

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

St Mary's RC 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 St Mary's RC SSRE included a visit to the school on Friday 22nd June 2018. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Tim Short, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft, Director of Education, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

St Mary's RC Primary School is situated in the northern part of Douglas. Its catchment area covers the Roman Catholic parishes of St Mary's, St Joseph's and St Anthony's. It is the only Catholic School on the Island. Although most pupils live in Douglas and Onchan, others come from further afield.

The school was opened in 1967 and is currently undergoing a period of significant change with a large building programme and several changes in staffing. The school accepts children from Reception to Year 6. All pupils are baptised Catholics.

There are currently 286 pupils on role, organised into 12 classes. 17 percent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. This is in line with the average for the primary schools on the Island. There are 24 percent who are learning English as an Additional Language. This is significantly above the average for the Island. 16 percent receive free school meals. This is slightly below the average for the Island. There are 14.7 full-time equivalent teachers including the headteacher. There are 3.1 full-time equivalent Education Support Officers (ESOs) and one Senior Education Support Officer (SESO).

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

- **Achievement Against Prior Attainment**
- **Teaching for Learning**
- **Partnerships with Parents/Carers**

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 or better progress over time in the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2
- The large majority of pupils have developed a 'love of learning'
- Achievement against Prior Attainment can be judged as 'very effective' overall

Teaching for Learning

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

- The large majority of staff are creating and embedding a growth mindset culture towards learning
- A large majority of teachers are promoting a culture of challenge, high aspiration and ambition
- The large majority of staff are using assessment systems (including feedback) to track individual progress and inform future planning
- A large majority of staff are giving pupils the opportunity to understand how they learn effectively and apply meta-cognitive strategies in different contexts
- Teaching for Learning can be judged as 'effective' overall

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

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

- The wider community holds the school in high regard
- The school has effective mechanisms to gather and respond to parental enquiries and concerns
- The school encourages parents to become involved with their children's education through constant communication regarding their learning
- Partnerships with Parents/Carers 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 does not know itself well enough. The SSRE does not accurately reflect practice and provision at the school.

Achievement Against Prior Attainment

This section of the SSRE was not written well enough against the criteria of the relevant grade descriptors. This is the result of misreading and misunderstanding the criteria. From the analysis provided on the day of the validation visit it is clear that a large majority of pupils make expected or better progress over time in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Progress across Key Stage 2 is above expectations in science and mathematics and below in reading and writing.

The school has little evidence, other than anecdotal, to support its judgment that the large majority of pupils have developed a 'love of learning'. Our discussions with a small number of pupils and parents did indicate that pupils do want to learn and enjoy their learning. A recent note to the school following a visit from the DESC's Education Improvement Service stated that 'pupils were enthused by their learning and could talk about how the 6Rs helped them to learn'. The school needs to systematically gather more evidence to support its judgments.

The validation team does not concur with the school's judgment that Achievement Against prior Attainment should be judged as 'very effective' overall. The evidence provided during the visit indicates that pupils' progress is effective. The limited evidence for 'love of learning' means that the validation team does not have enough information to make an overall judgment.

Teaching for Learning

This section of the SSRE is confusing. Some aspects of Teaching for Learning were judged to be 'not yet effective' but the commentary suggests 'very effective' practice. For example, 'growth mindset culture' is judged as 'not yet effective'. The commentary then contradicts this by stating that 'a large majority of staff are creating and embedding a growth mindset towards learning'. The validation team's discussions with pupils indicates that this aspect of teaching for learning is at least effective. Pupils were able to explain how growth mindset impacted on their learning and were able to give examples of how they use this in their lessons.

The school does not have sufficient evidence to support the judgments made regarding the culture of challenge or meta-cognitive strategies. During our visits to classrooms and from conversations with pupils it is clear that they are encouraged to reflect on their learning and, at times, choose their level of challenge based on these reflections. Pupils also informed us that teachers use a range of strategies to help them to make progress in their learning. The school's approach to tracking of assessment identifies the progress being made by individual pupils and informs future planning. Each pupil has targets for reading, writing and mathematics. This target setting is a real strength of the school.

The validation team cannot concur with the school's overall judgment that Teaching for Learning should be judged as 'effective' overall as the evidence is not presented clearly in the SSRE. While there are certainly aspects that are at least 'effective', the evidence as set out in the SSRE does not support a judgment of 'effective'. Instead it should be judged as 'not yet effective'

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

The school has very little evidence to support the judgments made in this aspect. From our conversations with parents and anecdotal evidence from teachers it appears that the wider school community does hold the school in high regard. Parents informed us that

communication about day to day issues and direct enquiries are effective. At present there are no formal mechanisms to gather parental views about the school's provision. The school communicates information to parents about the learning that is to take place and also how well their children are learning. Parents informed us that on an individual basis they are able to ask the school how they can support their child and advice is provided. Currently, the school does not run workshops for parents to help them to become more involved with their child's learning.

The validation team does not concur with the school's judgment that Partnerships with Parents should be judged as 'effective' overall. This is due to a lack of evidence. Instead it should be judged as 'not yet effective'

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 the following:

- A large majority of the pupils are proud of and committed to their school
- Pupil voice is promoted through Philosophy for Children, circle time and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)
- Through the schools embedded use of the 6Rs the vast majority of pupils are aware of the next stages of their learning including transition
- During breaks it is apparent that children look after themselves and others in line with the school's Catholic ethos
- The school has forged strong links with the Church
- Parents, staff and pupils informed the validation team that the school has effective policies for anti-bullying, behaviour and e-safety.

In addition, the validation team notes that the school is also held in very high regard by parents and staff and that behaviour is good.

Conclusion

The school does not know itself well enough. The SSRE does not accurately reflect practice and provision at the school. There are many good things happening in the school that are not evidenced in the SSRE. The SSRE is not written clearly enough against the supplied criteria to evidence that its judgments are accurate. The school needs to gather robust evidence that illustrates how it is meeting the criteria. This will place it in a stronger position to plan for improvement.

Howard Marshall
June 2018