.

The external results of the end of key stage assessments have been high. During the review we were able to confirm that standards remain high. From the evidence we observed and that provided by the school, our judgment is that the progress made by children throughout the school is above that which can normally be expected and, in some cases, well above.

### **Foundation Stage**

Children entering the school in the Foundation Stage are generally more advanced than would be expected in most schools in England in terms of their personal and social development and their readiness to learn. Our judgement is that the school builds on this and the youngest children make rapid progress. The progress made by children during the Foundation Stage is good, providing them with a very positive start to their learning.

Examples of learning we observed in the Foundation Stage classes include:

- children in Foundation 1 learning to write their name and using pretend writing for the names of other family members
- children in Foundation 1 developing listening skills and learning to co-operate
- children in Foundation 2 successfully identifying objects beginning with t, l, and h
- children in Foundation 2 demonstrating good progress in their skipping in a physical education lesson

### **English, mathematics and science (core subjects)**

Overall standards in English, mathematics, and science exceed the expected levels of attainment set out in the National Curriculum for England. This means that levels of attainment are high compared with those in maintained schools in England, and compare well with independent schools and British-style international schools. Some children read very high standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 (the end of key stages 1 and 2).

Mathematics results in 2004 show that two-thirds of the children in Year 2 and most children in Year 6 exceeded the level expected of their age.

In English, most children in Year 2 exceeded the level expected of their age for reading and for writing. In Year 6, almost half the children exceeded the level expected of their age. These children achieved the expectation of 14 year olds in the English system. Indications are that results in 2005 will continue to exceed the expected levels. The school has correctly identified the disparity in performance between reading and writing as an area within the school improvement plan. This disparity is also evident in schools in England.

In Key Stage 2 science (there is no formal assessment for Key Stage 1 science) results show that all children achieved the expectation of 14 year olds in the English system. Indications are that the disparity in performance between reading and writing as an area within the school improvement plan. This disparity is also evident in school in England.

In addition, the school also uses an internal assessment at the end of Key Stage 2 to indicate the performance of the most able. In all of the core subjects there are several children achieving the most able. In all of the core subjects there are several children achieving the levels well above those expected at Key Stage 2 and also above the levels expected for 14 year olds.

The current Year 9 students will be the first in this school to reach the end of Key Stage 3. The school uses a range of assessment tools to monitor their progress in learning. From observations and review of the available data, it is our view that these students will perform at a high standard in comparison to their peers in England. Optional English and mathematics tests taken at the end of Year 8 indicate that almost all children will achieve at least a level 5 (the expectation in England) with several performing well beyond this level.

Almost all children, including those with special educational needs and with English as an additional language, make progress in almost all lessons and over a period of time. This is noteworthy considering that children often join and leave the school at times other than at the beginning and end of school years and terms, and that they have sometimes change schools on a number of occasions.

The small number of children with special educational needs have individual education plans. Teachers give them support and encouragement and monitor their progress. These children develop a range of strategies to help them make progress.

In English the standard of children's writing is high. The school is working hard to further improve this aspect of children's learning. Writing skills are reinforced throughout the curriculum, so children write with a purpose ó writing about activities in other subjects, for example. Most learn to tackle some of the aspects that don't always come easily to them, such as writing independently. In lessons, most children are fluent, lively, articulate speakers. Almost all speak confidently in small and large groups. This is a strength of the attainment in the school.

In English lessons and in work in books and on display, standards are good overall and the

attainment of some children is well above National Curriculum expectation.

Children throughout the school were observed working independently to check the accuracy of their work.

Children use literacy skills across the curriculum, and work in their books reflects good standards in the writing in a range of genres such as experiments, diaries, letters and reviews. Such activities reinforce their skills and provide them with opportunities to write for specific purposes.

In mathematics lessons and in work in books and on display, standards are good overall and the attainment of some children is well above National Curriculum expectations. There was evidence throughout the school of children applying their mathematical knowledge.

The work in books indicates that the children are making good progress across the full range of the mathematics curriculum.

In science lessons and in work in books and on display, standards are good overall and the attainment of some children is well above National Curriculum expectations. There was evidence throughout the school of children making good progress in their understanding of scientific concepts and their ability to articulate the knowledge.

There are no noticeable significant differences between the progress of boys and that of girls or the learning of children from different nationalities and ethnic groups in English, mathematics and science. This is good.

There were many examples of good learning observed in the core subjects. These include the following:

- older children in Key Stage 1 explaining the use of the 100 square when adding 10, 11 and 12 to 2 digit numbers
- older children in Key Stage 2 developing their understanding of the equivalence of fractions and in another session using inverse operations to check their results
- students in Year 8 using their previous learning to investigate and hypothesise about relationship in mathematical problems
- students in Year 9 engaged in a practical activity to learn about the flow of electricity and demonstrating their understanding in a detailed class discussion
- Year 8 students demonstrating a mature attitude to their learning in their discussions and review writing about Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry
- children in Year 1 learning about time connectives
- students in Year 7 engaged in a very high quality discussion identifying specific passages to draw inferences and making points about the book they were reading
- children and students regularly using dictionaries and thesauruses to check their work

## **Other subjects**

In the lessons observed in the foundation subjects (those other than the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science) nearly all children attain the levels expected for their age by the National Curriculum, with many achieving above these expectations. This is noteworthy, as in England many do not attain these expectations. From the evidence made available, the progress made by children is also at least at the rate one would expect in these subjects. The programme provided in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 for modern foreign languages ensures that standards are well above those expected in schools in England where foreign language teaching is optional and still relatively rare. The learning observed in both French and Spanish is providing the children with a very good basis for future language acquisition.

Resources for certain areas of the curriculum do not enable learning to be as good as in other subjects. Specific examples include design and technology, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT) across the school and modern foreign languages and music at Key Stage 3. In these subjects the progress made by children is hindered, as the breadth of the curriculum is restricted by the lack of resources.

During lessons and break times, children communicate freely with teachers and each other. They listen well to teachers and each other. Without exception, children behave politely and with respect towards teachers and other adults. They are articulate and enthusiastic when offering explanations and information to visitors, They are used to people from a range of ethnicities and countries. Their personal and social skills demonstrated when eating lunch are exemplary.

There were many examples of good learning observed in the foundation subjects throughout the school. These include the following:

- Year 8 students explaining their findings have made independent interpretations of pictures and photographs.
- Year 2 children applying their knowledge of Venn diagrams in their work on the similarities and differences between two contrasting environments.
- Year 7 students drawing on previous learning to explain the relationship between earthquakes and volcanoes in a whole class discussion.
- children in Year 3 listening to and then answering questions in French
- children in Year 5 responding well to question and instructions in Spanish and developing Spanish accents.
- Year 4 children learning about and being able to identify *tristato* in a piece of music

## **Teaching for Learning**

Teaching is the most important factor in promoting children's learning. For this part of the review we considered not only the teaching that happens in classrooms and elsewhere but also how the school supports teaching that enables children to learn well.

### **The quality of teaching**

When we observed teaching, we looked particularly at what teachers were doing to help children and students learn, achieve high standards and make progress. We saw many good features in the teaching we observed.

One particular factor that we noted was the way in which teachers and other adults value the children and students. They clearly know them well and have developed good relationships with them. When speaking and listening to the children staff provide a positive example. They take a genuine interest in the children's experiences. This has an enormous effect on the children and students who learn to respect the adults and each other.

We observed teachers making good use of praise where it was appropriate. Learning is celebrated in lessons and children's efforts and achievements are acknowledged. This encourages further learning and helps children and students to develop self-respect and a sense of worth.

Teachers set high standards of both behaviour and learning. They often set challenging tasks that help children and students to improve their knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes. In doing this they create a situation in which children and students make progress which is always as good as, or usually better than, might be reasonably expected. The value-added provided by the school is therefore high.

We noted that, in many lessons, the pace set by teachers was particularly effective. Little time was wasted by unnecessary activities. Children and students were given opportunities to acquire new learning and consolidate existing learning, and were encouraged to move on when the time was right. This approach again contributes to the progress that they make.

Teachers use a variety of strategies to promote learning. Among the many good examples we saw were:

- a teacher using a puppet to enhance communication with children
- children being asked to talk to each other about the answer to a question before actually answering it to the teacher. This means that children are all involved, that they develop speaking and listening skills and that they learn from each other as well as the teacher
- students being involved in high quality group discussions about the book they had been reading
- teachers regularly making connections to previous learning
- a teacher developing children's Spanish pronunciation by the use of repetition and songs
- a teacher accessing different learning styles by, for example, asking students to model and enact the workings of an electric circuit

Teachers provide their classes with very good explanation of what they are expected to do. This clarity of instruction appears to be a strong feature of teaching throughout the school. It means that children and students almost always know exactly what is expected of them. If there is any doubt, teachers are quick to notice and to deal with the situation.

We also saw some very good examples of teachers explaining clearly to children and students

what they are expected to learn through the activities. In some classes the learning objectives for the week and/or for particular lessons are displayed on the board. In some cases the teacher tells children and students what the learning objectives are and then refers back to these objectives during the course of the lesson. From our own experience and from the research into the field, we believe that such clarity helps children to learn. Indeed in very few lessons we observed that were not so good, there was little clarity in the plans or in the lessons themselves about what the children were expected to learn. We recommend that the school consider the value of establishing common practice about the setting and communication of learning objectives.

Many lessons end in plenary sessions in which the teacher and the class discuss what has been learnt. These plenaries are generally used by the teacher to recap, to encourage the children and students to practice skills and to assess children's knowledge. Our experience elsewhere has shown us that it is valuable for the teacher and the class to reflect on learning within the lesson. This can help to consolidate learning and to set the scene for future learning or perhaps linking with procedures for target setting. We saw little evidence of this in the lessons we observed. This could, therefore, be considered an area in which teachers could raise the quality of teaching to an even higher level.

We recommend that the school consider the value of establishing common practice about using plenary sessions to provide opportunities for teachers, children and students to reflect on learning.

We saw very few examples of teachers giving children opportunities to use ICT as an integral part of their learning. We recognize that there have been considerable difficulties with equipment but hope that ways will be found to deal with these or otherwise children's attainment will suffer.

### **Curriculum**

The school's curriculum is firmly based on the National Curriculum for England. It uses the attainment targets and level descriptions as set out in the National Curriculum and assesses children against these norms. For English and mathematics, it makes use of appropriate aspects of the national literacy and numeracy strategies associated with the National Curriculum, thus giving a reliable structure for lesson in these subjects. For other subjects the school plans to introduce the International Primary Curriculum. This will enhance the curriculum for children up to Year 6 or 7, providing clear learning goals and targets and adding a greater international dimension. The introduction of the international Baccalaureate Diploma at Key Stage 4 will also be a major curriculum development for the future.

The school has developed schemes of work or medium term plans for each subject of the curriculum. These provide teachers with a useful framework on which to base their own lesson plans. We were told that these medium term plans were flexible or in that teachers could depart from the suggested activities as long as they enabled children and students to achieve the stated objectives. Our impression of the medium terms plans is that, while they do provide a useful framework or and provide a fuller structure than that in many international schools or they are not always as helpful as they might be. This is because:

- the learning objectives set aren't always sufficiently clear

- the learning objectives do not always easily relate to the National Curriculum
- the activities sometimes lack challenge
- they don't always cover the full range of National Curriculum requirements

The school is aware of this situation and is rightly keeping the medium term plans under review ó revising them and developing them further. The introduction of the international Primary Curriculum will largely resolve this issue for the primary school.

The curriculum is supported and enhanced by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities that are followed by a large number of children and students of all ages. These activities represent a particular strength of the school and constitute one of the ways in which the school demonstrates its commitment to children's personal development and in which the teachers who how much they value and respect the children. The curriculum is also enhanced by educational trips both within the US and internationally.

To some extent, issues of resourcing restrict the breadth of the curriculum. In particular we noted:

- the limited availability of hardware and software for the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum. Without additional resources teachers will be unable to provide the learning opportunities required to meet National Curriculum and IB requirements
- the lack of specialist facilities for aspects of the physical education curriculum such as gymnastics and dance
- the lack of specialist facilities for art, design and technology
- the lack of language laboratory facilities for modern foreign languages
- the limited size and resourcing of the library for a school of its current- and increasing-size

We understand that some of these issues will be resolved when the school moves to its new premises. Nevertheless, we suggest that the school conduct an audit of resources and take steps to deal with any shortcomings.

### **Learning time**

Our observations showed us that the school makes good use of time, with a good pace within lessons. We are aware that the geography of the school and size means that there are often delays between, for instance, the end of playtime and the beginning of lessons. We imagine that such delays would be greater in colder weather when children and students will be wearing outdoor clothes. We also anticipate that the opening of the new premises will partly resolve this issue.

### **Educational climate**

The educational climate of the school is notably directed towards the personal development and learning of children and students. Children are well cared for. Appropriate steps are taken to ensure their safety in classrooms and around the school and site. They successfully promote good

behaviour and teach children and students to respect their peers and other people, enhancing their confidence and self-esteem.

## **School conditions**

School conditions are those factors, which contribute to the life of a school in general and to learning in particular.

### **Leadership and management**

Effective leadership and management are essential for a school to operate successfully and efficiently. The responsibility for leadership and management in any school is not restricted to the headteacher and deputy headteacher but is shared by the teachers and by support staff. The purpose of leadership and management is to create an environment in which learning can and does take place.

It is our perception that the school has moved a long way forward in its brief lifespan. It continues to make progress because of the strong leadership provided by the headteacher and others.

There is a strong structure for leadership, including, for example, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the key stage leaders ó all of whom are hard working and dedicated, and make enormously positive contributions to the ethos of the school. Staff with a leadership role in any area are crucial to the future development and expansion of the school. The school recognizes that the main focus of all its leaders should be on learning. In a rapidly changing situation, many other issues can assume importance and the essential focus on learning could be easily overlooked. The school is aware of this danger and is rightly determined to avoid it. We recommend that the school continue to review the roles and responsibilities of its leaders and managers to ensure that they all have sufficient opportunities to contribute as much as possible to the quality of learning throughout the school.

The school has a particularly clear sense of direction. This appears to come from the headteacher's own vision for the school's future and is shared by others associated with it, particularly the senior managers. The school has a strong mission statement and evolving set of aims. The recently produced strategic plan is a sound base for improving the educational provision still further as the school expands and enters the next exciting phase with its new building. Our view is that the direction chosen is the right one and that the school has great potential for future success.

### **Care for children**

The school provides good support and guidance for children and student's personal development both in and out of the classroom and children and students develop well.

Success at all levels is celebrated, and during our visit we were able to attend an assembly in which awards were made to children and students for both behaviour and academic success.

The school does a great deal to assess the standards achieved by children and students in their learning. It uses a range of assessment materials, including the National Curriculum end of key stage assessments commonly known as SATs. Through these assessments, teachers can assess what children know and are able to do in English, mathematics and science. Teachers keep records of the assessment results, together with samples of work done by children and students. These records contribute to the knowledge that teachers have of what children have learned. During the review we were able to look at some random examples of reports that teachers had written for parents. These demonstrate very good professional practice and show that teachers know children and their attainment very well.

The school does not yet analyse the results to any great extent. It does not, for example, track the progress of individuals or groups. Nor does it keep a systematic record of comparative achievement in different aspects of the curriculum. This means that the school does not have easy access to the necessary information to enable it to reliably inform future learning, or to set evidence-based targets for individuals, groups or the school as a whole.

We recommend that the school establishes a systematic tracking system, which will enable it to set curricular, group, and individual targets for the future.

### **Professional development**

The school attempts to provide professional development opportunities for its teaching staff through, for example, the induction procedure and school-based training. It is not always clear to the teachers how the professional development activities are identified or what they are intended to achieve. Clarity is particularly important in a situation in which opportunities are limited by location and budgetary constraints. It was suggested to us that teachers' needs are not being met. We were unable to confirm or refute this in the time available to us but it does seem that greater clarity would be a benefit to all concerned. We suggest that the school develops a professional development policy to set out what is available and how professional development resources will be allocated. We also suggest that professional development activities are closely linked to learning targets identified in the school improvement plan.

### **Internal communications**

It seems to us that, despite the communication difficulties posed by the current accommodation, internal communication is good. There are successful systems of communication through, for instance, handbooks, staff meetings and daily briefings.

Most importantly, teachers and other are made aware of the school's direction and of the underpinning principles and policies.

### **Partnerships**

Learning can often be enhanced through partnerships a school is able to develop with others. Despite the fact that it is still relatively young, we noted that the school does, in fact, a number of

valuable partnerships.

The most important partner for any school is the parent body. Although we weren't specifically asked to investigate the school's relationship with parents, we noted the quality of communications with parents through, for example, the website, the school brochure, handbooks, contact books, the consultative board and attendance at special events such as achievement assemblies.

Other notable partnerships include:

- New England Sports Academy- where Key Stage 3 students will be having physical education lessons
- European Council for International Schools (ECIS) - from which one student recently received an award for international understanding
- Council for International Schools in the Americas
- Association for Independent Schools of New England
- local schools- with whom a series of sports fixtures is being planned
- Showa Women's University- on whose site the school is based on with which a mutually beneficial relationship is developing.

## **Key recommendations**

Throughout the report we have made various suggestions about what the school might do to enable it to provide an even better education for its children. We believe these are all important for the school to consider and act upon. There are particular things on which we think the school should focus.

We recommend the school:

- Consider the value of establishing common practice about the setting and communication of learning objectives
- Consider the value of establishing common practice about using plenary sessions to provide opportunities for teachers, children and students to reflect on learning
- Continue to review the roles and responsibilities of its leaders and managers to ensure that they all have sufficient opportunities to contribute as much as possible to the quality of learning throughout the school.
- Establish a systematic tracking system which will enable it to set curricular, group and individual targets for the future

## **Conclusion**

We are grateful for the welcome we received in the school. We realise that any review of performance is bound to be a stressful experience, particularly when the results are to be made available in a relatively small community. Despite this, we were very well received and given every assistance to make our visit both professionally rewarding and personally enjoyable.

What we have produced is a closely observed snapshot of the school. It is now for the school to consider this report alongside all the other information it has and to take any action that it regards as appropriate. We have tried to be supportive and hope that the outcome of our review helps the school in its future development and in fulfilling its aim to ensure that all children are given the opportunity and environment to achieve their full potential.

Graham Reeves  
Howard Marshall  
October 2004