

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

Ramsey Grammar 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 Ramsey Grammar School SSRE included a visit to the school on Wednesday 13th March and Thursday 14th March 2019. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Annette Baker, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft and Jan Gimbert, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

Ramsey Grammar School serves the north of the Isle of Man, drawing from a catchment area of around 100 square miles. It is located on the outskirts of Ramsey. About 50 percent of the students live in the surrounding rural areas and travel on school buses.

The buildings have been extremely well maintained and a programme of upgrading classrooms and corridors has produced a high quality learning environment. The school has a Rural Science department which holds a Farm Assured registration. The Student Services and Support Area (SS&S) provides a very good environment for those students requiring additional support.

There are 864 students on roll with a teacher-student ratio of 1:12. 12 per cent of the students receive free school meals. This is just below the average for the Island. 20 per cent have special educational needs at 'school action', 'school action plus' or 'high level need'. This is about average for the Island. 1 per cent are learning English as an additional language which 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:

- **Achievement against Prior Attainment**
- **Teaching for Learning**
- **Wider Partnerships**

Achievement against Prior Attainment

The school judges this aspect as 'not yet effective: improving'. It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- Achievement against Prior Attainment at Key Stage 3 (KS3) is 'very effective'
- Achievement against Prior Attainment at Key Stage 4 (KS4) is 'not yet effective'

- Achievement against Prior Attainment at Key Stage 5 (KS5) is 'very effective'
- Most students have developed a love of learning
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'not yet effective: improving'

Teaching for Learning

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

- Most teaching staff create and embed a growth mindset culture towards learning
- Teaching staff show very effective command of areas of learning and subject knowledge
- Staff are actively investigating and introducing new approaches to learning using appropriate technology
- Assessment systems are used effectively to track individual progress and to inform future provision
- Target setting is used by team leaders to identify and address underachievement
- Teaching for Learning is 'effective' overall

Wider Partnerships

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

- The school is 'very effective' in strategically planning work with other schools that improves student learning
- The Year 6 to Year 7 (Y6-Y7) transition is very effective
- Extensive partnerships with external agencies provide support for students and improves provision and outcomes
- Wider Partnerships are '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 leaders responsible for assessment

Findings

Summary

The school knows itself well. There are aspects of the SSRE where assertions are made without sufficient evaluative evidence. Overall, the school demonstrates that it has enough evaluative evidence to strategically and systematically plan for continuous improvement.

Achievement against Prior Attainment

Progress in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 is 'very effective' when compared with the Island's average with a large majority of pupils making four or more sublevels of progress.

Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is 'not yet effective'. Progress in English is above the Island's average in two of the measures used and below in one. Progress in mathematics is below the Island average for all three measures. The school's data analysis shows that progress in 2018 was a concern in several other subjects. The school's tracking of pupil learning indicates that Key Stage 4 will improve in the 2019 examinations.

The progress that pupils make in Key Stage 5 is impressive and correctly judged as 'very effective'.

The school has some evidence from lesson observations and surveys – supported by professional judgments – that, within lessons and units of work, most pupils have developed a 'love of learning'. Our discussions with pupils and visits to classrooms confirmed this judgment. There is less explicit evidence provided in the SSRE or held by leaders to support the degree to which students acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding within lessons and units of work.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'not yet effective: improving' overall.

Teaching for Learning

From the validation team's discussions with pupils, teachers and leaders and from the results of the pupil survey it is evident that the school promotes and embeds a growth mindset culture towards learning. Pupils are increasingly encouraged to embrace mistakes as part of their learning.

The school has evidence to support its judgment that teaching staff show very effective command of areas of learning and subject knowledge. The validation team's visits to classroom supports this judgment. Teachers are introducing new approaches to learning with the use of appropriate technology. Some exciting initiatives were shared with the validation team. The school is correct to identify developing greater pupil autonomy, metacognition and feedback as areas for further development. In addition, the sharing of learning outcomes requires further attention as often these are tasks to complete rather than learning outcomes. This has also been identified by the school as an area for improvement.

The validation team was shown and informed about the approach used by team leaders to identify areas for improvement. Assessment systems are used effectively to track progress and identify underachievement. There was less evidence to show how this directly informed future provision or its impact.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Teaching for Learning is 'effective' overall. There was much discussion about this judgment and the school recognises the need for this to be an area for further development to consolidate the judgment of 'effective'.

Wider partnerships

The school strategically plans work with other schools that improves the provision and outcomes for its pupils. The Key Stage 5 collaboration with two other secondary schools provides viability for less popular courses and courses for which there is limited or no staffing provision in the host school giving pupils a wider choice of subjects for study. Similarly, at Key Stage 4 the school's strategic liaison with University College Isle of Man (UCM) helps to provide a broad curriculum for pupils.

Parents praised the school's primary to secondary transition arrangements. The school has a dedicated teacher and almost all pupils are well prepared for their move to the school.

The school has developed an extensive range of partnerships with agencies that improves provision for students. These partnerships are wide ranging. There is less evidence in the SSRE to support the impact this strategic work has on improving student learning outcomes. It is evident that these partnerships have enabled the school to reduce suspensions. Anecdotally there are many examples of the impact these partnerships are having for pupils requiring additional support. The SSRE will be stronger once a mechanism has been agreed for the collation of evidence of impact.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Wider Partnerships is 'very effective' overall.

Other Areas Considered

In addition to the three specific aspects of the SSRE on which it focused, the validation team considered other judgments and statements set out in the SSRE. It concurred with several of these, including:

- Most pupils are committed to and proud of the school
- The student council represents the views of the pupils
- Attainment is 'Not yet effective: improving' overall and 'very effective' in Key Stage 5
- The SSRE process is integrated into the review of team effectiveness
- Teachers are inspired and supported by leaders to engage in professional development and reflective practice supported by evidence-based research
- The school is committed to a culture of inclusion that is guided by the 'Way of Being' - as one pupil told us 'the school can see that not everyone is wired the same way'
- Communication systems are developing across the school so that more stakeholders feel informed and can engage more effectively
- The school is improving in formally gathering feedback from families and the community for improvement purposes
- Assessment systems are used to track pupil progress which is used to support learning
- At Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 options are based on pupils' needs and choices

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

Conclusion

The SSRE is, in the main, evaluative and supported by appropriate evidence. There are sections where judgments, clearly made against the criteria, are not supported by sufficient evidence. This is an area for development. The SSRE clearly informs the School Improvement Plan. This plan and associated Team Action Plans would benefit from explicit targets in terms of the improvement desired in pupil learning.

The school knows itself well and is well placed to improve.

Howard Marshall
March 2019