



Grace Christian Academy Early Years Evaluation Report May 2008



Grace Christian Academy

Grace Christian Academy was founded in 1996, and is located in the district of West Bay. The vision of the founders was to establish a Christian school, based on the American system of education that would meet the educational and spiritual needs of their children and others from the local community. When the school began, it offered only elementary education.

In 2004, all the buildings were badly damaged by Hurricane Ivan – so much so that the school had to remain closed for a year. Since that time, buildings have been extensively renovated, and the whole site restored. Most of the work was undertaken by a group of hardworking and determined parents who were part of the restoration committee. The school has gradually added classes since 2005, and now caters to students from Pre-kindergarten to Grade 11. The intention is to complete the high school classes next year with the addition of Grade 12.

There are two Pre-Kindergarten classes and one Kindergarten class. There are 42 children in the early years. The children are taught in classes of 14 and each class has a teacher and a teacher's aide. The two Pre-kindergarten classes and the Kindergarten class provide children with a satisfactory start to their education at Grace Christian Academy. In all the classes, children enjoy coming to school and seeing their teacher and their friends. The staff have good relationships with the children and their parents. On the whole, children settle to their work quickly and co-operate when working in groups.

Children are assessed on entry to school and the data shows that most children are entering school with skills and knowledge appropriate for their age. Whilst they are in the early years, all children make satisfactory progress and some are making good progress. In Language Arts, most children are making good progress. In all three classes children's speaking and listening skills are well developed. They can concentrate, ask and answer questions showing that they have thought carefully about what they are about to say. Children are encouraged to develop good questioning skills and teachers model the 'what, why, where and when' style of questioning. In Kindergarten many children are reading at a level that is higher than you would expect for their age, and this is in part, due to the good use of Jolly Phonics in Pre-kindergarten. In Kindergarten, individual reading is encouraged and a reading diary is sent home daily for parents to comment in. This raises the profile of learning to read and has a positive impact on children's reading skills. There are some children who would benefit from carrying on the Jolly Phonics programme during their time in Kindergarten.

Standards of achievement are at least in line with what you would expect of children in Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten and in some cases exceed standards. Children leave Kindergarten able to read, write with words spelt

correctly or with a phonetically plausible alternative and are confident when working with numbers up to 20.

All teaching by class teachers is at least satisfactory and some teaching is good with very good elements. Where teaching is good, it is because the teachers have a clear understanding of child development and how young children learn. They plan practical activities which match the children's level of understanding but which have sufficient challenge as well. Conversely where teaching is only satisfactory, this is often because children are not actively involved in the lesson. Too much time is spent with children sitting, listening and watching the teacher and not enough time is given for them to do the work themselves. For example, as a whole class, children were watching the teacher weigh objects and were asked to guess if the objects would be heavy or light. This went on for so long that many children became restless and fidgety. If this part of the lesson had been shorter, more children might have stayed focused and on task. In lessons where the work is not well matched to the children's stage of development, the more able children finish their work quickly and some less able children have not really started their work by the end of the session.

All classes have a teacher's aide and on the whole they work well with the class teachers, supporting the children's learning. Where the aide works in partnership with the class teacher, children benefit by having two adults supporting their learning. The teacher's aide knows the lesson objectives and children know they can approach either adult for guidance and support and will be treated fairly and consistently by both. In other classes, the teacher's aides need to be more pro-active in helping the teacher rather than waiting to be directed.

The management of early years is not as effective as it could be. There is no-one person with a clear picture of what is being taught and how effective it is throughout the early years. The impact of lack of effective management shows itself in several ways including the following examples.

- In all three classes, children can become quite restless and fidgety with some children becoming quite loud and boisterous. The two Pre-kindergarten classes have joint assemblies and even with four adults in the classroom, the children's behaviour was not as respectful as it could have been. This was primarily because of the way the assembly was organised, with children singing along to a CD and having to wait while different CD's were put on, and also by staff not upholding the class rules consistently. When children sang the National Song along to the CD, not many of them joined in and those that did sang quietly. In the evening, the children sang unaccompanied and sang clearly and loudly and even the youngest child joined in with enthusiasm. Although all the classes have

school rules displayed, staff varied in their expectation of children's behaviour. This can be confusing for young children who usually respond better when they know and understand the required behaviour and what the consequence of certain actions will be. The youngest children were seen to make good progress in a lesson when the teacher explained what behaviour was acceptable and what was not. She praised the children who were making right choices and prompted the other children to follow suit.

- All teachers have written lesson plans which they follow but only one teacher was using the schools own scheme, as described in the handbook. This teacher included learning objectives and evaluations in her planning. This is helpful because the teacher and her aide can clearly see what they expect the children to know, do and understand as a result of the lesson. When they evaluate the lesson, they are able to plan the next step in the children's learning journey. There is a wide age range within each class and good planning should ensure that the teacher has thought about the needs of the children and provided differentiated learning activities, taking into account children's different learning styles, their age and stage of development.
- Across the early years, there are plenty of good quality resources which promote learning in all areas of the curriculum. The resources are not necessarily shared evenly throughout the three classrooms though and this is primarily due to lack of space in some classrooms. Young children need to be actively involved in their learning, and should have regular opportunities to paint, use dough and clay and build with blocks. Limited space makes it hard for teachers to plan these activities on a regular basis. More effective use of space could be made by using corridor space for certain activities or by limiting the number of tables and chairs in the room.
- The Dean of the Junior school, who teaches the Kindergarten class, has overall responsibility for the early year's classes, and the Vice Principal teaches one of the Pre-kindergarten classes. It can sometimes be difficult to discuss contentious issues with a colleague who is more senior. Regular Senior Management meetings would help to address this and there is a discrepancy among staff as to how often this happens. Management meetings need to happen more frequently than they currently are. Strong leadership and management can have a positive impact on children's learning by ensuring that all classes have equal resources, are following the same curriculum and the same behavioural expectations are upheld.

Assessments are completed on all children on a regular basis, but the data collected is not used to plan the next steps in children's learning and development. It is mainly used for reporting to parents.

Children with additional needs in pre-kindergarten are well supported by specialist staff from the Early Intervention Programme but children in Kindergarten are too old for this service. There are some children in Kindergarten who could make better progress if they had access to more support than the class teacher and aide can provide.