

## Case study 12

### School: Infant school in the East Midlands

### Focus: Achieving excellence and enjoyment: recognising individuals, celebrating families and communities

#### Background

The school is a modern, multicultural inner city school built in the 1970s based in the East Midlands. It is a popular school that attracts children from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, where 30 different languages are spoken. The school is committed to ensuring that all children, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, attainment or background are encouraged to reach their full potential.

In 2005 the school joined an initiative in conjunction with Creative Partnerships which provides school children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest quality

This infant school serves a very diverse population in an area of significant pockets of deprivation. A high proportion of the school's children come from these areas of deprivation. Close proximity to a university campus and a teaching hospital brings children from student and short stay homes. Gujarati, Somali, Polish and Albanian are the main languages in the school. The main ethnicities and languages of new arrivals are Polish, Latvian and Congolese. Minority ethnic children form some 65% of the school population.

Turbulence and child mobility is high and a significant proportion of children enter and leave school mid-term. School turbulence figures from the beginning of the Foundation Stage to the end of Year 2 were 72% for the 2005 cohort. Turbulence for Year 2 alone was 38%.

Overall, 35% of children receive free school meals, 25% receive income support and 10% claim family tax credit/student support. A total of 40% of children are from lone-parent families and 15% of children are on the special educational needs (SEN) register, with one statemented child and a further six children undergoing the statementing process. In all, 64% of children are of dual heritage and have English as an additional language (EAL), with

30 languages spoken in the school. Three per cent of children have refugee/asylum seeker status; 5% are supported by social services; 2% are currently on the 'at risk' register/child protection with a further 15% on the school/social services file. Attendance remains below expectations at 91%.

Children's attainment on entry at the age of three varies but overall is below/well below expected levels in language and literacy, mathematics, and personal and social education. On entry into school, the children are assessed on a profile which leads onto the Foundation Stage profile using the stepping stones.

## What is being done?

The school's vision for new arrivals is explained very clearly by the headteacher:

- Any child or adult arriving in the school should find something immediately recognisable – through image, script, text, sound or artefact.
- All should feel welcomed as valued members of the community from the outset.

Whole-school values of tolerance and respect are promoted, for example through inclusive assemblies. The importance of listening to others is emphasised. There is a strong message of acceptance and celebration from the first contact. *'We look to what the children bring...'*, alongside the recognition of adult skills and expertise:

*'We don't let any talent or expertise go unnoticed. For example, one of our mums is a concert pianist from Mongolia and she played for our Christmas show. A Greek mum will be running a music club this term. A level 3 childcare student, with profoundly deaf parents, returned to teach the staff signing. We now use signing across the school – it's something we are all learning and there are no experts. It really raises the self-esteem of the children to know we are all learning together.'*

The school places a high emphasis on working with parents through family learning and fun activities. There are many opportunities for communities to share and work together: celebration days such as *'Cool (name of town)'*; *'The world in our field'* – a whole-school

picnic celebrating different cuisines and cultures; 'Farmers' markets' – celebrating local community products.

### **Welcome and induction**

Staff are present in the two school playgrounds every morning to welcome parents and children. Parents are included very closely in the induction into school, particularly if their children are the only speakers of their language in the school. The school draws upon bilingual, trilingual and multilingual staff, volunteers, English for speakers of other languages, and childcare students, as well as parents, to help children rapidly feel settled and ready to start the learning journey. Home languages are used wherever possible and parents can register their children in their preferred language. Staff learn to say 'Hello' to parents in their home language. Parents are welcomed into class and can stay with their children as long as they want and always come into class at the start of the day.

The headteacher recognises the importance of using the skills and experience of the local community to support new arrivals but recognises the potential barriers such communities face when encountering school for the first time. *'There is always someone who can help ... it's important to let them (the parents and wider community) cross the threshold. We will do our utmost to explain... it's a question of time and commitment'.*

The induction process begins immediately. The school never knows how long the child will be with them – it could be three days, three weeks or three terms. They work, however, on the assumption that the children will stay and so they are placed from the first day in the secure comfort of well-ordered single year group classes (which are kept as small as possible) with above-average numbers of highly-skilled teaching and support staff. Additional adults are deployed as needed in classes to support new arrivals. Children are welcomed by children and are instantly attached to 'buddies'.

Initially, the focus is on finding out what the children can do, using home language assessments wherever possible and to establish the necessary relevant background information on children's previous learning experiences. The school recognises the need to give these young new arrivals, who may be very stressed or traumatised, time to settle into their new environment. Additional support is provided according to individual needs. Tracking processes are established immediately to ensure that the progress of each new arrival can be closely monitored.

### **Teaching and learning**

Home languages are used to support learning wherever possible so that a child's existing knowledge and understanding, for example in mathematics, can be acknowledged and built on.

Staff recognise that learning English will take time but the process can be made easier by carefully planned and structured support which is provided mainly in class. They emphasise the importance of games, practical activities, drama and opportunities to talk which can be provided informally to support language acquisition. The curriculum is carefully planned to be active, relevant and inclusive, reflecting the diversity of the school population. The school now makes significant use of sign language to support learning and give children the opportunity to become 'experts' as staff learn this new skill alongside the children.

The headteacher is committed to maintaining low class sizes, providing a high ratio between staff and children. There is additional adult support in each class and a peripatetic ethnic minority achievement (EMA) teacher provides specific support two days a week. This support is mostly class-based but the teacher also works with family groups. Currently, additional specific support is being given to a group of Polish-speaking children. The EMA teacher maintains a close liaison with the class teachers. Planning sheets and assessments of progress are shared on a regular basis. The main focus of the EMA work is on supporting access language for new arrivals, with lots of opportunity for practical work and small group interaction.

Detailed records of progress are kept for all children. QCA language levels are used as a measure of progress and each bilingual child has a QCA language level assigned alongside National Curriculum levels. The progress of all children is individually tracked across all year groups. Individual targets are set and monitored.

The results of statutory assessments are analysed in relation to all groups and changes made to the school's procedures should the analysis show variations between groups of learners. Close analysis of the comparative achievement of different ethnic groups, based on ethnicity, language, home background and gender, is used to inform planning for the next year and the placement of EAL, SEN and learning support. Children identified as more able and talented are provided with opportunities to deepen and develop their learning.

There is a strong emphasis on staff professional development, with particular focus on supporting bilingual learners. The expected outcome for all professional development is to make a difference to children's learning. Recent continuing professional development has included work on QCA language levels, the National Strategy EAL toolkit, the EAL dimensions of the renewed Framework and specific work on teaching vocabulary development and sentence structure across the curriculum.

The headteacher has specific expertise in multi-cultural education and is acutely aware of the vital importance of understanding the cultural dimension to learning. She constantly reinforces

the notion of such differences in learning experiences and processes, and ensures staff are aware of these differences when planning their teaching and assessing children's learning.

## Outcomes

### Attainment and progress

At Key Stage 1, the children make very good progress across all subjects but particularly in English (reading) and mathematics. Value added is high. Results for the 2006 statutory assessments show that the cohort exceeded national (2005) scores for level 3 in reading, writing and science. The scores for mathematics were equal at level 2A but slightly down at level 3.

In speaking and listening the percentage of children achieving level 3 was half the national average but given the complexity of the cohort and the number of new entries with EAL this is not a surprise. Ongoing improvement in national test results for the past four years represented as average point scores show:

- reading results improved from 14.20 in 2001 to 15.73 in 2006 (national average in 2005 was 15.70);
- writing improved from 13.16 in 2001 to 14.14 in 2006 (national average in 2005 was 14.60);
- mathematics improved from 13.69 in 2001 to 15.68 in 2005 (national average in 2005 was 16.00).

Analysis indicates that of the seven children in the 2006 cohort with an overall score less than level 2, only one has been at the school since the beginning of the second year of the Foundation Stage and he has been assessed for a specific learning difficulty. The remaining six are all children with EAL needs, two of whom have been learning English for less than six months.

The school makes a significant difference to children's attainment. The single determining factor for achievement is the length of time the children have spent in school. Achievement is high among those children who stay with the school throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, irrespective of gender or ethnicity. Children on the SEN register, including those with statements, make good progress set against the targets on their individual education plans. Looked-after children also make good progress in line with their personal education plans.

The school remains committed to continuing progress and improvement, with speaking and listening identified as a priority area for whole-school development.

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