

Graham Reeves Ltd

for

The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture

External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation

St Ninian's 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 St Ninian's High School SSRE included a visit to the school on Wednesday 11th March and Thursday 12th March 2020. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Chris Coole, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft and Joel Smith, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

Context

St Ninian's High School is situated on a split site in the town of Douglas in the east of the Island. In May 2011 the Lower School moved to a new purpose built site. This facility provides a very stimulating learning environment. The Upper School site continues to be developed and has recently opened a new Sixth Form Centre and Progress Zone.

There are 1206 pupils on roll with a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:12.7. 12.3 per cent of the pupils receive free school meals. This is slightly below the average for the island. 29.8 per cent have special education needs at 'school action', 'school action plus' or 'high level need'. This is above the Island average. 5.48 per cent are learning English as an additional language. This is above 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**
- **Teaching for Learning**
- **Partnerships with Parents/Carers**

Personal Development

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

- Most pupils are committed to the school community and are proud of it
- Most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs
- A large majority have a clear sense of wellbeing
- A large majority of pupils enjoy reading a wide range of literature
- Personal Development can be judged as 'effective' overall

Teaching for Learning

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

- A large majority of teachers create and embed a 'growth mindset' culture towards learning
- Pupils are given opportunities to direct their own learning
- Pupils are often given, and use, time to reflect on their learning
- Teachers use the assessment systems to track individual progress and to inform future provision
- Creative teaching strategies are widely and consistently applied to improve the learning of pupils
- Teaching for Learning is '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
- The school regularly seeks parents' views for self-evaluation and improvement purposes
- The school builds positive relationships with the large majority of parents and carers to support pupil learning and wellbeing
- 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
- visited the dining rooms at lunchtimes
- observed an assembly
- 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
- talked with the leadership team

Findings

Summary

The school knows itself well and is in a good position to continue on its school improvement journey. The SSRE is, in the main, systematic, evaluative and supported by appropriate evidence.

Personal Development

Evidence from pupil surveys, feedback from visitors and participation in community events indicate that most pupils are committed to the school and are proud to attend St Ninians's High School. The validation team's positive discussions with pupils supports this judgment.

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) Dimensions are used to build on the '6R' learning dispositions to empower pupils to develop their dispositions for learning. The school's monitoring, particularly the 'Ready to Learn' visits to lessons shows that most pupils demonstrate good levels of the 6Rs.

The evidence in the SSRE regarding pupils' well-being is not persuasive. Further discussions with pupils and leaders and evidence presented from parental surveys support the judgment that a large majority of pupils have a clear sense of well-being. As one pupil stated, 'everyone has a good connection to each other'.

The school is systematically gathering evidence to support its judgments for reading. Whilst the evidence presented in the SSRE could be more detailed and be drawn from a wider variety of sources the school has enough information to indicate that a large majority of pupils enjoy reading a wide range of literature. It would also appear that there is an upward trend in the numbers of pupils who enjoy reading.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Personal Development is 'effective' overall.

Teaching for Learning

The school has a range of evidence, including lesson observations by senior and middle leaders and pupil interviews, that indicate that a large majority of teachers both create and embed a 'growth mindset' culture towards learning. The school has been developing its approach to this area for over five years. Pupils that the validation team spoke with were able to explain how having a 'growth mindset' furthered their learning.

The evidence presented, and the validation team's visits to classrooms and discussions with teachers and pupils, shows that pupils are given opportunities to direct their own learning. Both teachers and pupils gave us very good examples of where this was happening. The school is aware that it needs to gather further evidence to support its judgment about this aspect of provision for it to be securely 'very effective'.

As part of the school's approach to learning through the ELLI Dimensions pupils are given time to reflect on their learning. The school has evidence to support its judgment in the form of 'Ready to Learn' classroom visits and middle leader reports. The validation team's discussions with pupils confirmed that pupils do reflect on their learning in a range of contexts.

The school has an effective assessment system that enables teachers to track individual pupils and inform future teaching for learning provision.

Evidence from monitoring shows that the school is 'effective' in its use of creative teaching strategies to improve the learning of pupils. Pupils and teachers were able to inform the validation team of many examples where learning had been improved through the use of planned creative activities. These activities often, though not exclusively, made use of technology.

The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Teaching for Learning is 'effective' overall and has elements of 'very effective'.

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

From parental surveys and from discussions with pupils and staff it is clear that the school is held in high regard. There is also evidence provided by the school to support the judgment that the school makes a positive contribution to the improvement of the community and the lives of families.

The school seeks parents' views for self-evaluation and improvement purposes. The regularity in seeking views is an area for development before the school can be secure in its judgment of 'very effective' for this aspect.

The school has built positive partnerships with the large majority of families to support pupil learning. Surveys indicate that parents are very positive about the information they receive about the progress of their child's learning and their pastoral support.

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:

- The senior leadership team has spearheaded a new vision and focus for the school which has helped it to make progress in the past 3 years
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is very effective
- Achievement against Prior Attainment from the end of Key Stage 4 to the end of Key Stage 5 is well above the Island average
- All staff have the opportunity to work with peers to develop strategies that directly impact on classroom practice
- Staff are expected to learn in cross-curricular groups carrying out evidence-based research to inform effective classroom practice
- Senior and middle leaders systematically gather evidence to inform school improvement planning
- Training for teachers has been provided to ensure there is understanding of the principles of metacognition, growth mindset and brain development
- The provision of support and guidance to pupils is effective
- The school works hard to nurture every pupil's healthy development, aspirations and achievement
- Relationships between pupils and pupils and teachers across the school are very good

In addition, the validation team is pleased to note that behaviour is very good across the school.

Conclusion

The school knows itself well and is in a good position to continue on its school improvement journey. The SSRE is, in the main, systematic, evaluative and supported by appropriate evidence. There are two sections where judgments are not clearly made against the criteria. This is an area for development. The SSRE informs the School Improvement Plan which would benefit from explicit targets in terms of the improvement desired in pupil learning.

Howard Marshall
March 2020