

NABSS INSPECTION REVIEW 2022 – 23

A brief review of the year compiled by the external moderator.

This year, 62 inspections took place. **Most schools achieved the full four years of authorisation** and most of the rest were recommended for shorter periods for parts of the school which were expanding to accommodate new year groups. Slightly unusually, five schools were required to submit action plans setting out how the school intended to improve the provision to a satisfactory level for authorisation as British. The low standards found on inspection included poor achievement by the pupils, inadequate qualifications and experience of teachers, a lack of training and support for staff, poor planning and marking, and inadequate resources. These schools will be inspected again to assess whether standards are high enough to be recommended for authorisation as British. As a result of the changes to procedures when new schools apply for British status, schools are finding it more difficult to progress beyond the first stage of approval if there are doubts about the qualifications and experience of the teachers. This, combined with the new procedure of a visit by an inspector, has lengthened the application process, but puts schools in a better position when they are inspected for the first time to determine whether or not they receive a recommendation for authorisation.

Standards remain high in British schools. Most teaching is good or very good, and this year a larger proportion has been deemed outstanding. Unsatisfactory teaching is rare, though the quality of teaching in many schools still varies between classes and within year groups. The best lessons, regardless of age group, are characterised by the teacher's good subject knowledge, effective methods of teaching skilfully adapted to suit the pupils' ages and abilities and the use of good quality resources which are sensibly deployed. As a result, pupils understand what is expected of them and they work productively for sustained periods of time. They take pride in the work they produce. Inspections reveal these pupils discernibly increase their knowledge, deepen their understanding and refine their skills. The best teachers convey an infectious enthusiasm for their subject or phase which inspires learners. They in turn take learning seriously and make good progress.

These good standards of achievement are bolstered by the almost universal positivity of the pupils and by their high standards of spoken and written English. Pupils who have joined schools recently often make impressive progress in learning English in a short amount of time. In one school, a group of pupils who voiced opinions on how they thought the school could be improved, spoke with confidence and clarity. They used excellent English vocabulary and convincing persuasive language.

Social education and personal development are often very strong in the schools. The pupils are free from bullying and feel they are listened to. Behaviour is often exemplary. The

schools also play their part by establishing a range of values for their pupils and teaching them about their responsibilities in their wider community. Through good relationships with each other and with teachers, the students learn to be independent and self-confident. Assemblies are often used effectively to promote the schools' values. The older students often receive good careers guidance. Sixth form students are usually well-informed about career opportunities and about the next stages of education. They leave school well-prepared for adult life.

Inspectors have found more examples of effective leadership in schools this year. A vivid snapshot of the characteristics of effectiveness in an inspection report stated that 'the school is led and managed by its long-standing head teacher who is well supported by a senior team of managers. The head directs the staff appraisal system which is rigorous and ensures that teachers are reflective in their practice and are always looking to improve. There is a constant professional dialogue between managers and staff. Practices are consistent across the school and expectations, and consequently standards, are high.' Effectiveness here was illustrated by the school's decision to prioritise reading and writing skills following a slight dip in standards during the pandemic. Good assessment systems identified the issue, good communication and cooperation led to agreed remedial action, resources were allocated as necessary, and further assessment resulted in the acknowledgement of good progress for all pupils receiving support.

Effective head teachers provide a clear sense of direction for a school. They prioritise. They focus the attention of staff on what is important. They know what is going on in the classrooms. They have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses, and know how to build on the strengths and reduce the weaknesses. They gain this overview from systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. By getting the best out of their staff, they influence work in the classrooms and help to raise standards achieved by the students.

Inspections this year acknowledge good leadership, most often exemplified by the good relationships in schools and care for pupils. However, a significant minority of schools lack a clear workable management structure where responsibilities are delegated sensibly. Consequently, some managers struggle to be effective and to use scarce time away from their classes productively. Some schools do not have a strategic plan for their development, even when on the brink of admitting new age groups as the school expands. A few leaders have insufficient knowledge or experience of how successful British schools work. In these schools, inconsistency in the quality of teaching persists. Some leaders are insufficiently aware of the strengths and weaknesses within their school; some leaders do not supply enough professional development or guidance to teachers to support them as individuals or to support the school's priorities for development.

According to the evidence from inspections, difficulties in teacher recruitment and retention are growing in schools. While most schools still have a well-balanced mix of well qualified and experienced staff, some are beginning to find problems recruiting well qualified teachers, particularly when they expand into new age groups. Some teachers have to teach outside of their specialism, at least temporarily. Some schools offer incentives and support to help recruit, train and retain staff with the appropriate qualifications and experience. It is noticeable that those schools in which the teachers feel valued and able to contribute directly to school improvement are often better at staff retention. Morale is high and turnover is low. At present, recruitment and retention problems may be 'clouds no bigger than a human hand', but there is no doubt that if these issues become more pressing, they will eventually have a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning.

The recommendations for improvement made to schools at the end of an inspection are very important because they encapsulate the key areas of weakness when all the evidence is analysed. They highlight the areas of educational provision which, when remedied, are likely to have the biggest effect on improving pupils' learning and achievement. **All schools take the inspection's recommendations seriously and usually set them as priorities for action.** Subsequent inspections reveal that, although some schools are only partway along the road to improvement, most have made discernible progress.

Inconsistency in the marking of pupils' work is often mentioned as an important weakness to be tackled. Shared expectations of marking may help to clarify what is required, but each subject or phase should determine practice in their areas. The key purpose of marking is to promote learning, but effectiveness declines if marking evolves into an unhelpful burden. Inspectors have no preferred system for marking, but the best practice aids pupils to make significant and sustained gains in their learning.

The system for inspecting and authorising British schools in Spain is now mature. It may be worthwhile to reflect on what inspection is for. Firstly, it is a requirement to enable the British Council to recommend to the Spanish authorities that a school should be recognised as British. But inspection has two other important functions: to inform interested parties, such as parents, about standards in their schools; and to provide a professional dialogue between staff and impartial inspectors about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This dialogue is based on evidence of what has been observed during the inspection and its prime purpose is to help the school to improve. This last function is essential as, without it, inspection becomes a limited bureaucratic exercise.