In Fact the School is Failing

The Case of Sophie (6 years old)

Let's start with her school report at the end of the first grade.

Teacher Assessments against Age-Related Expectations

Subject	Current Assessment	Effort & Engagement
Reading	**Working Below the Expected Standard (Pre-Key Stage)**	Poor
Writing	**Working Below the Expected Standard (Pre-Key Stage)**	Poor
Mathematics	**Working Below the Expected Standard (Pre-Key Stage)**	Poor
Science	**Working Towards Standard (WTS)**	Requires Improvement

Teacher Commentary

General Development and Social Development: Sophie is a popular and content member of the class, and she has a group of friends with whom she plays during recess. Sophie always tries to follow the rules at school and in the classroom, but she often needs to be told to pay attention and not get up to play in the middle of a lesson. Sophie has a kind heart, so she can make her friends feel better when they are sad. She would prefer to complete her assignments in small groups, with an adult providing guidance as she works. This makes it more likely that she will comprehend the information and enables her to learn new material much more slowly. She is proficient in verbal communication in class; however, she experiences difficulty in concentrating when confronted with challenging math or writing problems.

Participation and Effort: Demonstrates strong verbal communication skills; however, may become disengaged when confronted with difficult numerical or written assignments.

Organization and Focus: Needs frequent reminders to stay on task and manage classroom materials effectively.

Social and Emotional Development: Kind, respectful to peers and staff, and responds positively to encouragement.

English Language Progress: This year, Sophie has improved her English significantly. She possesses a fundamental comprehension of reading, writing, and phonics; however, she has applied herself diligently to enhance these abilities in both her academic and domestic environments. She frequently requires assistance in using her letter and sound knowledge to read and write words in class. With her teachers, Sophie likes to read. She will now need to focus on the sounds she hears in words while writing.

Sophie's progress in school this year is very worrying. She frequently exhibits extreme reluctance to engage in tasks, struggles significantly with classroom routines, and become easily frustrated, which disrupts her own learning.

Assessment Breakdown: While Sopie contribute thoughtful ideas during class discussions, her written work and reading comprehension remain below grade-level expectations. Core challenges include phonics decoding, sight-word recognition, and constructing complete, punctuated sentences. She often avoids independent reading tasks and requires significant scaffolding to organize ideas on paper.

Final Grade: Not Yet Meeting Standard

Mathematics

Sophie demonstrates enthusiasm during hands-on group activities, but currently struggles to meet the foundational benchmarks for Year 1 mathematics. Key areas of difficulty include basic number sense, place value, and multi-step addition and subtraction. Without visual aids or one-on-one prompting, she frequently loses track of problem-solving steps and struggles to complete independent assessments within the allotted time. She has encountered obstacles in the area of more complex concepts.

As long as she gets help and practices, Sophie should keep getting better next year. Next, she needs to feel comfortable adding and taking away numbers on a number line. Numeracy and reasoning/problem-solving skills fall well short of year group standards.

Result: Failure (Needs Improvement).

When their child fails in school, every parent gets scared.

When this occurs when a child is six years old, it is particularly terrifying. Sophie's mother was also shocked to learn that her daughter had failed math and was doing very badly in all of her other classes as well. Since parents frequently mistake academic performance for knowledge acquired in the classroom, Sophie's mother looked for a math tutor for her daughter.

In the initial lesson, it was evident that Sophie was inadvertently writing the numbers 7, 4, and 6 backwards. Additionally, she was uncertain about how to write 9, 5, 3, and 2. I was certain that, despite the fact that she writes with her right hand, she is actually left-handed.

Sophie's mother was taken aback when I inquired whether she had been retrained to write with her right hand and whether there were any other left-handed individuals in the family following the lesson. However, she inquired about whether there were any other members of the family who were left-handed. It was discovered that her husband's family had a number of left-handers, but they had undergone retraining.

Sophie was a left-handed individual who had not undergone any retraining; we may classify her as a "self-retrained" left-hander. The fact that Sophie is left-handed was a surprise to the whole family.

I explained to Sophie's mother the possible consequences of hand dominance. It was a great relief for Sophie's mother to realize that her daughter's apparent poor performance at school was not due to intellectual disability, but rather to perceptual and learning differences that were unmasked by her hidden left-handedness. These differences had been overlooked by the school. Sophie's failure was ultimately the school's failure. Since this time, she has begun to explore Sophie's world and has grown increasingly enthusiastic about sharing her findings with me.

Over the course of our year-long collaboration, Sophie earned an exceptional evaluation at school. In the book, I go into great detail about what made Sophie's performance seem mediocre, what her teachers ought to have observed at school, and what kind of support Sophie got from me so that her evaluation reflected her actual potential and talent.