

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

Ballacottier School

Introduction

Each school on the Isle of Man is expected to conduct a School Self-Review and Evaluation (SSRE) using an approach devised by the Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC) in consultation with the schools. Graham Reeves Ltd has been commissioned by the Department to carry out an external validation of each school's SSRE. The validation of the Ballacottier SSRE included a visit to the school on Thursday 7th December 2017. The visit was made by Graham Reeves. He worked alongside Carol Walsh, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft, Director of Education, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service. Karen Callister, deputy headteacher, participated in the various validation activities but was not involved in the final decision-making.

Context

Ballacottier School is located in the south of Douglas, a few miles from the centre. It serves a catchment area of mostly owner-occupied properties with some private rentals. A substantial proportion of the pupils currently live outside the catchment area. The building dates from 1998 when the school was founded.

There are 272 pupils on roll. They are organised into 13 classes plus a special unit (known as the 'Rainbow Room'). 18% of pupils receive free school meals. This is in line with the Island average. 13% of mainstream pupils (i.e. not including pupils who attend the unit) are on the register of special educational needs. This is slightly below the Island average. 6% of pupils are learning English as an additional language. This is above the Island average.

There are 13.3 full-time equivalent teachers including the headteacher and the unit manager. There are 7.5 members of the classroom and SEN support staff in mainstream and six in the unit.

Focus of the Validation

The validation of the SSRE covered the full range of the school's judgements but focused on three specific aspects. These were

- **Achievement Against Prior Attainment**
- **Leadership**
- **Teaching for Learning**

Achievement Against Prior Attainment

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- A large majority of pupils make expected progress (or better) over time in line with agreed IOM benchmarks
- Within lessons and units of work, the large majority of pupils have developed a 'love of learning' and make very good progress in their learning
- Progress across Key Stage 1 is best described as 'inspirational'
- Achievement against Prior Attainment should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Leadership

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- The headteacher and senior team promote a clear, shared vision, which the very large majority of staff have contributed to and taken ownership of. This reflects children's needs and interests and demonstrates a clear sense of purpose and high aspirations in a context where innovation and considered risk-taking is valued
- The headteacher and senior leaders undertake strategic planning as a reflective process which is informed by a variety of viewpoints and sources of evidence and brings about improvement by making best use of financial and other resources
- Leaders have a clear understanding of educational inclusion and are committed to running a fair and inclusive school
- Senior leaders develop other staff by sharing leadership responsibilities, organising relevant training and coaching, and mentoring staff to further develop their skills and to provide them with the experiences needed to gain promotion and enable effective succession
- Leadership should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Teaching for Learning

The school judges this aspect as 'very effective'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- The use of challenges is consistent across the school and enables the pupils to demonstrate responsibility for their own learning
- The organisation in the majority of classes encourages pupils to take appropriate opportunities to direct their own learning
- High expectations lead to teaching that encourages, motivates and challenges pupils
- Assessment processes ensure that pupils' progress is tracked rigorously
- Teaching for Learning should be judged as 'very effective overall.

The Validation Activities

To check and confirm the judgements in the SSRE the validation team:

- toured the school
- observed lessons
- observed playtime and lunchtime
- looked at a number of documents
- talked with a group of teachers
- talked with a group of pupils
- talked with a group of parents

Findings

Summary

The school knows itself well.

Achievement against Prior Attainment

Of those pupils who completed the Foundation Stage at the end of the 2016-2017 school year, 89% had made five jumps in any 13 strands of the Early Learning Goals. This is judged as 'very effective'. All of those who completed Key Stage 1 had, during the key stage, progressed by three sub levels in speaking and listening, reading and science. 97% had progressed by three or more sub levels in writing and mathematics. This is judged as 'inspirational'. All those pupils who completed Key Stage 2 had progressed by 6 or more sub levels during the key stage. The figures for speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics were 97%, 97%, 88% and 91% respectively. This is judged as 'very effective'.

The school has evidence from lesson observations and book perusals – supported by professional judgements – that, within lessons and units of work, the large majority of pupils have developed a 'love of learning' and make very good progress in their learning.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that Achievement against Prior Attainment should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Leadership

The headteacher and senior team promote a clear, shared vision which reflects children's needs and interests and demonstrates a clear sense of purpose and high aspirations in a context where innovation and considered risk-taking is valued. A small group of teachers is drafting a new vision statement and all staff will be able to comment on and contribute to this before it is finalised.

The headteacher and senior leaders make use of a variety of viewpoints and sources of evidence when they undertake strategic planning. While the priorities set out in the school improvement plan are mostly based on an analysis of the situation, they are not always clearly linked to the evidence and judgements that are set out in the SSRE.

Leaders have a clear understanding of educational inclusion and are committed to running a fair and inclusive school. The validation team regards this as a particular strength.

Senior leaders develop other staff by sharing leadership responsibilities and organising relevant training to further develop their skills. The validation team notes that this approach has led to some valuable school-wide initiatives, and regards it as another particular strength.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that Leadership should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Teaching for Learning

Teachers throughout the school use 'challenges' which help pupils to develop independence. Classroom practice provides opportunities, appropriate for their age and ability, for pupils to direct their own learning.

Teachers have high expectations and encourage, motivate and challenge pupils.

Teachers use the school's assessment processes to ensure that pupils' progress is tracked rigorously.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that Teaching for Learning should be judged as 'very effective' overall.

Other Areas Considered

As well as the three specific aspects of the SSRE on which it focused, the validation team also considered other judgements and examples set out in the SSRE. It concurs with many of these, including:

- A large majority of pupils are committed to their school community, are very proud of it, engage in dialogue about decisions related to their learning and wellbeing and display leadership skills.
- All staff, pupils and other stakeholders are well informed because there are very good communication systems.
- Effective pupil tracking systems are in place and the school analyses pupils' performance.
- The large majority of pupils are challenged, enthusiastic, focused and engaged with their learning.
- Pupils from the Rainbow Room are fully integrated into mainstream wherever possible.
- Parents are confident in approaching the school for guidance with regard to family matters.
- Parents feel that any complaints are dealt with promptly and effectively and that their views are valued.
- Good links have been made with outside agencies.
- Induction procedures for new teachers are appropriate.
- The School Council is a forum where pupils are able to raise concerns.
- The school encourages pupils to engage in physical activities.
- Pupils are encouraged to measure their own risks when attempting new activities.
- E-safety information evenings are held for parents.
- There are very few reported incidents at playtimes of fighting, bullying or a lack of friends.

In addition, the validation team is pleased to note that the school is held in very high regard by pupils, parents and staff.

Conclusion

The SSRE is a clear document that demonstrates that the school knows itself well. In addition, it has further evaluative evidence and judgements that are not yet included in the new SSRE format. The school is aware that it needs to add such information so that it can show that in producing its school improvement plan it has used the available evidence to identify specific aspects of pupils' learning that it intends to improve.

Graham Reeves
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