

First Tower School

La Route de St Aubin, St Helier JE2 3SD

Headteacher: Lyn Linton

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Children, Young People, Education and Skills
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Summary

- The headteacher’s appointment in January 2019 followed a period of considerable change in the school’s leadership and management leaving staff unsettled and unclear about the school’s vision and direction. Since her arrival, the headteacher has quickly gained a sound understanding of the school’s strengths and areas to improve. With the support of the newly appointed deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team have set a clear direction of improvement and started to address some of the priority areas.
- Most pupils are courteous and polite and have positive attitudes to school. Senior leaders have revised the school’s approach to managing behaviour and the majority of pupils respond positively when teachers use the new approach.
- Through professional development, coaching and support, senior leaders have begun to improve the effectiveness of teaching. Although of variable quality across the school, there are pockets of stronger teaching. Classroom displays of pupils’ work are helping pupils to share and develop their ideas. The review team noted occasions when pupils placed their questions on a class display and then developed their ideas by comparing and contrasting their work with others. Teachers use questions with increasing confidence to check pupils’ understanding and to adapt the lesson when pupils are unsure of their learning. Changes to the timetable and arrangements for planning have resulted in more time allocated to subjects and have ensured that teachers in the same year group can now work together to plan learning activities.
- The next step in improving teaching is to ensure that learning activities are pitched at the right level so that they are not too hard for pupils with special educational needs (SEND) and yet can be adapted to challenge the more able pupils in the school. Too often pupils were unsure what they were expected to learn and were not clear what they needed to do to produce a high-quality, good standard of work. As a recommendation for improvement, we have asked that senior leaders ensure teachers act quickly to adapt the lesson to help meet pupils’ needs and always make clear what pupils are expected to learn. Leaders and staff need to improve these aspects of teaching to ensure that pupils achieve well, and more pupils reach higher standards.
- The main priority for the school is to significantly improve the proportion of pupils in each year group reaching standards expected for their age. Children in Nursery and

Reception settle quickly into the Early Years classes. They are regularly provided with purposeful activities that help them learn and develop. By the time they leave Reception, children achieve broadly average standards. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in each year group then drops away across the school and too few pupils are reaching the standards they should by the time they leave the school in Year 6, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

- A new approach to teaching mathematics is helping pupils to apply their mathematical skills by solving problems and completing calculations. However, this approach is also identifying that there are gaps in many pupils' learning.

Full report

Achievement

- The Nursery environment is spacious and provides a range of purposeful activities for children to develop their learning across a broad range of areas. Children continue to learn and develop across the Early Years so that they leave the Reception classes with broadly typical knowledge and skills for their age. The proportion of children reaching higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave Reception is similar to that found in other Jersey schools.
- In a number of classes across the school, teachers are raising their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve; this is starting to improve pupils' progress. For example, teachers are beginning to expect more of pupils in mathematics. A new approach to the teaching of mathematics is providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. There remain however, considerable gaps in pupils' mathematical development, particularly in their understanding of place value, that slow the fluency of their calculations.
- From the purposeful start that they make in Early Years in developing their knowledge and skills, a greater proportion of pupils should be building on these solid foundations to go on and achieve more. Currently pupils' achievement across the school is too variable and requires significant improvement in a range of subjects. The challenge for the school is to ensure that pupils, including those eligible for Jersey Premium and those with SEND, make consistent progress across the school and work at far higher standards. There is much ground to catch up to ensure that pupils are fluent in their application of knowledge and reach the standards expected for their age.
- Standards in writing are below where they should be. Whilst focusing on developing punctuation and grammar, pupils are rarely expected to produce lively and imaginative written work. They are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their composition skills by writing at length and by revisiting their written work to edit and make improvements.
- Senior leaders do not yet have confidence in all teachers' tracking of pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics and writing. As a result, it is difficult to accurately identify the progress of different groups of pupils and ensure that learning activities are pitched at the right level. Leaders are keen to develop more accurate assessment systems that ensure a better match of activity to pupils' abilities, including for those pupils eligible for Jersey Premium and those with SEND.
- Where assessment systems are in place and accurate, teachers make effective use of this information to ensure learning activities closely match the learning needs of all pupils. For example, assessment of pupils' progress in reading provides accurate information on pupils' developing reading ability, their phonic knowledge, comprehension skills and the type and range of texts they have read. This system provides teachers with clear information on individual pupils' next steps and as a result, whilst still below average, a greater proportion of pupils reach expected levels in reading by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 than in other core subjects.

- Pupils cover a range of scientific concepts but in variable frequency and depth. Pupils' books show developing understanding of the use of scientific terms to explain keys, graphs and charts but the development of pupils' scientific enquiry skills is variable. Where some teachers regularly set pupils scientific investigations to complete, these pupils acquire skills in controlling variables and making predictions. However, opportunities to complete experiments are limited in some year groups and so pupils do not consistently develop and build their investigatory skills from year group to year group.

Behaviour, personal development and welfare

- A new approach to behaviour management is helping to reinforce pupils' attention and engagement. Pupils receive praise and encouragement for contributing their ideas and showing positive attitudes to their work. The majority of teachers apply the behaviour management strategy and in return most pupils respond with improved levels of participation and engagement.
- Around the school, the majority of pupils are polite and courteous. In lessons, pupils are increasingly engaging in discussions and co-operating well with their peers. Pupils listen to and value the input of others. Where learning activities are unclear, pupils continue to try and complete the activities, showing their positive approach to learning.
- The quality and standard of presentation in pupils' books is variable. In some subjects, pupils take pride in their work, carefully recording information and presenting their responses. On occasion, pupils' work appears rushed and less care is taken to present neat and well-formed handwriting.
- Pupils are generally organised and punctual showing their readiness to learn. Pupils' attendance rates have been in line with Jersey schools over recent years.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and speak positively about the support they receive from staff to stay safe. They are confident that adults will listen to their concerns and respond. Parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed similar views and the overwhelming majority confirmed that their children feel safe.
- The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is variable and lacks a clear sequence and progression across the school.
- Systems to ensure pupils safety and wellbeing have recently been improved and embedded. In addition, the curriculum does not fully support pupils' personal development and wellbeing, particularly those pupils with SEND and those eligible for Jersey Premium. As a result, the school's promotion of pupils' personal development and welfare is fair.
- Pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs are provided with support that is having an increased impact on developing their personal and social skills. Teaching assistants, including recently appointed staff, listen and allocate time for individuals and small groups that help to develop pupils' self-esteem, confidence and personal development.

Effectiveness of teaching

- Classroom environments are improving across the school. Teachers are encouraging pupils to develop their ideas through access to mathematical and English displays that promote learning. There are several examples throughout the school of displays of pupils' work in a range of subjects. There are some specific examples where displays are used effectively to develop pupils' thinking, as where pupils' questions are on display so that pupils are able to compare and contrast their ideas and develop them accordingly.
- Across the school relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Teachers are more frequently encouraging pupils to contribute their thoughts and share their ideas with others. Pupils are increasingly given opportunities to discuss their responses to questions with their classmates and develop their understanding.
- Teaching across the school is variable, although some teaching is more effective, the overall quality of teaching and assessment in the school is fair. There is a clearer emphasis this year on setting out what pupils are expected to do by the end of a lesson. In a geography lesson, pupils made clear progress in producing a detailed bird's eye view of the school with key features drawn to scale. The teacher set clear expectations, recapped these objectives during the lesson to ensure pupils remained focused and then provided additional challenge so that several pupils successfully produced maps with labels and a key. However, on too many occasions the purpose of the lesson is unclear and as a result, pupils do not understand what is required of them or how to produce a high-quality outcome and make good progress.
- The use of assessment to plan learning activities that are closely matched to pupils' needs is variable. There are too many occasions where activities are not pitched at the right level to enable pupils to achieve well. Too often learning activities are too difficult for those pupils with SEND and more able pupils are rarely challenged to extend themselves and produce their best work. The recent introduction of a new approach to teaching mathematics is helping to provide activities that are pitched at the right level of difficulty.
- In the Early Years classes activities are more regularly purposeful and engaging. Children in the Nursery listen carefully, showing attention and enjoyment as they hear a lively reading of a well-known story. They respond well, using different voices to join in with parts of the story telling. Following advice from an adviser, the outdoor areas are improving with children enjoying a range of activities and increasingly encouraged to develop their writing and mathematical skills outside.
- Senior leaders have identified key areas for improvement and are providing training that is helping to support improvement. Teachers are developing their use of ongoing assessment by asking pupils questions that check their understanding before they move to working independently. Where teaching is stronger, staff quickly adjust planned activities to address pupils' misunderstandings. For example, where pupils' responses to a question showed gaps in their mathematical understanding, the teacher quickly adapted the lesson to reinforce a key concept before moving on to new learning.
- The deployment of teaching assistants to maximise pupils' achievement is inconsistent and is an area for further improvement. Where learning activities are too difficult, staff deployed to support pupils with SEND and those eligible for Jersey Premium, naturally

want to help pupils complete the task but in doing so they sometimes over direct pupils. On other occasions they miss opportunities to adapt the task so that pupils can complete smaller steps. Recent staff training and some new appointments are starting to ensure teaching assistants provide better support for pupils, particularly in improving their reading and their personal development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

- Senior leaders have acted quickly to gain a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Within weeks of her arrival, the headteacher outlined the school's strengths and identified areas for development. A newly appointed deputy headteacher and the recent change in responsibility for the assistant headteacher to include provision for pupils with SEND has increased the capacity of senior leaders to secure improvement.
- The arrival of the headteacher in January 2019 followed a period of considerable change in the school's leadership, a period that left staff unsettled and unsure of the school's vision and purpose. The new senior leadership team are working closely with the headteacher and have increased the level of support and professional development that staff receive. Teachers in the same year group now have time to plan together, a development that has resulted in a more consistent approach to planning across the year group.
- With a new senior leadership team in place, there is an increased focus on tackling weaker aspects the school's work that is starting to improve the effectiveness of teaching so that overall, the effectiveness of leadership and management is fair. It is encouraging that senior leaders have shared the information and the school's achievement data in an open and transparent way. This has helped to convey to all staff a clear account of the challenges and priorities that the school needs to address and has led to improvements. For example, the timetabling across the school has been reviewed and reorganised this academic year to ensure that more time is spent on different subjects.
- The headteacher has recently taken on the responsibility for the leadership of Jersey Premium funding. The school's own evaluation recognises that there has been little discernible impact this calendar year on raising the achievement of pupils eligible for Jersey Premium. More positively, leaders have recently purchased a range of reading resources specifically to increase the range and quality of texts for Science, History and Geography and to the future benefit of all pupils, including those eligible for Jersey Premium. However, in devising a revised plan to ensure effective use of additional funding, there is a need to define clear success criteria that should go beyond listing the gains in the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards. The plan needs to include actions that seek to address the barriers to learning and gaps in understanding of those pupils eligible for Jersey Premium.
- Senior leaders have used staff meetings for professional development, sharing detailed information and setting clear expectations. School improvement is at the heart of their approach, the regular sessions have provided an intense input on a range of key areas

such as classroom environment, learning walls, SEND progress, phonics, new mathematics approach, curriculum development, the use of effective questioning and the deployment of teaching assistants. This volume of training in a short period of time is difficult for staff to take on board and apply in their practice, particularly where teaching is less effective. It is important that leaders continue to ensure that the effectiveness of their actions, coaching and support have a discernible impact on raising pupils' achievement.

- Safeguarding is effective. The newly established senior leadership team have spent a considerable amount of time since September 2019, sorting and organising information to ensure the school has the required safeguarding arrangements in place and that health and safety procedures are rigorous. Until recently, information on attendance, behaviour and accidents was stored separately. Senior leaders recognise that the effectiveness of the systems is currently reliant on accurate and regular communication between staff and other professionals.
- Roles and responsibilities of subject leaders in the school are underdeveloped. Subject leaders of mathematics have benefited from training that has helped the introduction of a new whole school approach to mathematics. With the support of senior leaders, they have completed monitoring of their subject through scrutinising pupils' books and sharing their findings with staff. They are providing a valuable model of the way the school intends to develop the roles and responsibilities of other subject leaders in the future.

Recommendations

The school should take the following actions.

1. Improve the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in mathematics, reading and writing, including pupils with SEND and those eligible for Jersey Premium, by:
 - consistently providing activities that are matched closely to pupils' abilities
 - continuing to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - developing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and in a range of styles.
2. Improve the effectiveness of teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers clearly communicate to pupils the criteria of successful learning
 - developing their use of assessment to plan purposeful learning activities closely matched to pupils' abilities and providing pupils with timely feedback on how to improve.
3. Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring senior leaders provide professional development and training that has a discernible impact on raising the quality of teaching
 - developing the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders so that they drive improvements in their subject
 - ensuring that teaching assistants provide support and interventions that are closely matched to pupils' identified special educational needs.

Information about the school

Age range of pupils:	3 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Boys and girls
Number of pupils on the school roll:	375 and 39 part-time in Nursery
Date of any previous Jersey review:	None

- The proportion of pupils eligible for Jersey Premium is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs receiving school support is higher than average.
- A far higher than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language

Information about the review

- 27 lessons (or parts of lessons) were observed. The work of teaching assistants during phonics sessions was also sampled briefly.
- A large sample of the work of pupils was considered.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils about their work and the way the school ensures their safety and wellbeing.
- A small sample of pupils read to reviewers and discussed their reading.
- Pupils were observed during break times and as they moved around the school.
- A tour was made of the school's site to check its security and safety.
- Extended discussions were held with school leaders at various levels and with the site supervisor.
- The school's published assessment data were analysed and taken into account.
- A wide range of documents was considered.
- The review considered the results of surveys of parents and staff, which had previously been conducted by the school.

The review team

The review team consisted of six reviewers and was led by an experienced off-island consultant. The other reviewers included the Director of Standards and Achievement and a senior adviser from the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills.

Enquiries about this report should be addressed to Director of Standards and Achievement, Children, Young People, Education and Skills, Highlands Campus, PO Box 142, St Saviour, Jersey JE4 8QJ