



**EDUCATION QUALITY
ASSURANCE UNIT**
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

HOPE ACADEMY

INSPECTION REPORT

OCTOBER 2013

Lead Inspectors: Favourita Blanchard and Helena McVeigh



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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM

THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Private school
Age range of students:	4 – 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	117
School address:	Grand Harbour Shoppes Units 1-8 1053 Crewe Rd PO Box 31160 Grand Cayman, KY1-1205
Telephone number:	345-769-4673
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Email address:	office@hopecayman.com
Name of Principal:	Mrs Samantha Tibbetts

THE INSPECTION TEAM

Lead inspector:	Favourita Blanchard	Education Quality Assurance Unit
Team inspectors:	Helena McVeigh	Overseas Inspector (Co-lead)
	Pachent Smythe	Overseas Inspector
	Alfred Gordon	Inspection Team Member

Introduction

The aim of the Cayman Islands' Education Quality Assurance Unit (EQUA) is to contribute to the raising standards of achievement in schools and early childhood care and education centres in the Cayman Islands through rigorous and independent inspections and by provision of sound professional advice to the Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs, and the Department of Education Services.

The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. External inspections are guided by the criteria in the EQUA *Handbook for Inspection and Self-Evaluation*.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Department of Education Services and the Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of reports, external inspections contribute to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

The Education Quality Assurance Unit hopes that this inspection report will prove helpful to Hope Academy and will contribute in a positive way to the improvement of the school.

Information about the inspection

The external inspection of Hope Academy took place from 28-29 October 2013 and involved a team of four inspectors. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at:

- Standards achieved and progress made by students in language arts and mathematics
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students' personal development including students' attendance and punctuality
- The quality of the curriculum and how students are assessed
- How well the school is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students, and the level of care for their welfare
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- 32 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, mainly in English, language arts, mathematics and science, but including a sample of other subjects.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, were looked at.
- Students' work was scrutinised. Inspectors spoke with students in lessons, around the school and in two organised meetings.
- The views of parents, staff and students – from their responses to questionnaires – were taken into account.
- Discussions took place with teachers, the principal and representatives from the Parent Teachers' Association.

Inspectors use the following grading scale to describe aspects of the school's work:

Grade		Description
1	'Very good'	Good in nearly all respects and exemplary in some significant areas
2	'Good'	Good in most respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas
3	'Adequate'	No significant weaknesses, but no major strengths. Improvement needed
4	'Unsatisfactory'	Some significant weaknesses (might be only one or two) that have negative impact on learning and standards. Cause for concern

Where these terms are shown in this form in the body of the report, they indicate the grade for that section.

Information about the school

- Hope Academy is a private school for 117 boys and girls from Pre-K to Grade 12. There are over twice as many boys as girls overall. The majority of students are Caymanian.
- The school follows an American curriculum, based on the Florida State academic standards. The school opened in 2009 and moved to its present site in the Grand Harbour Plaza in 2010.
- While all of the students have met the admissions requirement of average to above average IQ, approximately half of the students have special educational needs (Specific Learning Disabilities (Dyslexia), ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, Mild Autism Spectrum Disorder) and each of these students has an individual education plan. The school offers therapeutic services to its students and to members of the public.
- The school's mission is to provide 'an effective and pleasant learning experience for all children through multi-sensory, individualised education programs that embrace, celebrate and utilize their differences'.

Summary of the report

How effective is the school overall?

- Hope Academy is a good school with many strengths. The school has come a long way in the four years since it opened and has the capacity to continue to improve further.

What the school does well

- Students' personal development is promoted very well. Students are respectful, behave well and are enthusiastic about learning. They respond positively when asked to undertake research on their own or in small groups. Relationships are a strength throughout the school.
- The leadership and management of the school are very good. The principal has, through her drive, commitment and determination, established clear systems and high expectations, which are communicated effectively to staff and students. Staff work well as a team and feel valued and listened to.
- Much of the teaching is good and some is very good across the school. Teachers know their students well and manage their behaviour sensitively and effectively. They mostly engage students actively in lessons and make very good use of information and communication technology such as lap top computers, Ipads and interactive white boards to enhance students' learning in most subjects.
- The way that the school addresses the needs of the many students with particular special educational needs is very good.
- The school has established very good links with parents and the community. Parents are provided with a good range of regular information about their children, for example through Gradelink.

What needs to improve?

- The outside play area for students is not used exclusively by the school, which presents a potential health and safety risk, although students are well supervised by school staff when they are outside.
- The lack of suitable resources and laboratory for practical science activities inhibits students' learning in science, particularly for the high school students.
- The most able students are not always challenged enough in lessons, particularly when they are given the same work as others in the class and when the pace of learning is too slow.

Recommendations

In order to improve further the school leaders need to:

- Implement as soon as possible and practicable, the plan to provide an enclosed playground area for students and a separate fenced in area for the youngest children.
- Ensure that teachers include more practical science activities by improving resources in the current building as well as in the proposed science laboratory in the planned new facility.
- Ensure, by more rigorous monitoring of lessons and plans, that:
 - Teachers provide the most able students with work that is suitably challenging
 - The pace of lessons is appropriate to ensure that all students can learn well and make even more rapid progress.

*The school is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Quality Assurance Unit **within 40 working days of hearing the draft report**. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.*

Commentary on inspection findings

How well do students achieve and make progress?

- Students enter Hope Academy with a wide range of academic attainment and prior experience. Over half have special educational needs. Students make good progress in all subjects, their progress is tracked effectively and information is shared regularly with parents through the Gradelink on-line system.
- Children get off to a very good start in the Early Years where all areas of learning are catered for well. Children are learning to cooperate with others, to listen attentively and to take turns. They are encouraged to write their names, to learn the sounds that letters make (phonics) and to count and appreciate numbers, shapes and measures. The classroom environment enables them to explore for themselves and they happily concentrate on playing with building blocks, 'kitchens' and 'reading' books. The outside area includes some large play equipment but is limited in scope, for example, it lacks sand and water play apparatus. The area is not used exclusively by the school which restricts how it is used and what equipment can be left outside for children. These young children need to have access to their own secure, enclosed play area.
- Students in all grades make good progress in reading and this is tracked by STAR reading assessments done three times per year. Students write each day in their journals and make good use of lap top computers to write at length, which is very motivating for students, particularly those who have specific learning difficulties. However, teachers make too much use of worksheets and there is not enough extended writing in other subjects such as science and this restricts opportunities for students to develop their writing skills.
- Teachers help students to develop their speaking and listening skills well. Students are encouraged to speak in class and to answer questions in full. Some students are confident and interested enough to ask questions. Many show great enthusiasm for learning; for example, in science they remember the previous learning extremely well, and can recount the names and achievements of scientists such as Newton and Pasteur. Two Grade 12 students decided to undertake research to find out the prefixes for very large and very small numbers during a science lesson.
- Students are making good progress in English overall. In the upper grades, students write for a range of purposes including poetry and are involved in debates and discussions.
- Several students join the school at times other than the start of Pre-K or Grade 1. They are helped to integrate well into the school and assisted to catch up when they have missed work. For example, the school organises 'credit recovery' sessions for students who start in the high school, to enable them to acquire enough credits for graduation purposes. Teachers go out of their way to help students, for example, by giving them extra help at lunch times or after school. Students are very appreciative of this help.

- Students make good progress in mathematics and many are working above grade level. The school has just introduced STAR math to track students' attainment and progress. Several students claimed that mathematics is their favourite subjects. High school students are enabled to follow mathematics courses that meet their particular needs. For example, Grade 12 students can study Consumer Math or Pre-Calculus in the same class.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) by students, especially in the middle and high schools. Students use lap top computers and Ipads to take notes and to write accounts and prepare presentations. They are also developing skills in using spreadsheets, for example, in high school mathematics lessons. Students confidently pick up a lap top to research something for themselves, for example, in Grade 6 to find out how many constellations there are in the sky. In art, students' used lap top computers to research different artists' work and styles before reproducing their own artistic studies. Students are given 'music passes' to help them concentrate in art lessons by listening to music on headphones whilst completing their art work.

What is the quality of students' personal development?

- Students' personal development is very good. Students behave well in lessons and around the school and have a positive attitude towards learning. They are respectful and polite towards adults and their peers. Some students have moved to Hope Academy from other schools where their needs were not being met. They commented on how they appreciate the small classes at Hope, the caring staff and the 'family' atmosphere where everyone knows each other.
- The school has a well-developed and effective behaviour policy that sets out clear sanctions and rewards, with an emphasis on promoting positive behaviour. Students know the school rules and generally abide by them. A number of students have been excluded in previous years as a last resort when they have been through the 'three strike' system. Students are expected to attend Saturday classes when they have to catch up on work or for misdemeanours.
- The school promotes students' moral, social and spiritual development well. There are opportunities for students to reflect on their own beliefs and value systems, and for older students to consider challenging issues, such as racism and international conflicts and wars associated with religion. Students learn about the Caymanian culture but there are fewer opportunities to learn about a range of other cultures, although students come from a wide variety of different countries.
- Students are developing good social skills, which is a challenge for some of them because of their particular special needs. A school council has been established and students feel that they are listened to. Older students sometimes help their younger peers but feel that they could be given more responsibility, for example, as 'prefects'.

How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?

- Teaching is often good at Hope Academy and some is very good. Of the 32 lessons observed during the inspection, nearly three-quarters were judged to be good or very good, which is close to the school's own evaluation.
- There are several common strengths of the teaching. Teachers know their students and manage their behaviour sensitively and unobtrusively. They speak quietly to students and show them respect, to which students respond well.
- Teachers question students effectively and in the best lessons direct questions to specific students so that all are involved. They encourage students to explain what they are doing and what they have learned.
- Teachers use a good variety of strategies that engage students' interest and attention in lessons. They nearly always share the learning objectives with students and some teachers are beginning to use rubrics that indicate how they, and students, will know when objectives have been achieved.
- Some teachers provide work that is well matched to students' different abilities and needs. However, this is not consistent across the school and, at times, more able students find the work too easy when they have to do the same as others in the class. In addition, the pace of the lesson is sometimes too slow for some of the students, which restricts their progress. These issues were evident in a number of different subject lessons, including mathematics and science.
- Teachers make good use of ICT as a teaching tool, for example, using the interactive white board to illustrate concepts and showing videos that capture students' interest.
- Although all teachers plan lessons and link objectives to the Florida State standards, they are not all using the same format for their plans. Some plans contain much more detail, including, in the best cases, how they are going to differentiate the activities and which specific standards they are drawing on. The Pre-K teacher plans appropriately using the Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Framework's (ECCECF) four key areas of learning.
- Teachers provide students with encouraging comments on their written assignments, but do not always indicate what they need to do next to improve. Teachers provide older students with useful feedback and targets through Gradelink.
- The lack of practical resources and laboratory hinder students' progress in science as they are not able to carry out practical work to the standard expected in a high school. However, the science teacher makes good use of the local environment for field work, for example, in marine biology, and is helping students work towards diving qualifications.

What is the quality of the curriculum and how well is it organized?

- The school's curriculum is adequate overall with some good features. Students experience a reasonably broad range of subjects with a strong focus on English, mathematics and science. The emphasis given to ICT across the curriculum is a strength.
- Opportunities for students to participate in creative activities are fairly limited. However, they do benefit from weekly art lessons taught by a specialist, in which they explore a variety of media and dimensions and conduct research into artists of different periods and genres. Music is only provided to younger students and is not prominent in the school. Students do not have the opportunity to practise instrumental music.
- The school provides students with an appropriate amount of physical education each week. Some lessons are taught on site, whilst others involve facilities elsewhere to provide opportunities for students to experience of activities such as gymnastics, swimming, football, basketball, tennis and squash.
- Despite attempts to organize after school activities in the past, children do not currently have opportunities to engage in school-organised after-school activities and several parents were concerned about this.
- The teaching of a foreign language is not introduced until the upper school. Parents indicated that they would like this started at an earlier age. The current size of the school mitigates against offering high school students electives, although students do experience a suitably broad range of subjects. There are appropriate plans to introduce Advanced Placement courses for high school students, starting with science.

How well is the school led and managed?

- The school is led and managed very effectively. The principal's clear vision, drive and determination have taken the school from 20 students to the current roll of 117. The principal has high standards for staff and students and has recruited a highly qualified team of teachers who are well supported by administrative and technical assistants.
- Staff work well together and their views are listened to by the senior management team. Teachers feel valued and like working at the school. The good sense of team work enables the school to run smoothly on a day to day basis.
- The principal and other school leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly and provide feedback to teachers. The format used for recording observations does not focus enough on students' learning and progress, and leaders would benefit from the opportunity to moderate their evaluations with each other to ensure that they are consistently rigorous.
- The leaders communicate clearly with staff and provide good opportunities for professional development. For example, the whole team goes to overseas

conferences that are relevant to their work with students who have particular special educational needs.

- Staff and parents are involved in preparing the school improvement plan with senior leaders, which helps to ensure that they have ownership of planned changes. The school is making increasing use of performance data in its work but appreciates the need for a more robust analysis to drive up standards further.

How effective are the support and guidance offered to students and level of care for their welfare?

- Support, guidance, welfare and care are very good. The only significant concerns relate to the school's location in the shopping plaza.
- The principal has established an ethos in which students' individual needs are catered for effectively. Teachers know their students well and this enables them to address the particular needs of those who sometimes demonstrate challenging and disruptive behaviour in the classroom.
- Provision for special educational needs is very good. Students have a wide range of Specific Learning Disabilities (Dyslexia), ADHD, Anxiety Disorders, and Mild Autism Spectrum Disorder. Students are supported very well, for example, in reading, speech and language, social skills. The school benefits from having therapists on-site. Parents are involved in all meetings to discuss their children's individual education plans and are kept well informed.
- The newly appointed Dean manages all disciplinary concerns well. He maintains a visible presence in the school and is easily accessible by those who need his assistance.
- The senior management team ensures that effective interventions are implemented for students who are falling behind. Some students receive in-class support while others are withdrawn for short periods for individual help. New students are assessed promptly by the special needs educational coordinator (SENCO) and settled into classes quickly.
- The school provides valuable careers' education, and Grade 12 students benefit from weekly work experience from January to June.
- Overall, the provision for the health and safety of the children is adequate. The school promotes the need for healthy lifestyles and diets. Children are encouraged to bring healthy foods to school and school meals ordered from the local restaurants include fruit and vegetable in all servings.
- Since Hope Academy is located in a plaza, the outdoor play area is potentially unsafe for the children. The grounds are not used exclusively by Hope Academy, and as a result, broken bottles are sometimes found in the morning on the playground. There are no railings to enclose the area used by the youngest Pre-K students, although they are always closely supervised by staff when outside.

How effective are the links with parents and the community

- Links with parents and the community are very good. Parents are supportive of the school and most consider that it is well led and managed and that they are listened to. The Parents' Association has raised a good amount of money for the school to help provide resources, for example, in science, and to contribute to the building fund. Parents help out on school trips and organise events, such as the National Science fair at which the school is well represented.
- The school communicates regularly and effectively with parents. The online secure learning environment Gradelink is used to keep parents informed about their children's progress, behaviour and attendance. The school's open-door policy allows parents to meet with teachers to discuss children's progress and there are regular reporting meetings.