

## **Thames View Infants**

### **Report following 'mock inspection' visit of 11-12 February 2014 by Chris Nye (Education Consultant and retired HMI)**

#### **Context:**

The school commissioned the 'mock' inspection as part of their preparation for their next Ofsted inspection, which will be their first as an academy. The predecessor school was inspected in 2009 and at that time was judged to be outstanding in all the main sections of the report.

The visit was undertaken by one consultant and lasted two and a half days. Inspection activities included: 16 Lesson observations (most undertaken jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher); safeguarding checks; scrutiny of attendance records; scrutiny of pupils' work; observation of assemblies; scrutiny of a wide range of documentation; meetings with: pupils, staff, senior leaders (including the headteacher and deputy headteacher), governors and external stakeholders.

#### **The achievement of pupils:**

- In a section 5 Ofsted inspection, it is likely that this aspect of the school's work would be judged as outstanding.
- Children enter the nursery with skills significantly below those expected for their age. All children start at below the 30 to 50 month progress check criteria in their personal, social and emotional development (PSED), their physical development (PD), communications and language (CL) literacy (L) and mathematical development (M). This reflects the very high percentage of vulnerable children, including those who speak English as an additional language. Children make good progress in the nursery classes and evidence gathered during the visit demonstrated particular strengths in their progress in PSED and CL in particular. From exceptionally low starting points, children leave the nursery with skills still below those expect for their age, but the very good start that they have been given in the school is further built upon in the Reception Classes.
- In Reception, children make accelerated progress in all prime and specific areas of the EYFS Early Learning Goals. By the time they leave reception, the percentage attaining a good level of development is consistently well above that found both locally and nationally. For example, in 2013 68.1% of the children achieved a good level of development in all areas, compared with 52% nationally and 45.8% in the local authority. Given the low level of

attainment on entry, this represents outstanding progress. Progress is especially good in PSED, communication and language.

- In Key Stage 1 children's excellent progress in their learning is further built upon and outcomes are consistently and significantly above that found in other schools locally and nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The average point score has been significantly above average in recent years, but has nevertheless continued to steadily improve, reaching its highest point yet in 2013 when this was 19.6 in reading (national: 16.3), 18.9 in writing (national: 14.9) and 19.2 in mathematics (national: 16.1). The percentage gaining the higher level 3 is also considerably above that found elsewhere with, in 2013, 70% attaining level 3 in reading (national: 29%), 64% in writing (national: 15%) and 60% in mathematics (national: 23%).
- Vulnerable groups such as those who benefit from pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs or disabilities also make excellent progress from their starting points to achieve well above these groups nationally and only just below their peers within the school.
- In Year 1, the excellent teaching of phonics means that the percentage attaining the expected level in the phonics screening has been well above local and national results since the screening was introduced. For example, in 2013, 91% attained the expected level when the national average was 69%.
- A range of evidence was gathered during the visit to ensure that the teachers' assessment of pupils' achievement was fair, accurate and rigorous. This included scrutiny of pupils' work, scrutiny of case study evidence of assessments against national curriculum levels and in-depth monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment during lesson observations. The result of this was the conclusion that systems to assess the progress and attainment of all pupils are both rigorous and accurate. Both internal and external moderation is carried out to validate judgments and there is, therefore, nothing to suggest that these exceptionally high levels of attainment are not accurate.
- The quality of presentation and handwriting of pupils' work is good, but could be further enhanced by encouraging pupils confidently using a cursive handwriting style to write in pen. Also, it should be noted that the quality of handwriting and presentation dips in science and topic books.
- During the visit, pupils were observed in lessons making consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They are very articulate and demonstrate high levels of confidence in their use of speaking and listening skills. The quality of their extended writing is exceptional, demonstrating their

writing stamina and enthusiasm. This provides further evidence to confirm the school's claim of outstanding achievement.

- Although reading is a strength, still more could be done to expand pupils' enthusiasm for reading, for example through such initiatives as 'Extreme Reading'.
- The school recognizes the need to show more recorded and written evidence of progress in mathematics and science in books than was available during the visit. Although there was a significant amount of evidence of high standards in writing, the school accepted that an Ofsted inspection team would expect to see a greater quantity of pupils' work than was available to the consultant during the visit so as to triangulate this with other very positive evidence of progress and attainment.

### **The quality of teaching:**

- In a section 5 Ofsted inspection, it is likely that this aspect of the school's work would be judged as outstanding.
- Teaching was observed in every class. Of the 16 lessons observed, eight were outstanding, seven were good and one required improvement. There was an even spread of good and outstanding grades across all key stages and year groups. Given that the one lesson which required improvement did not reflect what teaching was like typically in this class, this grade profile supports the school's claim of outstanding teaching. Indeed, the high quality teaching which is typical in this school is the key reason for the exceptionally high achievement of pupils indicated above.
- The key and common features of highly effective teaching observed during the visit were:
  1. Well-planned and structured lessons which link effectively to previous learning and contain well-differentiated activities which accurately match the varying needs of the pupils.
  2. The excellent subject and pedagogic knowledge and understanding of teachers who know the pupils and their needs exceptionally well. This was especially evident in phonics sessions.
  3. The careful use of questioning to challenge pupils to do better and to ascertain their understanding of the concepts being taught. The outcomes of such questioning are used well to adjust teaching to meet the on-going learning needs of pupils.

4. The very effective use of talk partners to reinforce learning, for example through setting well-focused tasks (as in one class where pupils were asked to 'tell your partner three things you remember about the Great Fire of London')
5. The routine use of pupils to demonstrate their thinking and understanding to the class and their contributions as 'leaders of learning'.
6. Consistent high quality modelling of reading, writing speaking and listening by teachers.
7. The exceptionally effective use of a wide range of ICT resources to support both teaching and pupils' learning (the school is especially well equipped in this regard).
8. The very positive impact of teaching assistants on learning because they are well-trained, skilled, committed to the school's ethos. A strength is the time that they are given to plan and review learning with teachers.
9. Excellent relationships which are due to the effective modelling of how to treat people with respect and kindness that emanates from all adults and is copied by the pupils. Behaviour in lessons is never less than exemplary as a result and this is illustrated by the efficient way in which transition points in the lesson are managed, without a loss of pace to the learning.
10. Learning environments which 'sparkle' and bring learning alive. This helps to inspire pupils and because their work is valued, show a pride in what they have achieved. Throughout the school there is a 'can do' approach which pupils respond to very positively.
11. Often inspirational teaching which successfully nurtures a deep love of learning and a desire to do one's best. There were many examples of inspirational teaching, but the learning walk during a writing workshop on the Great Fire of London demonstrated how all teachers in this year group were using modelling to inspire pupils to write effectively and with stamina because they were so keen to do so.
12. In younger classes there is a good balance between adult led and child initiated activities. The generous space both inside and outside is well planned and used effectively to encourage pupils' confidence, independence and social interaction with each other.

- Although teaching was at least good and much was outstanding, where it was less effective, this was because:
  - The pace of a few lessons slackened when pupils were inactive for too long on the carpet and their learning became less focused.
  - Opportunities were sometimes missed to monitor the impact of teaching by, for example, the use of individual whiteboards to enable the teacher to check that everyone had understood the concept being taught.
- The quality of marking of pupils' writing in books and verbally during lessons is good. It provides clear targets for improvement, is written in simple, age-appropriate language and models good handwriting. As a result pupils work steadily improves, demonstrating the positive impact of marking. Work is accurately levelled and books contain a wealth of evidence of high standards of writing. However, mathematics and science books provide less quantity of evidence of progress with which to triangulate against other evidence. In addition, the marking in science books, whilst clearly focusing on the quality of writing, provides less guidance on how to improve scientific skills.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils:**

- In a section 5 Ofsted inspection, it is likely that this aspect of the school's work would be judged as outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is exemplary and no low level disruption was observed in any lessons. Their learning behaviour is exceptionally positive because they consistently demonstrate an enthusiasm for learning and this is reflected in the excellent progress that they make.
- Pupils work well with each other. The very youngest demonstrate such attributes as sharing and being kind to each other. Older pupils take the wide range of responsibilities that they are given seriously. They enjoy helping, for example, at lunch times and are keen to undertake such roles as playground buddies and in reading to younger children. They demonstrate a pride in their school and a strong sense of commitment to their community. Those interviewed during the visit said that they loved coming to school and felt completely safe and well supported.
- All adults consistently apply the school's behaviour management policies; pupils understand how these work and support them. Bullying is rare, but is always responded to swiftly and appropriately when it occurs. The pupils are very well aware of what bullying is and is not (including cyber-bullying) and know what to do if they experience this.

- Records of serious incidents are meticulously kept, although the school acknowledges that when each incident is recorded, a description of what action was taken and its impact is not always made sufficiently clear.
- Attendance is consistently well above the national average. In the current year this stands at 97.23% and no vulnerable group is significantly below this. The school has introduced very effective strategies to significantly reduce the number of late arrivals to school and meaningful rewards for 100% attendance also encourage exceptionally high attendance figures. The main reason for such good attendance is because the pupils want to learn and be in school, but a deeper understanding of pupils views on the school and their own well-being would be gained by undertaking and analysing age-appropriate questionnaires.

### **Leadership and management:**

- In a section 5 Ofsted inspection, it is likely that this aspect of the school's work would be judged as outstanding.
- The determination and drive of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior staff is the key reason for the high standards of provision and consequential outstanding pupil achievement. They continually strive to maintain the already high standards acknowledged at the previous inspection and in this they have the full support of parents, staff and governors.
- Leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for growth. This is because they evaluate themselves rigorously, accurately and fairly. The resulting SEF is a very clear and well-written document which reflects the journey that the school is on.
- The leadership's monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is rigorous and accurate. There is no room for underperformance and on the rare occasions when this is evident, leaders take firm and urgent action to resolve this. Monitoring informs the performance management of the teachers and support staff and this in turn drives the CPD program and the school's strategic planning for improvement.
- Strategic plans are detailed and provide clear indications of what actions will be taken to maintain high standards and further strengthen them. These include clear and measureable success criteria and are properly costed, with timescale and personnel indicators.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and well-designed to meet the specific needs of the pupils. Excellent resources and staff training ensure that pupils

have access to all that they need to thrive. Reading, writing and ICT are particular strengths, as is the very wide range of curriculum enrichment and extended school activities. Currently there are 32 activities or clubs on offer to the pupils, ranging from homework clubs to MFL to sport, art and dance. These are extremely well managed and pupil access is closely monitored to ensure equality of opportunity. As a result, the curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

- Although the mathematics curriculum is well-designed and strategies for teaching progression in the four rules of number are understood by staff, these have not been formalized into a published calculation policy which would help to improve parents' understanding of how to support their children's learning at home.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet legal requirements and are rigorously applied. The new safeguarding governor is currently awaiting training, but staff are appropriately trained and know who the safeguarding officer is.
- Governors are highly effective because they know the school well and routinely hold leaders to account, in particular with regard to maintaining the already high standards. This is well documented by the detailed questioning of the Headteacher's report to governors which is recorded in their minutes. A feature of every governor's meeting is a training slot and this means that they are kept up-to-date with the school's developments and external expectations. For example, recently a training session on levelling pupils' work has improved their understanding of assessment.
- A recent audit of governor's skills has helped to ensure that they have a good range of experience and talents with which to support the school. They recognize that the next step to strengthen their effectiveness still further will be to draw up a governor development plan which complements the school's own strategic plans.
- The school manages its resources well and ensures that they are well deployed to the benefit of all the pupils. Governors have established systems and controls to rigorously monitor this and ensure that additional funding (for example through the pupil premium and sports funding) is used to directly benefit those pupils concerned.
- Links with parents and the local community are very strong and ensure that there is a coordinated approach for the benefit of all pupils. For example, monthly meetings of all agencies and the 'Collective Voice' initiative are ensuring that support targets those families and pupils with the greatest need. Parents hold the school in high regard, as is exemplified by regular

parent questionnaires which are overwhelmingly positive. Recently improved links with the junior school, for example through undertaking joint moderation of Y2 pupils' work, is proving to be beneficial, but could be further strengthened, for example through the development of Y2/3 transition projects.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that there is sufficient evidence of pupils' recorded work in mathematics and science.
- Ensure that marking in science books has sufficient focus on the development of pupils' scientific skills, knowledge and understanding as well as their literacy skills.
- Consider further improving the quality of presentation of pupils' work by encouraging them to use pens as soon as they are confidently using a cursive script.
- Consider providing further opportunities to encourage pupils' reading, such as 'extreme reading'.
- Consider consolidating strategies for teaching the four rules of number into a single calculation policy so as to ensure that there is a clear skills progression route and that parents are more able to effectively support their child's learning in mathematics.
- Consider developing further Y2/3 transition projects with the Junior School.
- Strengthen the serious incident behaviour log by adding a column detailing what action was taken to address each incident.
- Consider undertaking an age-appropriate pupil survey to gain a more detailed understanding of pupils' views on the school and their well-being.
- Prepare case studies for any future Ofsted inspection so as to demonstrate the accuracy of the school's assessment judgments.
- Consider using the governor skills audit as a basis for an annual development plan.

## **Chris Nye. Professional biographical summary:**

After 10 years as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), Chris retired in September 2013. In this role he undertook numerous inspections of primary schools, including monitoring schools in 'Special Measures', inspecting English in both primary and secondary schools and inspecting initial teacher education and as a local authority link inspector for five LAs. Before becoming an HMI he was headteacher of four very different primary schools over 23 years.

In September 2013 he started an Education Consultancy ('Look4ward'). He has continued to undertake section 8 and 5 inspections and other work for Ofsted, including running seminars for headteachers and governors of schools judged as 'requiring improvement'. He is also a school improvement adviser for 10 schools in South Gloucestershire.