

# 2004 Inspection

## Fieldwork Education Services

The Review of the British School of Houston, October 2004  
Summary Report

### 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 three people, Helen O'Donoghue, Graham Reeves and Howard Marshall.

**Helen O'Donoghue** currently Assistant Director of Fieldwork Education Services, a division of Fieldwork Education. She has eighteen years of working in education including many years of international education experience and has taken key leadership responsibility in schools in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Germany. Until recently she was the Principal of a large international primary school in Berlin.

**Graham Reeves** is Director of Fieldwork Education Services. 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), He now works with international schools in many countries and has conducted reviews of international schools 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 in the UK. 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. On behalf of Fieldwork Education, he 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 Tuesday 12th to Friday 15th October 2004.

During the course of the review process we:

- observed over 60 lessons for a total of approximately 30 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 assemblies, club activities and visits from guests to the school

## **Overview**

During the review we found that children and student's results in English, Mathematics and Science are very 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 refer to attainment and progress. Progress is a more objective judgement of a school's performance than attainment. Children's and student's attainment can be attributed 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 and students of all abilities, not for those abilities themselves.

English and Mathematics are taught using the literacy and numeracy strategies of the English National Curriculum. These subjects 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 very high. During the review we were able to confirm that standards remain very high. Our judgement 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'. 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.

### **English, mathematics and science (core subjects) in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3**

Overall standards in English, Mathematics and Science exceed the expected levels of attainment set out in the National Curriculum for England. Very few children or students do not achieve the level expected by the National Curriculum. 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. It is worth noting that in England many children **do not** attain the expected levels.

Given this context, it is clear that some children reach very high standards at the end of Year 2, Year 6 and Year 9 (the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3).

Mathematics results in 2004 show that all the children in Year 2 reach the levels expected of their age with two-thirds reaching one level higher. Over half of the children in Year 6 exceeded the expected level. Year 9 standards are extremely high with nearly all students achieving at least one level above expectations of their age and one fifth of students achieving 3 levels above.

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, where results are very high, and writing as an area within the school improvement plan. This disparity in performance is also evident in many schools in England. Year 9 standards are very high with all students achieving a level at least one above the expectations in England.

In Key Stage 2 science (there is no formal statutory assessment for Key Stage 1 science in the English system) results show that only a small number failed to achieve the expected level with nearly all children reaching a level above that expected of their age.

In Key Stage 3 science, all students achieve the level expected with nearly three quarters of children achieving a level at least one above the expectation with one third achieving two levels above. These standards are very high.

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. The small numbers of children and students with special educational needs, including those identified as very able, have individual education plans. Teachers give them support and encouragement and monitor their progress. These children and students are able to develop a range of strategies to help them make progress.

In **English** the standard of writing is high. The school is working hard to further improve this aspect of children's learning. 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 and students is well above National Curriculum expectations.

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 of children and students making good progress in their understanding of scientific concepts and their ability to articulate this knowledge.

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

## **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. The one exception to this judgement is in information and communication technology (ICT) where standards are below those expected by the National Curriculum. Currently the resources available do not enable the children to access all the areas of learning required for them to reach the levels expected of their age.

From the evidence made available, the progress made by children is also at least at the rate one would expect in all subjects apart from ICT. In England, foreign language teaching in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is still relatively rare and, therefore, the programme provided ensures that standards are above those expected.

## **Key Stage 4**

Standards are high in the lessons observed during the review. Predicted grades indicate that results will be high in comparison to schools in England. The school made a very good start with excellent results in mathematics and modern foreign languages GCSEs in 2004. All students gained at least a C grade with many achieving A and A\* grades. This is noteworthy considering the students took the examinations one year early. From the evidence we have, students make very good progress in Key Stage 4.

During the review we did not observe many lessons in the school where children and students were encouraged to participate in independent investigative learning activities. We are aware that the school does offer several enrichment days during the course of the year where this is the focus. **We recommend that the school review the extent to which children and students have opportunities to take part in independent, investigative learning activities as part of the day-to-day curriculum.**

## **Teaching for Learning**

Teaching is the most important factor in promoting 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**

Teachers at the school are successful in promoting good learning experiences and enabling children to reach high levels of attainment and to make good progress. Teachers value children and their learning and there is a good atmosphere of mutual respect between teacher and child/student. Teachers display a firm and friendly, encouraging attitude towards the children and students to help maximise their learning.

Teachers provide the children and students with learning opportunities that are high challenge in a low stress environment. Where children and students were given the opportunity to work independently they made good progress in their learning. During the review these opportunities for independent learning were not observed on many occasions. **We recommend that the school reviews the extent to which children and students have opportunities to take part in independent, investigative learning activities as part of the day-to-day curriculum.**

Most lessons are very well structured, with the teacher giving clear explanations of the subject matter and task. This aspect of teaching is a particular strength of the school. Teachers give good support to different ability groups and ensure they understand what it is they need to do to be successful in their work.

We observed very few examples of teachers using ICT as an integral part of learning across the curriculum. We recognise that there have been difficulties with equipment but these need to be overcome if children and student's learning is not to suffer.

## **The Curriculum**

The school's curriculum is firmly based on the National Curriculum for England and Wales. It uses the attainment targets and level descriptions as set out in the National Curriculum and assesses the children against these norms. The planned introduction of the International Baccalaureate Diploma at Key Stage 4 from September 2005 will be a major curriculum development.

The school has developed comprehensive schemes of work for each subject of the curriculum. These provide the teachers with a good framework on which to base their lesson plans.

The curriculum is supported and enhanced by a very wide range of extra curricular activities. These activities are a strength of the school and this is a good indicator of its commitment to the academic, personal, social and physical development of the children and students. The curriculum is further enhanced by the educational field trips for children and students.

The breadth of the curriculum is enhanced by the teaching of French from the Foundation Stage through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. The provision Dutch language and culture for Dutch children and students is also a very good extension to the curriculum.

Issues of ICT provision both in terms of hardware and use of ICT across the curriculum restrict the breadth of the curriculum. Without additional resources teachers will be unable to provide the learning opportunities required to meet National Curriculum and IB requirements.

We recommend that the school investigate strategies to improve the use of ICT across the curriculum (including increasing the quantity of computers available for use across the school).

## **Learning Time**

Our observations showed us that the school makes good use of time. The lessons observed were well prepared and had good pace. Some lessons started late, particularly in Key Stage 3 and 4. Timetabled hours are greater than those recommended for schools in England. The school allocates this time well to meet curriculum expectations.

## **Educational Climate**

The educational climate of the school is one of care and concern for the academic, personal, social, moral and physical development of children and students. The school provides a structure in which children and students are well cared for and are safe. Throughout the school there is a happy atmosphere, where teachers promote children's and students' self confidence and self-esteem. Learning is encouraged and celebrated in many different ways.

## **School Conditions**

School conditions are all those other things that contribute to the life of a school in general and to learning in particular.

## **Leadership and Management**

The school has progressed well in a short period of time and this is largely due to the strong leadership of the headteacher and the leadership team. There is a strong sense of direction.

## **Care for children**

The school is one in which the adults clearly show great care for the children and students – promoting both their personal and their academic development. This was evident in classes, around the school and from our many conversations with teachers and with children of all ages.

There are good policies on promoting good behaviour and on preventing bullying, and the school improvement plan identifies activities to take such initiatives further. The existing policies advocate a positive approach, which is evident throughout the school. There are also good policies on child protection and on supporting able children. There are well-developed systems of rewards for both personal development and achievement.

The school does an enormous amount to assess and monitor children's and students' learning. It has a great deal of data gathered from a range of assessment results. These are recorded and passed from teacher to teacher as children and students move through the school. This is good practice. The school has begun to analyse the data to track the progress of individuals in the core subjects and in Key Stage 4. **We recommend that the school continue to develop this data analysis to include the foundation subjects and to investigate comparative attainment and progress of different groups (such as boys and girls) and different cohorts, and comparative results in different aspects of the curriculum.** This would make it possible for the school to use existing and new data to identify targets for the further improvement of learning.

## **Care for quality**

The school has procedures in place to monitor and promote the quality of its educational provision.

## **Professional development**

The school endeavours to provide professional development opportunities for its teaching staff, through, for example the induction procedure, and occasional school-based training. The improvement plan actions will take this further.

The school has a draft professional development policy, and plans to set out what is available and how resources will be allocated. Professional development activities can then be closely linked to learning targets identified in the school improvement plan. The introduction of a performance management procedure should also help the school identify the professional development needs of individual teachers. It is likely that well-targeted professional development would help the school to achieve greater stability by retaining teachers who might otherwise decide to move on.

## **Internal communications**

Internal communication appears to us to be good.

## **Partnerships**

Despite the fact that it is still relatively young, we noted that the school has a number of valuable partnerships.

The quality of written reports is particularly high. The depth of these reports is noteworthy and – together with such initiatives as back to school nights, written guides for parents, consultation on individual target setting, and the school website – are a good indication of partnership between the school and parents. One of the priorities identified in the school improvement plan is to develop this partnership further.

We noted other valuable partnerships with a range of organisations.

## **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 that the school:**

- build on the existing good practice to agree the common features of sharing learning intentions with children and students
- build on the existing good practice to agree the common features of effective plenary sessions
- draw- together its effective practice into one learning policy for the whole school
- review the extent to which children and students have opportunities to take part in independent, investigative learning activities as part of the day to day curriculum
- continue to develop its data analysis to include the foundation subjects and to investigate comparative attainment and progress of different groups (such as boys and girls) and different cohorts, and comparative results in different aspects of the curriculum
- investigate strategies to improve the use of ICT across the curriculum (including increasing the quantity of computers available for use across the school)

## **Conclusion**

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 hope that the outcomes of our review help 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.

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