



**NORTH SIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**INSPECTION REPORT**

**OCTOBER 2006**

**LEAD INSPECTOR: CAROLINE DAWES**



**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.

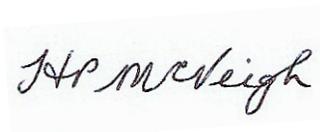
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to 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 North Side Primary School become a more effective school.



**Helena McVeigh**  
**Chief Inspector of Schools**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM	4
INTRODUCTION	5
INSPECTION FINDINGS	
o How effective is the school overall and how much progress has it made since the last inspection?	6
o What the school does well	6
o What needs to improve	6
o How high are standards at the school?	7
o How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?	7
o What is the quality of students' personal development?	8
o How effective are the curriculum and the way that students are assessed?	9
o How well is the school led and managed?	9
o How effective are other aspects of the school's work?	10
o What is the quality of teaching and learning in the early years, language arts, mathematics and ICT across the curriculum?	
o Early years	11
o Language arts	12
o Mathematics	13
o ICT across the curriculum	14

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM**

### **THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Government
Age range of students:	3 years 9 months – 10 years 9 months
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	80
School address:	North Side, Grand Cayman
Telephone number:	947 9516
Fax number:	947 8868
Email address:	nsps@candw.ky
Name of Principal:	Philip Schofield

### **THE INSPECTION TEAM**

Lead inspector:	Caroline Dawes	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
Team inspectors:	Mary Bowerman Pachent Smythe Kate Marnoch Natasha Chopra	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate Early Childhood Unit Local Occasional Inspector

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Information about the school**

North Side Primary School provides education for children aged 3 to 11 and is located on the northern side of the island. It is the smallest government school on Grand Cayman, with 80 students. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls, although there are variations within some classes.

The school has seven classes from Reception to Year 6, a full time literacy coordinator, support from a guidance counsellor and from a learning and behaviour disorder specialist.

The school's motto is 'small but united'.

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspection took place from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006 and involved a team of five inspectors. 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 help 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:

- 38 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, mainly in language arts and mathematics, but including all subjects offered.
- Students' work was scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke with students and took their views from the questionnaires into account.
- Inspectors heard students read and observed them doing some mathematics.
- Discussions with teachers and other members of staff took place.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, policies and guidelines, were looked at.
- 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 and how much progress has it made since the last inspection?

North Side Primary is a welcoming, inclusive and friendly community school, which students enjoy attending. They are keen to learn and have good relationships with their teachers and each other.

The school has undergone significant changes of staff and senior management over the last few years. This instability has undoubtedly contributed to the lack of progress since the last inspection. The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum still need improving and the standards that students are achieving are not as high as they could be.

The school has correctly identified the quality of teaching and its impact on learning as the key area for improvement. Teachers are eager to improve their practice and many used the inspection as a source of professional development. This reflective practice, coupled with the implementation of new policies, further professional development and sharing of good practice within the school will put North Side Primary in a good position to make progress.

The new principal has quickly established a clear and appropriate direction for the school and teachers are closely involved in developments. It is too soon for this strong leadership to have greatly affected the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning, but the school is now in a good position to start a new phase in its development. It has the capacity to improve significantly.

### What the school does well

- The leadership has established clear direction, focused on raising students' achievement
- The staff have created a positive and caring ethos
- There are good links with the parents and the community
- There is a well cared for and attractive school environment.

### What needs to improve

- The way the curriculum is planned and organised
- The way teachers assess students and use this information to help them improve
- Teaching methods, so that the differing abilities and learning needs of all students are taken into account
- The consistency of teaching and learning, especially in language arts and mathematics.

*The school is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Department and Schools' Inspectorate within 40 working days of receipt of the final report. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.*

## **How high are standards at the school?**

The TerraNova results indicate that in 2006, students generally performed as expected for their ages<sup>1</sup>. The inspection team, however, found that in general, standards of achievement at the school are too low, and students are not achieving as well as they did in the TerraNova tests. Students cannot readily apply their skills or knowledge in new or different situations.

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

Teaching varies tremendously at North Side Primary, with some pockets of very good practice and other areas which are weak. Overall, it is not effective enough to ensure that students are learning and making the progress of which they are capable.

The students are generally eager to learn. They listen to their teachers and, for the most part, do what they are asked. In most classrooms, they sit in groups, but they do not spend much time in discussion with their peers. Most of the lessons are taught as a whole class, with the teacher doing most of the talking. There are missed opportunities for students to develop the skills of working together and learning how to listen and respond to others and to solve problems.

Teachers plan lessons regularly, and try to use a variety of teaching resources, such as connecting-cubes and mini white boards in mathematics, or computers and dictionaries in language arts. Teachers' planning does not, though, take into account the fact that within each class the students are at very different levels in their learning. In most lessons students are all expected to do the same work. The more able are not sufficiently challenged and the less able are not receiving enough support.

Many lessons start with the teachers sharing the objectives with the students, which is good practice. However, the objectives are not always worded in a way that students would easily understand, and are rarely referred to again. Teachers do not use the objectives to check whether or not students have learnt what was intended in the lesson.

In both language arts and mathematics, teachers rely too heavily on the textbooks, and this does not necessarily ensure progression in students' understanding and skills. There are examples of work being repeated at a low level. For instance, long vowel sounds were being taught in Year 3 and in a class of much older children. When the work they are asked to do is at too low a level, some students become restless and bored.

Students and teachers have good relationships and there is a secure environment for learning to take place. There were examples of effective teaching where students were thoroughly involved with the activities and were shown how to share and develop ideas and seek new ways of doing things. For example, a mathematics lesson where students used equipment to work out related number facts for themselves provided a 'trial and error' situation which cemented their understanding. The teacher then gave them the opportunity to explain why they thought their answer was right. The teacher's good

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<sup>1</sup> The number of students sitting these tests in each year group was very small, so results must be interpreted with caution.

modelling of an activity on the parts of a cell in a science lesson provided the stimulus for students to try it for themselves, and they were encouraged by appropriate praise and help both from the teacher and their classmates.

The way that teachers assess students' progress is unsatisfactory. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to show what they understand and can do. Because they are not assessing students' work effectively, teachers cannot plan work that would help them to make the next steps in their learning. In their marking of work, teachers do not usually include comments that would help students to understand how they could improve. There is little evidence that students are required to make corrections or re-do work.

The school now has co-ordinators for literacy, mathematics and special needs, who will provide guidance and direction. There is also a new teaching and learning policy, which gives clear guidance for making teaching and learning more effective. These initiatives have the potential to make a big difference to the progress that students make and the standards they achieve.

### **What is the quality of students' personal development?**

North Side Primary provides well for students' personal development. There are various opportunities for students to develop responsibilities within the school. The school has recently introduced the idea of a Students' Council, which will enable students to take greater responsibility and develop leadership skills. Already the two Year 6 representatives and a few classmates have started to monitor the students before school, during break and lunch times. The students also learn how to make the right choices, build relationships and become responsible through the guidance and counselling sessions led by the school's counsellor. These initiatives have a positive impact on students' personal development.

The school makes very good arrangements for the development of students' awareness of local culture. Classes have some interesting displays and visitors are invited to share their experiences of growing up in the Cayman Islands. Students take part in North Side heritage day, visit heritage day celebrations in East End and have performed the quadrille dance at community functions.

The school does not plan enough opportunities for students to learn about other cultures. The library has a small collection of books but it is not fully in use, so students do not currently explore other cultures through reading. There is not enough use of music, art or video recordings to broaden the students' experience of other cultures.

Students have positive attitudes to their learning and want to do well. They are well-mannered and show respect for the staff, their school and the surroundings. Teachers encourage students' spiritual and moral development effectively through devotions and special assemblies as well as in some lessons. Students sometimes lead devotions themselves and most participate well.

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

The curriculum in the school is currently fragmented. There is not enough of an overview of the curriculum as a whole and teachers plan in isolation, deciding what to teach in each subject for their class. This often results in insufficient progression within individual classes and a lot of repetition from year to year.

Students have access to a broad curriculum, but it is not well balanced. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects but the amount of time spent on each varies considerably between classes. Personal, social and health education is particularly well planned for and good use is made of the guidance counsellor who teaches some classes.

There is an appropriate range of after school sports activities which are well-attended. The football and netball clubs are open to all abilities and students enjoy learning new skills and feel valued for their effort. These clubs help support students' physical development and promote their self esteem.

Students are assessed regularly in language arts and mathematics by tests at the end of a unit or chapter. These tests vary in quality and emphasise recall of facts rather than application of knowledge. There are a few isolated examples of teachers using information from tests to plan support for students, but this is not widespread or part of a whole school system. Students are also assessed by external tests such as TerraNova, but the school does not yet analyse this data to identify areas of strengths and underperformance.

## **How well is the school led and managed?**

In a short space of time the new principal has accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of North Side Primary School. He has quickly established a clear direction for the school, focused on raising students' achievements through improving the quality of teaching. He has a clear vision for the school and a very good understanding of how best to achieve this through effective teamwork. There is a clear management structure consisting of task groups for teaching and learning and for pastoral and children's support. This structure encourages all teachers to be involved in, and take some responsibility for, the improvement of North Side Primary School.

The school has made a promising start in assessing the quality of teaching through self-evaluation. Both the previous and current principals have carried out some monitoring of teaching and learning. The subject coordinators and special needs coordinator have carried out some lesson observations and they have made good use of the school's link inspector for professional development in this area. The principal and teachers are beginning to address weaknesses and inconsistencies in teaching across the school.

The principal has set targets for students' achievements in mathematics and language arts in Years 2, 4 and 6 based upon what he expects children to be able to do at these ages. Although this is a good start, teachers are not yet aware of these targets, or the benchmarks to which they relate, and so they are not currently adjusting their teaching to help students achieve them.

The school environment is conducive to learning with bright displays and well-kept grounds which students respect and enjoy. The library is in the process of being developed and books and furniture have been ordered. Resources for information and communication technology are good, but underused. In other areas of the curriculum, resources are often of poor quality and insufficient in number for all students to benefit as much as they could.

Teachers have taken part in training workshops and conferences both on and off-island but these have not had enough impact on the work of the school. One exception to this is the ITALIC<sup>2</sup> programme which successfully helped teachers to improve their computer skills. Teachers are now beginning to identify their own development needs in the context of the school's new policy on teaching and learning. This approach, coupled with ideas about professional development, indicates a good understanding on the part of the principal of how effective professional development will help to improve the school.

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

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

Students at North Side Primary receive a satisfactory level of support and guidance from the school. The school has adequate records of students' personal, academic and medical information, psychological assessments, individual educational plans and class reports which are accessible by teachers through the school office.

The less able students and those with special educational needs could make much more progress. The school has identified more than a fifth of students as having special educational needs and there is support allocated to try to support them. Teachers have access to students' individual education plans but these are rarely used to inform lesson planning. The progress of identified students is not tracked and there is insufficient monitoring of the effectiveness of different teaching and learning strategies.

The counsellor provides very good support to students through individual sessions or in group settings. Her kind and supportive manner, and the topics that she covers, help students to deal with everyday problems they encounter and to build good relationships. Some teachers build on these sessions during class time. This reinforces the support and guidance available for students outside lessons.

The school and link inspector report that students' behaviour has improved since the introduction of a clear discipline policy, which teachers use to varying degrees. Many teachers also reward students for good behaviour during class time, which serves to reinforce positive attitudes, particular when the teacher is explicit about why the student is being praised.

Students' **attendance** and **punctuality** are satisfactory. In the past, the school has used Star Student<sup>3</sup> to monitor daily attendance, but this is not yet operational for the current academic year.

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<sup>2</sup> Improving Teaching And Learning In the Cayman Islands

<sup>3</sup> Island-wide database system

## **Links with parents and the community**

The school has developed good links with parents.

The principal and teachers send home regular newsletters that keep parents well informed about events. The newsletters give parents information about topics and work to be covered for the term, as well as other class activities. These help parents take an active role in their children's learning by supporting them at home. Parents often volunteer their time to help with school events and there is an active home-school association.

Parents feel comfortable in addressing any issues with the school and are in regular contact with teachers. In addition, there are well attended consultation meetings between teachers and parents. These provide teachers and parents with an opportunity for dialogue about students' progress and achievements. There are also written report cards which detail students' test results and grades and provide general comments from the teacher about the student's performance. These are limited in the extent to which they show how a student could improve and what the parent could do to help.

North Side Primary School is an important part of a close-knit community and there are many very good links. Teachers organise local guest speakers for lessons and assemblies. For example, fire-fighters and police officers have visited the school to teach students how to keep safe. The local area is used for field trips and students participate in island events such as the Spelling Bee and the National Festival of the Arts.

Members of the community are actively involved in the school. They run after school clubs and help to keep the school environment clean and attractive. The school makes good use of the local library in extending students' access to books.

## **What is the quality of teaching and learning in the early years, language arts, mathematics and ICT across the curriculum?**

### **Early Years**

Children in the reception class enjoy coming to school. The teacher and support assistant work together as a team, supporting the children in their learning. The classroom has space to play and work, and the teacher has turned it into an attractive environment.

The children have not been in school long, but they are making a satisfactory start to their learning. For example, some children are counting up to four objects and learning the letters of the alphabet. They share and take turns and play co-operatively. The children are eager to join in songs and rhymes and will sit quietly for story time, listening attentively. Sometimes, though, they are expected to stay sitting quietly on the floor for too long and then they become bored and restless. When practical activities were planned, such as making puppets or playing sound lotto, children demonstrated their ability to concentrate and work hard.

The children are given opportunities to look at books, draw and paint, all of which help their early reading and writing skills. There are building blocks and a home corner in the classroom, but children do not regularly use this equipment as part of their lessons. There are some opportunities for children to play together and use their imagination, which helps their spoken language and social development. The large outdoor play area just outside the reception classroom is a valuable but underused resource.

The Cayman Islands pre-school curriculum guide is not currently used and there are few written plans to show what the children will be learning each day. This makes it difficult for the teacher to assess children's learning.

## **Language Arts**

Students' standards of achievement in language arts are below the expected level in most year groups. Students do not make the progress they should as they move through the school, so standards in reading and writing, speaking and listening remain low.

Students are enthusiastic and want to learn but there are too few opportunities for them to participate actively in lessons. They are rarely encouraged to think about or question what is being said and many find it difficult to put their thoughts into complete sentences. Some teachers use skilful questioning to encourage students to speak, but this is not a common feature in lessons and too often students are passive learners. In one lesson the teacher asked students to justify their answers with examples from their own personal experiences. This gave students a good opportunity to develop their speaking skills.

Too many students do not make enough progress in reading. Younger students talk confidently about books they have enjoyed but they find it difficult to read out loud. Older students are fairly confident readers but too many read without expression and understanding. Students are not regularly encouraged to read for enjoyment, although in some classrooms teachers have tried hard to make bright and attractive reading areas.

In their writing, students express ideas using limited vocabulary and write from personal experiences. There are not enough opportunities for students to complete extended pieces of writing. Teachers mark students' work regularly but do not show students how to improve their writing.

Handwriting is of a high standard and students take pride in the presentation of their work as a result of the good model that many teachers provide.

Work provided in lessons is not well matched to students' different abilities. The more able students do not make enough progress as the work is frequently too easy. The least able students struggle as they are unable to cope with the reading materials and are offered little support. In one lesson, good use was made of an adult helper who was there to support and work with the less able students. These students achieved well and made progress. In many lessons the choice of reading material does not motivate the boys and they become distracted and bored.

Some teachers use their expertise and subject knowledge to make lessons more interesting and lively, rather than relying on the text books to guide lessons. Some use visual aids and practical activities that involve the students in their own learning. In these lessons students make better progress and are enthusiastic about their work. Teachers have worked hard to make the classrooms stimulating, with displays celebrating literacy.

A new literacy coordinator has recently been appointed. She has a good understanding of what steps need to be taken to improve and raise standards in language arts and a clear vision for the subject.

## **Mathematics**

Many students in North Side Primary School say that mathematics is their favourite subject and most of them are keen to learn and are engaged in lessons. However, students could make much better progress.

There are several contributing factors to students' limited progress in mathematics. There is no clear curriculum plan for mathematics from Reception to Year 6 and little monitoring to ensure that teachers are following the Cayman Islands national curriculum. The mathematics topics that children are taught tend to be narrow, repetitive and too focused on unrelated skills and facts. Students are not given enough opportunities to solve mathematics problems or apply their learning in different situations.

By the time they reach the older classes, most students can add and subtract multi-digit numbers using written calculations, list different types of numbers and expand numbers to illustrate place value. However, students find it difficult to use these learned facts and skills in more meaningful ways. For example, some students could recall that 10 fives were 50 but could not use this fact to work out 20 fives. Similarly, students knew about place value and some could identify the larger of two numbers. However, they could not work out by how much one number was larger than the other.

In lessons, teachers used equipment such as cubes and base ten blocks, which helped students create mental images to support their learning. For example, children used linking cubes to show subtracting from six, which helped them to see the picture behind a sum such as  $6 - 2$  and to begin to spot patterns. In the same lesson, individual white boards were used by students to give an example of a subtraction sum. This was very motivating for the three students who had them, but the rest of the class could have benefited too if more white boards had been available.

Teachers are using some good teaching strategies in a few lessons and these need to be shared and built upon. There were examples of effective questioning that developed students' understanding, the use of a number line, displays of vocabulary and examples of students making up questions for their classmates. In the majority of lessons, however, the whole class does the same work, irrespective of students' different abilities, prior knowledge of the topic and achievements in their previous lessons. This restricts the progress that students can make, particularly the more able. Teachers' questions too often only test recall and are addressed to the whole class, inviting choral responses, rather than to individuals to assess and extend their understanding.

## **ICT across the curriculum**

The school is well-resourced with computers, display projectors and digital cameras. In addition to hardware in classrooms, there is also a dedicated ICT suite. Students enjoy working on the computers and they are well-motivated. Whether they are in their classrooms or in the ICT suite, they are well-behaved and helpful to each other.

The use of ICT in different subject areas is dependent upon individual teacher's skills and preferences and is not well-planned for across the school. There are some examples of good practice, such as young students using 'click and drag' techniques to create repeating patterns in mathematics, but this is not widespread across different classes.

Overall, students' ICT skills tend to be weak. Even though older students were using the Internet to find out about different systems in the body, they did not know how to use a search engine or browser efficiently. Some students type up their work on the computer, but opportunities are missed to improve their word-processing skills, and the youngest students refer to the monitor as a 'television'.