

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

07

REPORT BY H.M. INSPECTORS

on

THE ROYAL NAVAH SCHOOL,

VERDALA,

MALTA.

INSPECTION

on 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1967.

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THE ROYAL NAVAL PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
VERDALA, MALTA

Inspected 23rd to 27th January, 1967

PANEL OF INSPECTORS

H.M.I. Mr. L. Clark (R.I.)

H.M.I. Miss R. E. A. Wertheimer

H.M.I. Mr. N. Thomas

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At the time of the last report on this school, in 1961, there were 1093 children on the roll. By 1964, this number had fallen to 670. There are now 605 (329 Royal Navy, 28 Royal Air Force, 13 Army, 200 whose parents are 'entitled' civilians, and 34 whose parents are 'non-entitled' Civilians). These latter parents pay fees of £72 per year in addition to charges of transport. Because of recent announcements by H.M. Government about the future of Service personnel on the Island, it is anticipated that the numbers will be further reduced in the near future. All the children are transported daily to, and from, their homes in the various parts of the Island. These arrangements are working well.

The children stay at the school for an average of two years. Newcomers join the school weekly and there is about a 45% turnover each year.

At 11 plus, as a result of Secondary Selection Tests, they proceed either to secondary schools in the United Kingdom or to the Services' secondary school at Tal Handaq on the Island. It is very strongly recommended that these Selection Tests should now be discontinued. They are neither popular with the children nor with the teachers and there is a great deal of evidence to show that they have a cramping effect upon the children's education. It should not be difficult, for all concerned, to devise other methods, based mainly upon regular and full records of the children's progress and development in school, by which they can be passed on to the kind of secondary education most appropriate for them. Such records should not concern themselves only with the more formal aspects of the children's work in school but with the whole of their education. The school already keeps excellent records and knows its children so well that this information could well form the basis of the kind of profile which could replace the present arrangements.

Although not normal Service practice, there is also evidence to show that a part-time nursery group, on the lines suggested by the recently-published report of the Central Advisory Council for Education, Children and their Primary Schools, would be a boon to many young children on the Island, whose parents send them to private schools. With the safeguard that parents, or adults known to the children, accompany them to and from the nursery each day, that the journey is not unduly lengthy for a part-time session, and that appropriate space indoors and out is made available, adapted and suitably equipped to accommodate young children, there is no educational reason why such a group of not more than 30 children, in the care of a qualified teacher and a helper, should not be established on sound educational and health foundations.

The premises, though rather isolated, are adequate and well cared for. There is a large playground, most of the classrooms are of a reasonable size, and there are several other amenities. A considerable amount of money has been spent on these premises in recent years, so much so that it is to be hoped that they will continue to be put to good educational use. Sinks might be provided in some of the rooms used by the juniors, and the lighting could be improved in one or two of the classrooms.

The school is well equipped, though more materials, often of a homely nature, are needed for the teaching of mathematics and science on the most up-to-date lines. Materials for the younger children need building up in certain directions, such as sand, clay, wood, water, waste fabrics and card, and dressing up clothes for dramatic play. There are plenty of books of all kinds though the emphasis in the classrooms tends to be on the use of text-books and class readers. More appropriate reference books are needed by the children for the specific study in hand, and more books of poetry. The

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The schemes of work are full and ambitious, and obviously carefully thought-out, so that the gifts of the staff are well deployed. Some of the schemes, in English and mathematics particularly, are now in need of further revision. The schemes, too, should be looked at as a whole so that continuity of aim and purpose is maintained throughout the whole of the primary stage.

The children are organised in 20 classes (13 junior, 7 infant) and there is partial streaming in the junior classes. No class has more than 39 children on the roll and 5 have less than 25. There are 3 classes in each of the junior years after the first year where there are 4 classes. There is one reception class for the infants when there might well be two. The organisation has been carefully worked out on an age basis, and though it is more 'subject-based' than it might be, it is flexible enough to provide the children with some variety of teaching. The school day includes a morning assembly, a mid-day meal, and arrangements for some interchange of staff between the classes. During the week the children in the junior classes are able to take part in the freer activities of 12 clubs. These are art, games, chess, country dancing, drama, French, music, model making, embroidery and needlework, science and photography, seamanship, and swimming and First Aid. The children are clearly getting a great deal of satisfaction from these clubs though some of them might be more adventuring and less formal in their attitudes. There are also regular visits during the term to places of educational interest on the Island.

Nevertheless, a school of 605 juniors and infants is too large. It is suggested that a single school of not more than 380 to 400 children is educationally a more effective unit, in that it can have more intimate contacts with the children.

The children are charming and friendly and on the happiest terms with all the adults who work on these premises. They are well turned out, attend school regularly, and work hard at what they are given to do. Many of them are of high intelligence and these children need to be challenged much more so that their imaginative and creative powers are fully used and developed. The present Secondary Selection Test is of such a nature that it does not reveal their innate abilities over the whole field of their learning.

There are 25 members of the teaching staff, including the Head Master. Of this number, excluding the Head Master, 20 are teachers who normally work in schools in the United Kingdom, and 4 are 'locally engaged' teachers. All but one of the teachers were trained in the United Kingdom. Five of the teachers have been on the staff for more than three years; the Deputy Head has been here for just over 10 years, another teacher for 7 years and two for 5 years; one of the 'locally engaged' teachers has been available for 13 years. It is suggested that application from members of staff who have completed 6 years or more, for further extensions of tour, should be examined critically, as a matter of general principle, by the Navy Department.

Four teachers who do not have charge of permanent classes are the Deputy, the teacher in charge of the infants, a teacher who specialises in music throughout the junior school, and another who takes groups of infants for additional reading. During the inspection discussion took place as to how the gifts and time of each of these admirable teachers might be used in other ways than at present. There does not seem to be much of a case for additional 'progress' teachers as such though there is always a need for additional teachers to be used by the school in a variety of ways.

The teachers work hard and are clearly devoted to the children. They are adaptable, attentive to duty and eager to learn about the newer ways of dealing with some of their problems. Some of them are really gifted teachers

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o have already introduced some of the newer ideas which have to do with grouping, integration, and work with books and art materials. The ancillary staff consists of the school nurse, the two secretaries, and the various domestic helpers, all of whom give good support.

The Head Master, an Instructor-Commander of the Royal Navy, has had charge of the school since 1964. He is an able organiser, patient and kindly by disposition, and eager to do the best for the teachers and children. He does not, at present, make himself responsible for any of the teaching in the classrooms, but he is aware of what is happening in them.

In general, the work though often conceived and practised on rather set lines, is of good quality. Religious Instruction is regularly and sincerely taken. There are visits by Church of England, Roman Catholic, and non-conformist ministers. The children have much to say for themselves and the quality of their diction is good. This being so, they should be given many more opportunities for discussion and conversation in their classrooms. Many of them, too, are able to express themselves clearly and imaginatively on paper. More of them could do so more often if they did not spend so much time on English exercises from class books which are not only of limited educational value but also seem to be imposed on the children because of the Selection Test. The children read very well and a great deal is done to ensure that they acquire the mechanical skill. But fuller use should be made of books other than class readers and text books. More of the books which are now available in the junior and infant libraries would find a better place in the classrooms. There are some developments in mathematics which indicate what kind of work might be done, but much of this is still rather formal and unrelated to the daily lives and true needs of the children and, as with language, geared too closely to the demands of the Selection Test. Yet there is much mechanical accuracy in all classes even though some of the children are not very clear as to the meaning of what they are doing. History, geography and social studies are not neglected in the junior classes. Following the visits which are paid to the various parts of the Island, notes are made, and here and there there are some promising links with art and literature. But there is also too much reliance on class text-books and formal lessons given to whole classes. More could certainly be done about science. The children should be trained to use their eyes and ears more, to ask more questions and to make themselves familiar with the abundant floral life of the Island. The work is too academic, at present. Some good work is done in art, and much of the painting and modelling is very lively. But here again the scope of the work needs to be extended by regularly using a wider range of materials, e.g. clay, fabrics and wood. Some very good work indeed is done by the juniors in music. They learn many songs and sing them pleasantly, they listen to gramophone records, and enjoy playing a growing range of musical instruments; some of the recorder playing is particularly promising. The work in music is not so effective, nor so broadly based, in the infant classes. The children are getting a great deal from the work in physical education. They engage in a full programme of physical activity which includes games, dancing, gymnastics and swimming in the school pool during the summer term. They make good use of all the facilities which have been provided for them.

This school, then, is an efficient and well-conducted community in an interesting transitional stage of its history as it moves by degrees from more formal attitudes and practices to the newer conceptions of the modern primary school. There are already noteworthy attempts to develop the work in various directions which should bring good rewards to all concerned. But it is the abandonment of the Secondary Selection Test which would have the greatest liberalising effect.

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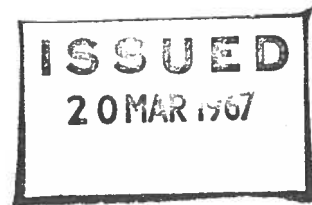
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