

The Review of Shell Schools

Plasau School

January 2007

Summary Report

Introduction

This review was part of a rolling programme of school 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 people. Howard Marshall and Ilona Dubois work with Fieldwork Education and Stichting NOB, the organisations in the UK and the Netherlands that are responsible for the education management of Shell schools. Nina Siddall joined the team as the third member, being someone who does not normally work with Fieldwork or Stichting NOB or have dealings with Shell schools. Her membership of the team was to extend its perspective and to establish a degree of impartiality. Each member 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 took place over 5 school days from 29 January 2007 to 2 February 2007.

In conducting the review we used a framework devised 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 63 lessons or parts of lessons for a total time of 22 hours
- looked at samples of children’s work
- met with the headteacher
- met with the deputy headteacher
- met individually with other teachers
- met with the staff team
- met with parents
- analysed responses to a questionnaire sent to all parents
- talked with children
- reviewed a range of documentation
- observed other activities
- met with the HR Manager

The School

The school is situated on the outskirts of Miri in Sarawak State, Malaysia. Its premises are in the residential area of Sarawak Shell Berhad (SSB). It is operated by SSB and caters for children of the company’s expatriate staff and of those employed by other associated companies.

At the time of the review there were 223 children on the school roll. There are around 26 different nationalities represented in the school and approximately 18 first languages. Apart from the headteacher, there are 20 full-time and 3 part-time teachers in the school. They represent 4 different nationalities. In recent years the size of the school has changed – there having been 140 on roll in 2004.

The school was previously reviewed in 2004. On that occasion the key recommendations were that the school:

- Agree the values and standards that underpin effective learning and teaching throughout the school.
- Further develop the system of individual target setting to establish high standards of children's learning.
- Continue to review its provision for English as an additional language, considering such things as agreed strategies, necessary expertise, staff training and providing information to parents.
- Ensure curriculum coverage by identifying the learning goals that are covered in the chosen IPC units of work and – where appropriate – teaching subject-specific units to fill any significant gaps.

Overview

Children in Piasau School achieve high standards in their learning and make very good progress. The school provides a very good educational environment and the quality of learning and teaching is high. The school is very well managed and led and is staffed with hard working, enthusiastic and committed teachers. The school is supported by a company convinced of the school's importance.

Learning

Schools exist to promote children's learning, so this was the main focus of the review. We looked at learning in its widest sense, including aspects such as social, moral, personal, physical and academic development.

Learning in almost all lessons and over time is good. The progress of children exceeds the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and English National Curriculum (NC) expectations. For children who learn English as an additional language (EAL), to achieve these standards indicates very good learning.

The school learning statement underpins children's learning: "At Piasau School we believe that learning is a lifelong process which furthers knowledge, develops skills and deepens understanding and is best promoted in a nurturing, supportive yet challenging international environment." We observed children, from the Nursery to Primary 8, who demonstrated confidence, independence and commitment. Children were caring, considerate and frequently took responsibility as classroom monitors. They contributed to the life of their class and the school showing responsibility for themselves and others. Children relate very well to their class teacher and clearly understood how rules help them to stay safe and happy.

English and Mathematics

The results for the most recent assessments in summer 2006 at Primary 3 are good compared with results in England and very good when we consider the number of second language learners. Primary 7 results are excellent as almost all children attained well above the level expected of them in literacy and in numeracy compared with standards in England. For some of these children the progress they made was outstanding.

We agree with the school self-review analysis of previous years' results, where teacher assessment and teacher knowledge indicated that generally the children's reading levels are higher than their writing levels. This is not a major issue as the differences are similar to those in England.

Literacy learning is promoted both through dedicated literacy teaching and opportunities to develop and apply learning across the curriculum and beyond the school day. Key aspects of learning, including speaking and listening, are securely developed and embedded in literacy learning. We observed children learning to read and to develop their reading through shared, guided and independent activities. Children were heard reading confidently to parent helpers in several classes.

Using key aspects of learning such as enquiry, discussion and creative thinking, children develop their understanding of genre and learn how to describe characters and construct simple storylines. Dialogue, with accurate use of speech marks, is well presented in their own stories. In more interactive texts, such as PowerPoint presentations, children explore how carefully selected vocabulary, different colour moods and graphics can contribute to the telling of a story.

During the review, the team observed the majority of core areas of learning in literacy. In reading we observed a range of skills and strategies including phonics and use of graphic cues. Children were observed selecting information from texts, identifying and commenting on the structure and organisation of texts and using ideas to enrich their own writing. There were many opportunities for children to relate books to their own experience and express personal views. On several occasions, older children commented on the overall effect of the text on the reader.

In writing we observed good and very good examples of composition. Children learn to write in a variety of forms for different purposes including fiction, poetry and non-fiction adapting style to audience. The development of children's confidence as writers is good. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools to aid presentation is good and keyboard skills develop appropriately. Learning of sentence structure and punctuation is frequently produced at a very good standard. Children apply good phonic knowledge and use spelling rules very well when writing. We observed children learning letters and sounds within other learning. Phonic learning is exciting, appropriate and sufficient.

A significant strength in learning is speaking and listening. Children are confident when speaking, listening and responding in group discussion and interaction with both peers and adults.

Children are improving their evaluative skills by considering what they have learned during lessons. They enjoy the various methods used and are able to describe why they think they are 'getting it' or not. We observed some children self assessing in a kinaesthetic manner selecting the appropriate actions for "I'm getting used to it, I'm getting better and I'm getting it..." This is good practice and will help future learning.

In mathematics learning was seen in the seven core National Curriculum areas across the school. Children confidently use and apply mathematics to communicate, reason and solve problems, often working beyond expectations of their age. Development of mathematical language is good.

Other subjects

For the majority of subjects, other than English and mathematics, the school uses the learning goals of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and its Early Years programme. From our observations and school assessment data most children are on track to meet or exceed their appropriate IPC milestones.

In lessons where the children's interest was engaged and the activity challenged their thinking, learning was very good. In such classes children demonstrated good understanding of the lesson content. Many very productive lessons were seen in which children were attentive and motivated, where they persevered with the challenges they had been set and went on to show progress in their learning. There were examples, too, of collaboration between children and peer support for learning; instances of children assessing their own learning, recognising and correcting their own errors while they worked were seen. Relative to their prior attainment a few of the most able children require even greater challenge if they are to reach their full potential.

Empathy, reasoning and evaluation skills are developed through mathematics, English and IPC learning opportunities. Children have opportunities to identify the impact that the behaviours of some

have on others. Children's attitude to learning and the work ethic in classrooms is very strong. Children generally take pride in their work.

Children are becoming active and reflective learners. We observed examples of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) learning. Children are often able to work independently of the teacher and understand the need for reflection. Children learn best and make most progress when they spend time self assessing and reflecting on their learning.

In Art, good early painting skills were observed from Nursery children through to extended sessions in Primary 7 and 8 where children were engaged in critical studies of a range of schools of art with children presenting a research project and then working in the style of a chosen artist. Learning in art was age appropriate and sufficient.

Geography and history learning within the IPC is appropriate and sufficient. Children learn confidently as evidenced in children's workbooks and displays in classrooms. A good range of maps around school also supports the international curriculum. Children's international understanding and learning of other cultures is developed well through the IPC.

Music lessons were observed where children demonstrated progress in the use of their voice, listening skills, movement and playing a variety of percussion instruments. Learning was good in all lessons with children making appropriate use of the resources.

Children in all year groups achieve above average swimming skills and are on track to meet the learning goals of their relevant mileposts.

In science, learning was good as it was centred on enrichment of previous learning and development of new understanding. Children fulfilled the IPC learning targets. They were challenged and acquired, consolidated and applied knowledge and skills.

In ICT learning is supported by good use of interactive whiteboards. Progress in learning is good against IPC goals and supported further through the use of other learning materials

Children with learning difficulties or special educational needs (SEN) and those with English as an additional language (EAL) make progress in their learning in lessons and most make good progress overall. We observed no significant differences between the attainment and rates of progress of boys and girls or of different age groups. Children's learning is supported well by parents and the tasks that the children complete at home enhance learning in several areas.

Learning was best where marking informed next steps in learning. Children with learning targets used these to improve these aspects of their learning.

Teaching for learning

Teaching is the most important factor in promoting children's learning. For this part of the review we considered not only the teaching that happens in the classroom and elsewhere, but also how the school supports teaching that enables children to learn well.

The quality of teaching

The quality of the teaching team is a strength of Piasau School. During the review we were impressed by the commitment of the teachers to their teaching. The teachers share a very clear dedication to raising the standards of children's learning. They have set themselves and each other high standards and are working very hard to reach these. This view is supported by the parents. Overall parents who attended our meeting and/or returned our questionnaire clearly hold the team in high regard. At schools like this, the high turnover of staff is always challenging. Only four teachers and the headteacher remain since the review three years ago. However this has not prevented the team from moving forward and developing a shared professional attitude and clear pride towards providing a good education for the children. Teachers cooperate well and share their expertise, they clearly benefit from each other's professionalism. The focus on learning and the international dimension of the school permeate through into all different aspects of the school. This is very good practice.

The self-review of the school and the school improvement plan identified the importance of the following issues in relation to the teaching for learning:

- The sharing of clear learning targets with the children
- Self-assessment
- The provision of an effective learning environment, with areas of learning to promote independent learning

During the review we have seen that teachers have responded to these issues and have taken action upon it. We compliment them on this. They have established a common best practice, which is applied consistently by most of the teachers.

We saw many examples of good teaching, such as

- clear learning objectives that were explained to children and displayed on the board
- good subject knowledge
- well structured lessons, starting off with a whole group activity, followed by differentiated group or individual tasks
- plenary sessions used to identify areas for improvement
- effective use of attractive areas of learning in the classroom
- stimulating environment where children are encouraged to be inquisitive learners
- making effective use of the interactive whiteboards to engage children in their learning
- a recognition of children's different learning styles
- encouraging children to develop their independent learning and collaborative skills
- modelling good assessment for learning
- promoting discussion through talking partners; children are confident in using this strategy
- a good pace providing high challenge and low stress
- effective use of ICT in and outside the classroom

Children are encouraged to become active and reflective learners; we observed examples of learning using a range of learning styles. Children are often able to work independent of the teacher and understand the need for reflection. Where they are offered opportunities to self assess their learning, then learning is often good. Children are generally assessing their learning well. On a few occasions we saw some children rushing this reflective part of the lesson.

Reading records are differentiated and the book bands system is well established. With a high percentage of EAL children it is encouraging to observe extensive speaking and listening opportunities, often supported by good use of gesture, that aid immersion in English for second language speakers.

Since the last review the school has made a major step forward in the field of ICT. The majority of teachers teach ICT well and make good use of ICT in the classroom. Teachers have been given training by the three ICT coordinators and all the new resources are well used to enhance children's learning.

The school improvement plan has identified the tuition of EAL and SEN children as areas for development and the school has acted accordingly. Appropriate measures are being taken. Children for whom English is an additional language and children with special educational needs receive additional support individually and class teaching generally takes account of their individual needs. This enables them to make good progress. This is a good initiative and children will benefit as it is developed further.

The school has identified mathematics as a priority in the 2007-8 school improvement plan. We suggest a particular area for further development is investigational and problem solving in mathematics. We were provided with some good examples of investigational mathematics. As in many other schools, the challenge now is to ensure that this area exhibits continuity and progression throughout the school.

At times, feedback to children, through verbal and written comments in books is inconsistent in its message. At best, it provides children with a clear understanding of where they are in their learning

and what they need to do next to improve. Not all practice reaches this good level. **We recommend that the school review its policy on effective marking and feedback and then monitors its provision to ensure that the policy is applied consistently.**

The Curriculum

The school's curriculum is broad, well planned and reflects Shell policies. It provides an appropriate opportunity for children to learn and to reach good levels of attainment and develop international awareness. The curriculum for language and mathematics is fully linked with the English National Curriculum. Other subjects are taught through the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and the IPC Early Years Programme by the class teachers. The school has deliberately chosen not to work with specialist teachers for these subjects, to guarantee the coherence within the curriculum.

During the review parents questioned the amount of time spent on swimming. Because of the travel time, the 30 minutes of swimming in the morning, mean 90 minutes curriculum time a week for all children. The physical education programme (PE) appears very narrow as a result of the heavy emphasis on swimming. The programme of swimming is considered essential for the school due to the life styles of pupils and close proximity of the school to large bodies of deep water. We observed good learning taking place during swimming lessons. The leading swimming teacher is ably supported by staff and parents (10 adults: 30 children) to deliver a programme that promotes high level learning. *We suggest that the school review the provision of swimming.*

The international dimension of the school is well enhanced by the Cultural Module, in which, the school takes great pride. During the review visit, Egypt was the focus country and it was clear that most children showed real interest and were benefiting from it. The Egyptian children were really proud with all the attention for their home country. Learning about the host country Malaysia is further developed by regular school outings.

A well developed system is in place for the additional languages taught, to meet the different needs of the children. The majority of the children learn French as an additional language. If parents prefer, children who have English as a second language can opt out of the French lessons to improve their mother tongue in sessions led by a parent. The Dutch speaking children have Dutch lessons led by a teacher. As highlighted in the school improvement plan, the growing number of Dutch children has led to a change in the provision of their mother tongue provision and the amount of Dutch language time has increased considerably.

Based on requests from Dutch parents, recommendations were made last year regarding the provision of the Dutch language for Dutch children:

- To increase the amount of tuition time in Dutch by a professional teacher
- To introduce a new language scheme
- To introduce CITO testing

The school has taken the wishes from the parents and these recommendations seriously; since September a full time Dutch teacher has been working in the school, with the sole purpose to provide the Dutch children with language lessons. Very recently the school has introduced the recommended new language scheme. The school is now looking to introduce regular individual assessment. We expect that all measures that the school is taking this school year will improve learning for the significant percentage of Dutch children in the school.

Learning time

Teachers are at school well before the school day starts and stay on after it ends. The school makes effective use of time, often with good pace within lessons. Lessons start and finish on time and following breaks children are back involved in their learning quickly.

During the review there were questions from parents about the amount of curriculum time at the school. Evidence indicates that the intended time allocations fully meet the requirements for Shell schools and compare well with those in England.

Educational Climate

The school's educational climate or ethos is a strength. The environment inside and outside the classrooms is stimulating and supportive to children. Children seem to be happy to come to school and are taught to communicate easily with adults and each other. Teachers and children know each other well and the relationships seem to be good. Children get on well together and are taught to respect each other and other people. Behaviour on the playground is very good and is in accordance with the standards set by the school.

Conditions for Learning

Conditions for Learning are all those other things that contribute to children's 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 school's leadership and management team impacts extremely well on the quality of learning and teaching at the school.

The headteacher is in his eighth year at Piasau School. When he took over as headteacher the school was in need of substantial change if it was to provide children with a good education. In the last seven years, and especially since the last review, the school has been transformed into one that is truly learning focused and it provides a very good education for the children.

The school has a very clear sense of direction. This is expressed in the aim of the school which is 'to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to learn to their full potential.'

The school has developed a very good approach to learning-focused self-evaluation which creates information that shows the areas of children's learning that have been developed and indicates areas that should be considered for future development to improve children's learning. The identified areas then form the basis for the next improvement plan.

In 2005-6 ten areas were identified for improvement and the headteacher monitored the developments made by the teams assigned to each area. In the 2006-7 document 'Moving Forward' there are 9 areas identified for improvement with teams assigned to lead developments in each area. Expectations of each team are clearly presented. This is good practice. Most of the success criteria written for the targets are written in terms of what the school will provide. To improve what is already a good process the school now needs to ensure that the success of any developments are measured in terms of what the impact is on children's learning and not on what the school will provide. **We recommend that the school ensure that all future school improvement targets are written so that the success will be measured by impact on learning rather than on what is provided.**

All teachers have curriculum and other responsibilities and therefore play a valuable part in the leadership and management of the school. As the school moves forward this shared leadership becomes more and more important so that the vision and direction permeates all aspects of the school's learning-focused drive. At present the responsibility of the curriculum leaders is not sufficiently defined in terms of leading learning. The role is more one of supporting provision. Curriculum leaders, with support from the leadership team, should be empowered to be more responsible for leading learning in their areas. The time is right to further develop their present responsibilities to include evaluation of standards and progress in their areas. The recent review of music is a good model on which to base future practice. **We recommend that the school continue to build on the good start made in sharing leadership among members of teaching team in order that leadership for learning is embedded throughout the school.**

The leadership team has recruited a strong team of committed and professional teachers and support staff and this is having a positive impact on learning in the school. The recruitment of such a team does not happen by chance and we congratulate the leadership team for this aspect of their work.

Care for Quality

The school improvement plan sets out the priorities for the current school year and beyond and the actions that will be taken to achieve the various targets.

Teachers know the children in their class very well. They know where they are in their learning and share learning targets with them. This is good practice. At a strategic level assessment information is not easily enough accessible to enable the leadership team to make decisions about future action. During the review a process was discussed with the headteacher which would enable him to have easier access to an overview of each child's progress in learning. **We recommend that the school investigate strategies to enable the leadership team to have easier access to an overview of the school assessment information so that they can be more strategic in their leadership of the school.**

Care for children

The school provides very good support and guidance for children's personal development. It goes to great lengths to welcome new children – and their parents – so that they settle into school very quickly. This is an excellent aspect of the school's care for children and one that has significantly improved over the last five years when it was judged by parents as a weakness. It also makes sure that children's departure from the school is as stress-free as possible.

There is a culture of praise in the school. Children's achievements and progress are acknowledged and celebrated in assemblies and through a merit reward system including certificates. Praise is used appropriately and contributes to children's self esteem and their motivation to learn and reach high standards. Children's learning is also celebrated in classroom displays and in the way in which individual teachers respond to their work. We agree with the views of parents that the school works extremely hard, and is successful at promoting children's confidence to speak in front of their peers both within class and during assemblies.

There is a policy relating to children with special educational needs, and the school prepares appropriate individual education plans for these children. Since the last review, the school has made significant improvements in provision for EAL children. Many of these children arrive with little or no English. An EAL department has been set up with two teachers. The school has carried out an EAL survey to investigate the need for more visual resources in classrooms and these have now arrived. The school is also looking into providing EAL training for teachers. In line with the present thinking and other International schools, the school opts for immersion plus EAL instead of removing new pupils from the classroom for two or three months. The programme is benefiting children in the school and is a significant improvement since the last review, when this was an area for improvement.

The whole atmosphere in the school is one that demonstrates considerable care for children's personal development and learning. Teachers show a real concern for the children's academic, personal and social development and this is a notable strength of provision.

Professional development

The way in which the school plans for and monitors the professional development of staff is very good. There are observations of classroom teaching and regular professional development meetings focusing on the children's learning, the teacher's personal development, and curriculum responsibilities.

Partnerships

The school has clear procedures for communicating with parents and these are fully detailed in the school's excellent 'A guide for families at Piasau School'. Communication includes:

- The school website
- Piasau Post – the school newsletter
- Reading/homework diary

- Half-termly curriculum information letters

In addition, the school offer the e mail addresses of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the school secretary to parents. The school also operates an 'open door policy' which was confirmed as working well by the majority of parents who responded to our questionnaire or attended our meeting. One issue raised by parents was the late date of the first written report of the year. This year the first report will be sent to parents in March. We agree with parents that this is late and suggest that the school consider reporting earlier in the school year. Some parents also suggested that they would like a more formal opportunity to meet with their child's class teacher at the start of the year so that they can find out about the curriculum and ask questions about how they can support their children's learning. *We suggest that the school reinstate classroom based meetings with parents early in the school year.* Some parents also commented that they felt information about progress in learning in mathematics and literacy is good. They found it more difficult to know about progress in subjects that make up the IPC. We suggest that as IPC assessment for learning becomes more embedded, the school share progress in learning more with parents.

We saw some excellent examples of parents playing an active part in the school, supporting children's learning. Parental involvement in swimming instruction, for example, results in children achieving very high standards. The school is also supported by parents teaching children their own language and culture in school time. There is a parent-teacher association which currently does not have a chairperson. At present there is a vacancy for the parent representative on the school board and to date there have been no applicants for this post.

The school works well in partnership with the Education Services Department of Shell People Services, Stichting NOB and Fieldwork Education. The school has also developed a number of partnerships with organisations locally and further afield that are of benefit to children's' learning. These organisations include:

- The Sunflower Centre
- Panaga School
- Lutong Primary School
- The Garden School, Kuala Lumpur
- Tunku Putra International School, Kuching

The availability and use of resources

On the whole, the school is well resourced to aid children's learning. The recent installation of interactive whiteboards in several classrooms and the plan for them to be in all classrooms is a good initiative and will provide teachers with an excellent resource to enhance learning. The developments in the playground area are also impressive. The new climbing frames and associated safety surface and shade area contributes well to facilities for play.

The content of the library is a cause for concern. The books do not reflect well enough the international constituency of the school. We understand from the headteacher that a large order is due and this should go some way to remedying the situation. *We suggest that the school evaluate the appropriateness of the content of the library and remove dated publications once the new order arrives.* We also understand that the school is interviewing for a librarian shortly after the review. This will be a positive step forward.

Of greater impact on children's learning and concern for the school is the fact that the last 5 teachers to arrive at the school have all arrived later than planned and required. One of these resulted from a late appointment after the school was unable to recruit someone of suitable standard from the first interviews. The other four have all been the result of contractual issues for entry to Malaysia. This is unacceptable. **We recommend that the school investigate with the company whether anything can be done to overcome the problem of teachers arriving late to begin their contracts.**

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 children. There are 5 particular areas on which we think the school should focus as it moves from being a good school to a great one.

We recommend that the school:

- **review its policy on effective marking and feedback and then monitors its provision to ensure that the policy is applied consistently**
- **ensure that all future school improvement targets are written so that the success will be measured by impact on learning rather than on what is provided**
- **continue to build on the good start made in sharing leadership among members of teaching team in order that leadership for learning is embedded throughout the school**
- **investigate strategies to enable the leadership team to have easier access to an overview of the school assessment information so that they can be more strategic in their leadership of the school**
- **investigate with the company whether anything can be done to overcome the problem of teachers arriving late to begin their contracts.**

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. It is important to remember that children in the school achieve high standards and make very good progress. The school provides a very good educational environment and the quality of learning and teaching is high. The school is very well managed and led and is staffed with hard working, enthusiastic and committed teachers who are supported by a company convinced of the school's importance. We are confident that everyone can continue to work together to move the school forward and to fulfil its ambition of moving from good to great.

Ilona Dubois
Howard Marshall
Nina Siddall

January 2007