

The Review of Shell Schools

PDO School, Muscat, Oman

March 2011

Summary Report

Introduction

This review was part of a rolling programme of independent reviews commissioned by Shell International.

The purpose of such reviews has been defined by Shell as being:

- to support the schools in fulfilling the shared mission statement that: 'through excellent teaching and organisation, they maximise children's learning in a way which enables them to achieve high social, personal and academic standards, enjoy learning, adapt to other education systems and develop both a national and an international perspective'
- to provide assurance to Shell International and parents that schools are providing high quality education

The review team consisted of three independent reviewers. Howard Marshall and Pam Mundy were appointed by Fieldwork Education. Thomas Gunneweg was appointed by INTES. Fieldwork Education, based in the UK, and INTES, based in the Netherlands are both contracted by Shell International to provide consultancy and other services to the group of Shell and Shell-affiliated schools. All three members of the team reviewed the learning and educational provision throughout the school, with the intention of gaining a balanced insight into the school as a whole.

The actual review visit took place over 5 school days from 19 March to 23 March 2011.

In conducting the review we used a framework devised by Fieldwork Education in consultation with headteachers of Shell schools and approved by Shell International. The framework has three main sections: Learning, Teaching for Learning and Conditions for Learning. We investigated each of these areas.

During our visit to the school we:

- observed 53 lessons or parts of lessons for a total time of almost 26 hours
- looked at samples of children's work
- met regularly with the headteacher
- met with the deputy headteacher
- met individually with other teachers
- provided an overview of 'what we are thinking' at the end of the second day for all teachers
- met with parents
- spoke with the school's line manager
- talked with children
- reviewed a range of documentation
- observed other activities

In this report – after a brief description of the school – 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 recommendations, and then some concluding remarks.

The School

PDO School was founded in 1966 to provide education for the children of expatriate PDO employees of all nationalities. The school has a Dutch Language Stream and an International Stream, the latter of which currently includes children of approximately 29 nationalities.

At the time of the review there were 302 children on the school roll. There are 29 first languages. Apart from the headteacher and deputy headteacher, there are 22 full-time teachers, 32 support/teaching assistants (6 different nationalities) and an ICT teacher. The current teachers are all British or Dutch. The Dutch department has two part time teachers of SEN

The school also has two locally appointed staff, one being an administrative secretary and the other a general secretary, who contribute a great deal to the smooth operation and running of the school.

The school was previously reviewed in January 2008.

Overview

Overall, children make sufficient or good progress in the school. They achieve standards that are at or above those expected by the English and Dutch National Curricula. Learning in subjects covered by the International Primary Curriculum is developing well. The leadership and management of the school requires a clearer strategic focus on those things that directly impact on the quality of learning and teaching. This will help to identify the reasons for the variance in progress in some classes and the need to increase the challenge for more able children.

Learning

The key focus of our review was children's learning and the way in which the school maximises learning opportunities and experiences for children. Learning was the key focus of our time with the school and the development of learning through knowledge, skills and understanding was considered in all observations, discussions, meetings, document sampling and all other activities. Learning was considered in its broadest sense, including academic, personal, social, moral and physical development and the ways in which children are able to access learning in the way that they learn best.

In practice, for children in the Pre Nursery, learning is achieved through a combination of the English Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) Early Years Programme. This is not the school policy. In the Nursery and Primary 1, learning is mainly achieved through the IPC Early Years Programme and supplemented by aspects of the English and mathematics National Curriculum for England. The English National Strategy 'Letters and Sounds' Phonic Programme is being used to supplement and extend learning. From Primary 2 to Primary 8, children's learning is achieved through the IPC main programme and English and mathematics are taught according to the English National Curriculum. For children in the Dutch Stream, learning is achieved through the Dutch National Curriculum (Kerndoelen). There are benchmarks against which standards in the International Stream of the school can be compared with national expectations in England and for the Dutch stream, against the Dutch Kerndoelen. Standards are at the levels expected of children of their age for children in the Dutch Stream and there is a range of standards in the International Stream. Overall, standards in the International Stream are slightly above those expected of children of their age in England. Progress overall is good with some being very good.

During the review we observed 53 lessons or part lessons. In 40 of these we deemed that there was sufficient and appropriate learning. In 6 lessons it was deemed that the children made great gains in their learning. In 7 lessons there was not enough learning. In almost all of the lessons, children were able to tell us what it was they were supposed to learn and some were able to tell us how they would know that they had made progress against the specific intention and success criteria for the lesson. In a small number of lessons, children were unsure of the learning intention and were unable to tell us what they were learning or how they would assess their progress toward it. This prevented them from making sufficient progress in their learning. In several of the lessons where we judged that there was sufficient learning some children made very good progress and others did not make enough progress. There are no significant differences between the learning of boys and that of girls. There is some variance in the progress children are making between year groups and classes within year groups.

The school has identified a number of children across the school as needing English as an additional language (EAL) intervention. The majority of these children make good progress when they first join the school and gain confidence to join in with class activities. Learning for those children new to the English language is good over time. In class and in withdrawal lesson, children consistently made progress appropriate to their age and stage of learning.

Learning in Pre Nursery, Nursery and Primary 1 (Early Years)

Children in the Pre Nursery, Nursery class make a good start to their learning. In the Nursery, children in the International and Dutch streams learn particularly well in the IPC strands of Independence and Interdependence and Communication. In the Pre Nursery, children did not always learn enough during adult initiated sessions, where they were not challenged sufficiently. For children in the Pre Nursery, learning was at its greatest during independent activities. Children in the Primary 1 classes build on the good start made in the Nursery. They are engaged in their learning during adult led activities. In these classes, children's learning in independent activities is not always sufficient. All children, including the majority for whom English is not their first language, are progressing very well in the Healthy Living strand of IPC, particularly in, self help and social skills. In the Dutch Stream, children learn to discriminate letter shapes and build words, enjoy sharing books and practising their skills. Children make sufficient progress in their mathematical development. Children in the Pre Nursery and Nursery and are able to count numbers appropriate to their age and developmental stage, match 1 to 1, recognise and name simple shapes and make patterns. **We recommend that the school improve learning in the Nursery and Primary 1 so that all children make better progress when involved in independent or self selected activities.**

Standards in English and mathematics in Primary 3 (end of Key Stage 1) in the International Stream

Children were assessed in the last academic year (2009-10) by their teachers against the levels of the National Curriculum for England in writing, reading and mathematics towards the end of Primary 3. Nearly all children made good progress and achieved the national expectation in England of level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. 44% of children achieving a level 3 in mathematics and reading and 24% achieving a level 3 in writing which is above the expectation in England. Those children who are learning EAL made good progress. Assessments at the end of Term 1 (December 2010) indicate that this trend is set to continue, where standards are at least at the level expected of them and in many cases above expectations for children of this age in England. Most children are making at least the three sub level improvement expected by the English National Curriculum over a two year period.

Overall, standards in both English and mathematics in Key Stage 1 are good.

Learning in English and mathematics in Primary 2 and Primary 3

The children in Primary 2 and Primary 3 are making good progress in lessons in English and mathematics. They are able to write simple sentences with accurate punctuation and some make plausible attempts at the spelling of new words. They use simple personal dictionaries appropriately. Their reading is developing well and they enjoy a range of fiction and non-fiction books. They are confident to read on sight and are able to decode unfamiliar words by blending sounds. They show some expression when reading aloud. They enjoy writing stories and simple information texts. In mathematics children can add and subtract numbers up to 10 and use place value to order numbers to 100. From evidence taken from looking at books and from talking with the children they can make calculations, explain and order fractions, solve simple problems using different strategies and know the names and properties of 2D and 3D shapes.

Standards in English and mathematics in Primary 7 (end of Key Stage 2)

National Curriculum Assessments (commonly known as SATs) for Primary 7 indicate very good attainment in English and in mathematics. Most children achieved the national expectation of Level 4, with three quarters of children achieving level 5 in mathematics, and English which is above expectations for children of this age in England. This indicates very good progress for these children. Given the current levels at which the Primary 7 children are performing in English and mathematics we anticipate that standards at the end of Key Stage 2 will remain high.

Learning in English and mathematics in Primary 4 to Primary 8

This year, for the first time, children have been assessed using the International Schools Assessment (ISA). The ISA monitors performance in mathematical literacy, reading and writing and is aligned with international expectations of performance.

Results for mathematical literacy for children in Primary 5 are significantly below the mean score for all schools. In reading and writing (Task A) results are marginally above the mean and in writing Task B, marginally below. For children in Primary 6, scores in mathematical literacy, writing Tasks A and B are also marginally below the mean score. For children in Primary 7, scores for mathematical literacy, reading and writing tasks A and B are significantly above the mean scores.

In the main, children in Primary 4 to 8 are motivated in their learning and are making good progress. We observed the children involved in problem solving, measuring and data collecting activities in mathematics. They also made good gains in their learning where they worked with peers in other classes to investigate problems.

Language and mathematics in the Dutch stream

For children in Primary 1 to Primary 8 Dutch and mathematics are externally assessed and validated by the Centraal Instituut voor Toets Ontwikkeling (CITO). These standards are benchmarked against national expectations in the Netherlands. CITO tests for 2010 -11 at year group and individual level show inconsistencies in progress in spelling and vocabulary for Primary 3 to Primary 8 and mathematics for Primary 4 and Primary 6 where results are below average. Standards are at the levels expected for children of their ages in the Netherlands. There are also discrepancies between the outcomes of ongoing curriculum related assessments made by teachers and the formal CITO tests. For Primary 8 the final CITO test outcomes, at 540, are above average for children of their age in the Netherlands.

Standards and learning in other subjects

For subjects other than language and mathematics, the school uses the learning goals of the IPC. The IPC has goals for Milepost 1 (the end of Primary 3), Milepost 2 (the end of Primary 5) and Milepost 3 (the end of Primary 8). These goals are based on, and generally exceed those for a number of national systems, including those for England. Children enjoy their lessons in these subjects and show enthusiasm for the activities.

The children are learning to assess their own progress against the IPC children's rubrics at the end of a section of learning in a particular skill, recording this in their Learning Journals. Children make good progress towards the Milepost 1, 2 and 3 goals and are at the levels expected of them.

In most of the IPC lessons we observed there were some children who were not always challenged by their activities. These children, often the more able, did not make sufficient progress in their learning. In swimming most children are confident in the water and are learning a wide range of skills. The majority of children will achieve their milepost goals. Where children arrive at school with little previous learning in swimming, they make progress quickly.

Children are making good progress in their learning about home and host countries. They are developing an international mindedness. They collaborate and draw on each others' knowledge, culture and heritage as a resource for their learning.

Additional comments about learning

The children are very welcoming to visitors and are genuinely proud of their school and were eager to engage us in conversations about their learning. They learn well together and are making good progress in their personal and social development. The children also told us that they love their learning in the after school clubs and it is evident that this contributes to their learning overall.

Some children in the International Stream have been identified by teachers as having a special educational need (SEN). The majority of these children are making good progress in their learning. Where these children are also learning EAL, they are making sufficient progress. Children with SEN in the Dutch Stream are not always identified early enough. This reduces the progress they are making.

In several of the observed lessons where overall most children made sufficient or good progress, there were a number of children who did not make enough progress. Often, these were the more able children whose individual needs were not being met. At times, this was because they were not sufficiently challenged by the planned activity and opportunities for them to extend their thinking were not offered. In other lessons good learning could have become very good learning if individual needs had been fully met. **We recommend that the school improve learning, particularly, though not exclusively, for the more able by ensuring that children's individual needs are met so that they make the progress appropriate to their ability.**

We found that the quality of learning and the progress children are making varied between different classes and year groups. This is partly the result of the quality of teaching and partly as a result of the school not making enough use of the information available about prior learning through ongoing assessment. **We recommend that the school ensure that there is less variance in the progress being made between children in different classes in the school.**

Teaching for learning

Teaching is the main factor in promoting children's learning. In the review we considered the teaching that happens in the classroom and elsewhere and also how the school supports teaching – through its curriculum and beyond – so that children are enabled to learn well and enjoy their learning.

The quality of teaching

The majority of teachers are enthusiastic, work hard and are committed to the school, its children and their learning. In the 53 lessons that we observed we judged that teaching promoted appropriate and sufficient learning in 40 lessons. In 5 lessons the quality of teaching promoted very good learning and in 8 lessons the quality of teaching did not promote enough learning.

Teachers have developed very good relationships with the children and parents, based on mutual trust and respect and are creating classroom learning environments and an ethos in which children are happy, secure and eager to learn. Most teachers organise their classrooms creatively with vibrant and stimulating displays that support, celebrate and challenge current learning. Teachers take a genuine interest in the children and support their well being and the development of their self esteem. They work effectively together and provide good support for each other, using each others' expertise and skills where appropriate. In most of the lessons we observed, the quality of teaching helped the children to make sufficient and appropriate gains in their learning. In the small number of lessons where there was insufficient learning, the learning intention was not sufficiently shared with the children. In addition, lessons were not planned well enough to challenge all children to learn more and assessment information was not used to inform the learning.

The school has a great deal of information about children's learning as the majority of teachers are recording learning outcomes in English, mathematics and IPC. At present, there is insufficient strategic use of this information. The Dutch Stream does not have a teacher who collates and analyses assessment information. This means that there is a potential risk that individual teachers will not have an overview of learning across the Stream.

The teachers in Pre Nursery/Nursery and Primary 1 work together in planning general activities for learning. They have created a very pleasant and purposeful, challenging atmosphere for learning and have very good relationships with children. Children's learning in independent and self initiated activities is not always sufficiently supported and extended by intervention. Children would make greater progress in their learning if teachers provided a greater level of challenge and extended children's learning by the use of skilful intervention and open ended questioning.

Teachers in the school are internationally minded and help the children to develop international mindedness. They capitalise on many opportunities to draw on children's cultural heritage and to incorporate international dimensions into learning.

Teachers provide sensitive support for those children identified as having a special educational need and/or EAL and encourage all children to live and learn through the personal goals of the IPC.

Parents who attended our meeting hold the teachers in high regard. Parents stated that their children made good progress as a result of the quality of teaching.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum for the International Stream is based on the English National Curriculum for English and mathematics and the IPC for all other subjects. The Dutch programme is based on the Dutch national standards and covers the Dutch Kerndoelen. The curriculum is broad and meets statutory and other requirements. The curriculum is supported by the use of additional materials from a range of schemes.

There are programmes for EAL, Spanish and French. As identified by the school, and by parents who attended our meeting, second language learning is an area for development as there is inconsistency in the quality of learning.

The school enriches the curriculum by including a range of outdoor activities, educational visits and a wide range of after school activities. These are led and supported by teachers and parents. These activities enhance the curriculum. The school also supports and facilitates many educational visits.

The school has employed part time teachers and an ICT specialist to support learning. The ICT specialist teaches all children in the school from the Nursery to Primary 8. This programme is helping children to develop their ICT skills.

Learning Time

Teachers make good use of the time available for learning. Lessons begin on time and the various aspects of the curriculum are planned in a clear timetable. The school keeps to the designated break, snack and lunch times. The combined length of the snack and break time which for some age groups is over 30 minutes is an area for consideration as it has no specific impact on learning. *We suggest that the school reduce the length of snack and break time and use it for additional learning time.*

During the review almost all lessons had a good pace and little learning time was lost. Children behave very well in the classroom and around the school. This has a direct impact on learning, because it allows teachers to focus fully on developing the learning process.

Educational Climate

Children tell us that they are very happy in their learning in the school. They learn and play well together and as individuals. Parents told us how much they like the way in which the children love school and love being together.

The educational climate inside and outside the classrooms is learning-focused. Children are invited to learn in different ways in a variety of contexts. Successes are celebrated and there is 'space' in which children can learn to express ideas and share opinions. Learning is the focus of classroom displays and in the learning journals. The personal goals of the IPC are clearly displayed throughout the school and evidence recording children's demonstration of them is recorded in the Personal Goals Passport. Teachers and children share a mutual respect and they know each other well. Overall, the school provides good support and guidance for children's personal development.

Conditions for Learning

Leadership and Management

Effective leadership and management are essential for a school to operate successfully and efficiently. The purpose of leadership and management is to create an environment in which learning can and does take place. The last 12 months have been difficult for the school with the arrival of a new headteacher and the move to outsource the school to new owners gathering pace. Undoubtedly, this has given the headteacher an additional management workload and as a result placed greater responsibility on the deputy headteacher to lead learning developments in the school. It has also impacted on the morale of the teachers and we are aware of the additional challenge this provides for leadership. From our discussions with middle leaders, teachers and some parents it appears there is confusion about the roles

and responsibilities of the two senior leaders. Senior leaders have not communicated clearly enough how they are working as a leadership team to improve learning in the classroom. This has led to a situation where the capacity of some of the middle leaders to lead their areas has been reduced.

The 2008 review recommended changes to the middle leadership structure. Several changes have been made which have placed teachers in leadership positions. For example, there is an IPC leadership team, Milepost leaders and leaders for English, mathematics and assessment in the International Stream. These middle leaders are impacting on developments in their areas. This positions the school well to move forward if roles and responsibilities are clarified. What is now required is strong senior leadership which provides them with direction, guidance, builds their capacity and empowers them to be more effective. At present middle leaders are unclear about how much initiative to show and this reduces the impact they have. In the Dutch Stream the teachers with responsibilities do not have leadership roles. Their management roles help to ensure the smooth running of the day and the completion of testing. *We suggest that the school empower those teachers with responsibilities in the Dutch Stream to lead their areas.*

The 2008 review recommended that the school 'devise and implement an observation and monitoring programme including all leaders that provides detailed feedback to teachers about their strengths and areas for development'. There has been progress in this recommendation. It is important that senior leaders are fully involved in this process as this is one of the most important aspects of school life in which they can demonstrate their leadership of learning. Senior leaders need to clarify how they are involved in the observation process and ensure that teachers receive regular opportunities to discuss their classroom performance

The school's immediate line manager is the Human Resources Operations Manager (HRO) Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and he expressed a positive support for the school.

The leadership and management of the school require a clearer strategic focus on those things that directly impact on the quality of learning and teaching. *We suggest that the school leaders clarify their strategic focus on improving learning and ensure that their individual responsibilities are documented.*

Care for quality

The quality of the school's self evaluation has improved since the last review. Termly reports identify areas of strength and areas in need of development. The collection, collation and analysis of information about learning and teaching are developing and this provides a solid base on which to plan future improvements.

The present school improvement plan details the activities that the school believes will help it improve the quality of learning in the school. The plan particularly references improvements in areas of the IPC.

There is a need to improve the classroom observation procedures. This will provide additional information that when combined with the analyses of learning data will enable the school to further improve the focus on improvement planning procedures and provide a basis for planning the next steps in all areas of learning.

Care for quality in the school is now in a position to be very good if the information being gathered is well used.

Care for children

The school provides very good support and guidance for children's personal development. Children are very happy in school and they and their parents speak enthusiastically about how much they enjoy the whole school experience. The positive ethos in the school contributes to the children's self esteem and their motivation to learn.

The 2008 review made two recommendations about how the school needed to develop its tracking of children's learning. Good progress has been made in implementing systems for tracking of learning. The time is right now to ensure that good strategic use is made of this information and that individual teachers use it well to inform learning in their classrooms. Overall, we have not seen enough use at a strategic level of these analyses.

The school has begun to use the International School's Assessment (ISA) which is designed especially for students in international schools from Primary 5 onwards. This is Shell policy. The information has been analysed well by the assessment leader. It is important that this analysis now feeds into the school self evaluation so that the identified areas for development feature in the next school improvement or subject action plans. The analysis should also help individual teachers to more fully meet the needs of children in their classes.

The school recognises that tracking children's progress in the Early Years is an area for development. We agree with the school that this requires improvement. *We suggest that the school implement a time effective and consistent system for observing, recording and tracking children's learning from Pre Nursery to Primary 1.*

The Dutch Stream has systems in place for assessing and monitoring children's learning in language and mathematics. It keeps good records of results in the various CITO tests and tracks learning using scheme related testing. As stated in the learning section there are discrepancies in the standards identified by these two assessments. At present, there is no structured analysis of this data and this means that learning and teaching is not sufficiently informed to enable children to make maximum progress in their learning. It is essential that the discrepancies mentioned between CITO testing and ongoing teacher assessment is investigated and actions planned if analysis indicates that there is a real cause for concern about learning.

The IPC Assessment for Learning Programme is being used to record progress in all the skills over the course of each milepost. The IPC team has identified the need to ensure that these are accurately completed for all subject areas and then to analyse and evaluate the assessments in order to identify strengths and areas for development.

The school is moving forward very well in its use of the IPC self review process. It has identified where it believes it is at present and what it needs to do to be at mastering level against all nine criteria. The process the school is using is a good one, has involved all teachers and has been led well by the IPC team.

Throughout the school the marking of learning is regularly completed by teachers. Comments usually identify where the students have demonstrated learning against the lesson intentions. At best there is feedback about what the child needs to do next. *We suggest that the school monitor and evaluate marking and feedback so that all teachers consistently help the children to know the next steps in their learning.*

In the International Stream there is an appropriate system for identifying children who have particular needs. There is co-operation between the learning support leader, teachers, parents and children. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are developed as appropriate and children receive support in line with their needs. This can involve in-class support and/or withdrawal work as individuals or in small groups. The learning support leader monitors and evaluates the child's progress and meets with parents as appropriate. This is good practice. There is no such system in the Dutch Stream. *We suggest that the school agree and implement a system for identifying children in the Dutch Stream who have specific needs.*

Professional Development

There is a healthy budget for professional development activities which indicates the importance given to this aspect of supporting teachers. The school has a history of good use of professional development opportunities and all teachers try to take the opportunity to attend courses. One good example of whole school training for EAL has had a positive impact on learning and teaching.

Partnerships

There is effective communication between the school and parents. The parents who attended our meeting report that they are very happy with the ways in which the school informs them of what their children are learning and how well they are learning. They believe that their children enjoy school and they all think the school is a safe and caring environment. Some parents expressed the view that they are welcome in school and that there is an open door policy. Other parents did not feel that this was always the case. Parents are happy with the approachability of the teachers and informed us that teachers work very hard.

Parents at our meeting expressed concerns about the leadership and management of the school. They do not think that the vision for the school has been communicated well to them. Parents did tell us that PDO School is a warm and open school community. They have concerns that this could be at risk if communication does not improve.

Teachers provide detailed reports to parents at the end of each term for children from Primary 1 to Primary 8. This is good practice. The school is currently piloting 'three way' meetings where parents, children and the teachers meet to discuss the child's learning. There are indications that this is having a positive impact on learning. *We suggest the school extend this practice to include more year groups.*

The school has an active Parent Teacher Association that meets twice each term to discuss issues of general interest. There are also subcommittees established on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific events or activities

The school is well supported by its parents in a range of learning activities.

The availability and use of resources

The school is well resourced and makes good use of its indoor and outdoor resources to stimulate children's learning. Teachers are supported well by the school's non educational staff so that they can focus on their role in developing learning.

There is a well-equipped ICT suite which is accessed on a rota basis by classes from Nursery to Primary 8. PDO swimming pool is an excellent additional facility which has a positive impact on children's learning.

Key recommendations

Throughout the report we have made various suggestions about what the school might do to help it provide an even better education for its students. There are particular things which we think the school should act upon to improve the already high quality of its educational provision and improve children's learning.

We recommend that the school:

- **improve learning in the Nursery and Primary 1 so that all children make better progress when involved in independent or self selected activities.**
- **improve learning, particularly, though not exclusively, for the more able by ensuring that children's individual needs are met so that they make the progress appropriate to their ability.**
- **ensure that there is less variance in the progress being made between children in different classes in the school**

Conclusion

We are grateful for the way in which we were welcomed into the school. We realise that any review of performance – particularly when the results are to be made available in a small community – is potentially a stressful experience. Despite this we were 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 appropriate action. We have tried to be supportive and hope that what we have said and what we have written helps the school in its future development.

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March 2011