

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

Ballasalla 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 Ballasalla SSRE included a visit to the school on Thursday 21st June 2018. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Jamie Cox, headteacher, and Chrissy Callaghan, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

Ballasalla School is situated in the village of Ballasalla, to the south of Douglas. It serves a mixed catchment area consisting of owner-occupied properties, local authority housing and private rented accommodation. The catchment area is particularly large, with several pupils travelling up to five miles to get to school.

There are 109 pupils on roll. The school has had a 28% increase in numbers over the last three years and is expected to rise to 120 once new housing is completed. There are four classes, 5.3 full-time equivalent teachers including the headteacher, one full-time education support officer and a full-time nursery nurse.

Twenty two per cent of pupils are on the register of special educational needs. This is higher than the Island average. Thirty per cent of pupils receive free school meals. This is also higher than the Island average. Four percent of children are learning English as an Additional Language. This is in line with the Island average.

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

- **Personal Development**
- **Achievement Against prior Attainment**
- **Keeping Safe**

Personal Development

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

- Almost all children are proud to attend Ballasalla Primary School
- Most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs

- The development of growth mindset has improved resilience around the school
- A large majority of children enjoy reading
- Personal Development can be judged as 'effective' overall

Achievement Against Prior Attainment

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

- Progress in the Foundation Stage is 'effective'
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'very effective' in Key Stage 1
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'very effective' in Key Stage 2
- Most pupils enjoy learning
- Achievement against Prior Attainment can be judged as 'effective' overall

Keeping Safe

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

- The school has a clear child protection policy and procedures are in place which are understood and implemented by staff
- The school meets its statutory requirements in relation to DBS checks and record keeping
- Key policies such as Health and Safety and Emergency Plans are in place
- A programme to improve pupils' emotional well-being is being embedded
- Keeping Safe can be judged as 'effective' overall

The Validation Activities

To check and confirm the judgments 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 quite well. There are aspects of the SSRE that require further evaluative evidence in order for the school to strategically and systematically plan for continuous improvement.

Personal Development

The school conducted a pupil questionnaire earlier this year and this showed that almost all children are proud to attend the school. This view point confirmed earlier pupil interviews and was also made clear to the validation team by pupils and parents during our visit. The school has good evidence from learning walks that most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs learning dispositions. The pupils informed us of the importance of the 6Rs and gave examples of how they use them in their learning. Pupils talked very positively about how the development of a 'growth mindset' was helping them to understand that challenge and failure are important to their learning. From our discussions with pupils it is apparent that the development of growth mindset has improved resilience around the school. The school's questionnaire indicates that a large majority of children enjoy reading. This was confirmed by the pupils with whom we spoke.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Personal Development should be judged as 'effective' overall.

Achievement Against Prior Attainment

The school's tracking of the pupil progress shows that a large majority of pupils make five or more jumps in nine of the areas of the Early Learning Goals. This indicates that progress in the Foundation Stage is 'effective'. In Key Stage 1 a large majority of pupils make three or more sub levels progress in all of the core subjects. The SSRE contradicts this for writing. This is the result of the method used to calculate progress by the school. Progress in writing, using the criteria in the provided toolkit, is 'very effective'. Achievement against prior attainment is 'very effective' in Key Stage 1. A large majority of pupils make six or more sub levels progress over Key Stage 2 in all of the core subjects. Achievement against prior attainment is 'very effective' in Key Stage 2.

From the learning walks conducted by school leaders, the outcomes reached by pupils and from our visits to classrooms and discussions with pupils, it is clear that pupils acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding in their lessons. This is not explicitly referenced in the school's SSRE.

The school's monitoring indicates that most pupils enjoy learning. As the SSRE states 'there is not enough evidence that this is consistent across the school', leading to a judgment of 'effective' in this aspect rather than 'very effective'.

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

Keeping Safe

The school has strong evidence, which is supported by external audits and link adviser visits, that child protection procedures are in place and these are understood and implemented by staff when required. All child protection training is up to date. An external audit in June 2017 confirmed that the school's statutory requirements for safeguarding, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and record keeping were in place. Key policies such as Health and Safety and Emergency Plans are in place and the school uses the 'Evolve' system for education visits which requires effective risk assessments. During playtime the validation team observed pupils making and taking decisions based on their own ongoing assessment of risk. The playtime experience at the school is active, imaginative and full of real-life decision-making opportunities - risk assessment brought to life.

The school has recently introduced a programme to improve pupils' emotional well-being, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). This programme is in the process of being embedded.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Keeping Safe should be judged as '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 examples set out in the SSRE. It concurs with many of these, including:

- The headteacher has created a culture where staff feel safe to take risks and are motivated to engage in research to inform decisions
- The school's vision is articulated to the school community. The school next needs to develop a set of shared values
- Staff are consulted regarding the School Improvement Planning process
- A very large majority of 'must have' policies are in place
- Staff take ownership for areas they are leading
- Communication in the school is effective
- All staff track pupil learning and interventions are put in place where necessary and impact is monitored
- A large majority of parents hold the school in high regard
- The majority of parents feel the school engages with parents to help their children learn

The validation team noted that on several occasions the SSRE correctly states that 'further evidence is required'.

In addition, the validation team is pleased to note that behaviour on the day of the visit was very good.

The validation team did not agree with the school's judgment that Teaching for Learning is 'not yet effective'. In meetings and through the validation team's observations teaching for learning is 'effective' against the criteria. The school's view is overly cautious. One significant factor contributing to 'very effective' achievement is often the quality of teaching and learning. Achievement is 'very effective' in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and 'effective' in the Foundation Stage. Encouragingly, the school's attainment and achievement predictions for 2018 are that it is likely to be able in future to make a judgment of 'very effective' in both these sections of the SSRE.

Conclusion

As the result of clear leadership and a dedicated and unified staff, Ballasalla Primary School has improved rapidly in a number of ways. The knowledge the school has is not always clearly expressed in the SSRE. As the school knows there are also aspects of SSRE that require further evaluative evidence in order for the school to strategically and systematically plan for continuous improvement. The school knows itself quite well.

Howard Marshall
June 2018