

‘No Child Left Behind – Everyone’s Responsibility’

Raising the Achievement of Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals

Ofsted HMI Survey on good practice in six Surrey Schools

Between 25th and 27th November 2013 six Surrey schools took part in an HMI survey on good practice in raising the achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals. We have pleasure in setting out below the common features of effective practice identified in the participating schools and would like to thank the schools listed below for their co-operation.

Pine Ridge Infant & Nursery School – Janet Du Cros
 Guildford Grove School – Elizabeth Corlett
 Limsfield CofE Infant School – Jenny Baird
 St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, Guildford – Steve Philips
 Wallace Fields Junior – Stephen Lee
 St Bartholomew’s CofE Primary School – Charles Beckerson

Outline of survey activity

Six schools from the primary phase received a survey visit from an HMI during the week beginning 25 November 2013. The schools were selected on the basis of their attainment and progress data. The schools are situated across the four Surrey quadrants, serve diverse communities and contain varying proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. In all six schools pupils eligible for free school meals attain results that are above the average attainment of similar pupils in Surrey as a whole. All six schools had been judged to be good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection.

During the monitoring visits, HMI gathered information about the impact of leadership on the progress of pupils eligible for free school meals, the quality of provision and teaching in the classroom and the quality of interventions and links with parents and the community outside the classroom. All visits included meetings with senior leaders and governors, joint lesson observations with the headteacher or a senior leader, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of pupils’ work. In two of the schools, HMI also met parents of pupils eligible for free school meals. Relevant documentary evidence, particularly relating to the tracking of pupils’ progress and teachers’ planning, was also scrutinised. All schools involved in the survey were provided with significant opportunities to engage in discussion with HMI.

Features of good practice

The impact of leadership

- **School leaders relentlessly aim to ensure that all pupils achieve well.** Leaders’ primary focus is on continually

improving teaching so that it is of the highest quality. Teachers receive regular training which helps them improve their practice. They know what the different aspects of good quality teaching are and strive to put them into practice. Leaders create a strong professional culture in which teachers share ideas, draw on best practice, reflect on their teaching, and receive effective support from each other and from leaders. Often, this is enhanced by strong partnerships with other schools. Teachers continually seek to improve their teaching so that no pupil underachieves.

- **The headteacher leads by example. He or she is an expert in teaching and learning.** The high level of subject knowledge and skills of other leaders ensures that teachers get the advice and support they need in order to effectively meet the needs of pupils. Leaders are reflective and make sure that teachers are given sufficient time for their own professional development and support.
- **Data are comprehensive and useful, and make a difference to what happens in the classroom.** The progress of all pupils is assessed accurately and regularly, and analysed in detail. Leaders pay very close attention to the achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals. When these pupils are at risk of underachievement, leaders and teachers take effective and specific steps to improve the progress of these pupils.
- **Leaders monitor and evaluate teaching rigorously.** Frequent lesson observations focus on how well teachers are helping underachieving pupils to make more rapid progress. Leaders’ timely review of pupils’ work and teachers’ planning ensures that pupils are being challenged appropriately and making good progress over time. Importantly, leaders regularly give teachers high quality feedback about what they are doing well and what they need to improve. Leaders make sure that this feedback is acted upon by teachers and that it makes a positive difference to pupils’ achievement. The records of leaders’ monitoring activities show a clear focus on the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals.
- **The school environment promotes pupils’ learning.** Classrooms and corridors welcome children and adults with celebratory displays of work and resources to support current programmes of study. Working walls and desktop toolkits provide pupils with helpful resources when working individually or on tables, encouraging independence and resilience. There are frequent examples of pupils’ work that demonstrate high achievement, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals.

- **Leaders make sure that pupils who are eligible for free school meals play a full part in school life.** School leaders ensure that pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable have a real stake in the school: for example, places on the school council. Additional funding is used to allow pupils to participate in school trips and other activities. Leaders encourage and sometimes insist upon extra learning – such as home learning, the use of a virtual learning environment, reading at home and involvement in after-school provision.
- **Governors know how well pupils are achieving and why.** They regularly receive detailed information about the achievement of pupils and the quality of teaching. This allows them to challenge school leaders effectively. Governors focus specifically on the pupils who are at risk of underachieving, including those eligible for free school meals, and expect leaders to take swift action to improve the progress of these pupils. They regularly check whether these actions have been effective or not.

In the classroom

- **Pupils establish a secure foundation in the Early Years Foundation Stage.** Leaders identify this as critically important for pupils eligible for free school meals. It is often enhanced by partnerships with children's centres, provision for under-3s and nursery provision. Children's learning is enriched with high quality language and number work, purposeful child-initiated activities and thoughtfully planned interaction with adults. Carefully thought-out provision in the outdoor learning areas enhances children's experience.
- **Teachers have high expectations of all pupils.** They expect all pupils to reach the same high standards, regardless of their backgrounds. Teachers carefully differentiate the kinds of support pupils receive in order for all pupils to achieve well. Teachers do not put ceilings on what pupils can achieve. Resilient behaviour, independence and purposeful learning are promoted by all teachers. No time is wasted in transitions between activities. Extremely positive relationships with teachers and other adults ensure that pupils are motivated and challenged.
- **Teachers' feedback to pupils is regular and effective.** Marking clearly shows pupils what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are routinely expected to make improvements to their work. Teachers give pupils specific feedback during lessons as well. They question pupils effectively in order to find out what pupils have learnt and what gaps exist in their understanding. Often, teachers ask pupils eligible for free school meals additional targeted questions, or give them extra feedback about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- **Teaching is precisely matched to pupils' needs.** Teachers know pupils' strengths and weaknesses in detail. They use what they have found out about pupils' learning from marking their work and from observations they make in the classroom to adapt subsequent activities and lesson plans. Consequently, lesson plans show how teachers intend to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals. Groupings of pupils are flexible and are determined by careful planning that takes account of individual needs. Thorough planning ensures that there are varied opportunities to practise literacy and numeracy skills throughout the curriculum, in science, topic work, technology and PE.
- **Teaching assistants play a central part in supporting pupils' learning.** Leaders invest time and money in providing high quality training for teaching assistants. As a result,

teaching assistants make a crucial contribution to pupils' learning because their levels of skill are high. They question pupils well and make sure that pupils' independence is not jeopardised by their support in lessons. There is good communication between teachers and teaching assistants. They see themselves as one team who work together to help pupils make great progress.

- **Effective speaking and listening forms the basis of good learning.** Pupils productively work together in lessons. They are taught how to work well in pairs and groups, and they confidently contribute to whole-class discussions. Not only do pupils develop each other's ideas, but they often challenge each other's thinking. They are taught how to review the quality of their own learning and that of their peers, and they are given regular opportunities in lessons to do so. Pupils are encouraged to speak in sentences and give extended answers. Storytelling, oral rehearsing of writing, role-play and drama engage pupils, build their confidence and promote confident, vibrant writing from the early years upwards. These features combine to improve pupils' language skills. This is often crucial for improving the achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals.
- **Pupils' reading skills develop rapidly.** Pupils are taught phonics effectively. Reading for pleasure is promoted throughout the school, with high expectations of parental involvement. Teachers continue to track reading regularly and with frequency, particularly for those pupils who have not reached national expectations. Regular guided reading, specific reading interventions reading recovery programmes and refreshed library provision drive pupils' tangible love of reading.

Outside the classroom

- **Pupils' needs are comprehensively evaluated.** Leaders and teachers go to great lengths to make sure that they have detailed information about individual pupils. This includes information about their achievement but also information about their social and emotional needs. This ensures that leaders and teachers know every pupil extremely well so that they can offer the right provision for them.
- **Interventions are effective.** They are matched precisely to pupils' needs because of the detailed information leaders and teachers have about pupils. For pupils eligible for free school meals, these interventions often focus on developing reading and language skills, but they also focus on improving pupils' social skills, self-esteem and confidence. Interventions are led by skilled teachers and teaching assistants. However, interventions are never seen as a replacement for high quality teaching in the classroom. Rather, it is the carefully planned blend of the two that help pupils make more rapid progress. Leaders evaluate the impact of interventions in great detail, making changes when necessary.
- **Links with parents and other agencies are very strong.** Leaders make extra efforts to establish good relationships with parents, especially those whose children are eligible for free school meals. School leaders know they are influential in the local community and take practical steps to forge strong, life-changing links between parents and between home and school. Schools often employ additional members of staff to enhance this. Equally, teachers make themselves readily available to parents in order to discuss the needs and progress of pupils. Leaders also make sure that there is regular and effective communication with other agencies so that appropriate information about pupils is shared. This helps ensure that provision for pupils in school is specifically tailored to their needs.