

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

Castle Rushen High 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 Castle Rushen High School SSRE included a visit to the school on Thursday 8th November and Friday 9th November 2018. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Keith Winstanley, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft and Joel Smith, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

Castle Rushen High School is situated in the town of Castletown in the south of the Island. There are 781 pupils on roll with a pupil-teacher ratio of 14.1. There are 18.5 per cent of the pupils receiving free school meals. This is just above the average for the Island. 29 per cent have special education needs at 'school action', 'school action plus' or 'higher level need'. This is above the Island average. One per cent of the pupils are learning English as an additional language. This is below the Island average.

Focus of the Validation

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

- **Personal Development**
- **Leadership**
- **Partnerships with Parents/Carers**

Personal Development

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

- Some groups of pupils are displaying leadership skills
- Most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs
- Most pupils feel safe, nurtured, healthy, able to achieve, active, included, respected and responsible and help to develop these qualities in others
- Most pupils have an enjoyment of reading and read widely and often
- Personal Development can be judged as 'effective' overall

Leadership

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

- Leaders encourage staff to conduct evidence-based research

- There is a clear and shared vision for the school and associated priorities for improvement
- There is a team-based form of distributed leadership where leaders take responsibility for improvement
- There is a commitment to be an inclusive school
- Leadership can be judged as 'effective' overall

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

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

- Parents, pupils, governors, staff and the wider community hold the school in high regard
- Feedback from Parents/Carers is being used to improve provision
- The school communicates well with most parents to support learning and well-being
- Partnerships with Parents/Carers can be judged as 'very effective' overall

The Validation Activities

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

- toured the school
- observed lessons
- observed lunchtime
- observed assemblies
- visited tutor periods
- looked at a number of documents
- talked with a group of teachers
- talked with a group of middle leaders
- talked with a group of pupils
- talked with a group of parents
- talked with leaders responsible for inclusion
- talked with the leader responsible for safeguarding
- talked with the leaders responsible for assessment

Findings

Summary

The school knows itself quite well. There are several aspects of the SSRE that require further evaluative evidence in order for the school to demonstrate the extent to which it knows itself and for it to strategically and systematically plan for continuous improvement.

Personal Development

The validation team agreed that there was enough evidence to support a judgment of effective. Not all aspects of the framework's criteria for personal development were backed up by strong evidence. There is need for a more systematic, robust and rigorous collection of evidence to support this aspect of learning.

Some groups of pupils are displaying leadership skills. We met with several pupils who described the formal and informal opportunities for leadership in the school. These included: as Head and Deputy Head Girl and Boy; as House Captains; as members of the Student Council; as Tutor Group Representatives; as mentors; as role models; and within day to day teaching and learning.

From our visits to classrooms and the school's limited evidence it appears that most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs learning dispositions.

Most pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training.

Not enough evidence was provided to support an effective judgment about pupil well-being or pupils' enjoyment of reading. Anecdotal evidence and our observations support a view, rather than judgment, that pupils do develop socially and emotionally in an age-appropriate way.

On the basis of the available evidence the validation team is just able to concur with the school's judgment that Personal Development should be judged as 'effective' overall.

Leadership

Leaders in the school have recently promoted the importance of making school improvement decisions based on evidence-based research. The development of FACE (Feedback, Assessment, Challenge, Engagement) is based on educational research. Action research by the teaching and learning team has recently led to a planned new direction for Key Stage 3. The school's improved appraisal format has been led by action research.

FACE is driven by the values of Care, Quality and Opportunity. Leaders articulate the vision and priorities for improvement and are clear about these values. FACE has helped to establish a common direction for the school.

The school is providing support and training for leaders across the school to take more responsibility for leading aspects and areas of school improvement. The 'scrapbook' scheme has led to middle leaders and teams taking on more ownership for the direction of learning and teaching in their areas of responsibility.

It is clear from the validation team's discussions with colleagues and the evidence in 'scrapbooks' that the school improvement planning process is developing in the school. At the moment the SSRE is not sufficiently driving the school improvement planning process and is in need of much development, by, for example, including more evaluative evidence to support judgments.

Leaders are committed to running an inclusive school. There was insufficient evidence provided to support the statement that leaders have a clear and agreed understanding of educational inclusion in the school.

On the basis of the available evidence the validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Leadership should be judged as 'effective' overall.

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

From discussions with parents, pupils and staff it is clear that the school is held in high regard. Anecdotal evidence provided by the school supports the judgment that the school makes a positive contribution to the improvement of the community and the lives of families. It is now time to systematically gather and record this evidence.

During the past year the school has gathered feedback from parents/carers about what the school is doing well and its areas for improvement. The newly formed Parent Forum is providing the school with specific feedback on a range of topics. Feedback from parents/carers has already been used to

improve open evenings and to formulate the school's mobile phone policy and is beginning to gather evidence about homework.

The school has built positive partnerships with the majority of families to support pupil learning. Parents are very positive about the information they receive about the progress of their child's learning. They also believe the school to be welcoming and positive about building relationships with them and their children. They enthused about the very effective transition programme with primary schools. The school has a productive open-door policy.

On the basis of the available evidence the validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Partnerships with Parents/Carers 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 judgments and statements set out in the SSRE. It concurred with several of these, including:

- Improving learning has been established as the central focus of the school.
- Student attitudes to learning are positive as indicated in the school's tracking.
- Attainment overall is 'not yet effective'. Key Stage 3 attainment is very effective. Key Stage 4 attainment is a strength for 2018 in Physical Education, French, Biology, Spanish and Drama.
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'not yet effective'. Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 4 achievement is above expectation in 2018 in Principles of Science, Computers, Resistant materials, Textiles, Drama, Music and Physical Education. Key Stage 5 achievement is 'effective' overall with aspects of 'very effective'.
- Assessment information is increasingly being used to identify gaps in learning and to plan specific interventions.
- 'Open Doors' has led to staff identifying gaps in their current practice and to observe 'experts' in that field.
- Students review their assessments in a one to one conversation with their tutor in order to identify next steps in learning.
- Developing Castle Rushen High School FACE is a clear whole-school priority.
- The school is a major partner in the growing A-level collaboration with other schools.
- The school actively seeks partnership learning opportunities with associated primary schools.
- There is a highly effective Student Listening Service.

The validation team was unable to concur with several judgments made in the SSRE as there was insufficient evidence provided in the SSRE or in evidence files.

Conclusion

The SSRE requires improvement. Some sections describe the activities that are happening but do not include evidence to support their overall judgments; others describe provision when an evaluation of outcomes are required. This means that it does not help the school to identify targets for improving learning or provision in the school improvement and development plans. Improvement plans should be based on firm evidence and explicitly detail the student learning outcomes that will result from the planned activities.

The school knows itself quite well. This judgment is based to some extent on observations and on evidence gathered during the validation visit rather than from evidence in the SSRE.

Howard Marshall
November 2018