

# The WCL Group for The Isle of Man Department of Education and Children

## 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 and Children (DEC) in consultation with the schools. The WCL Group 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 culminated in a visit to the school on Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 November 2014. The visit was made by Howard Marshall. He worked alongside Andy Fox, headteacher, Keith Winstanley, peer headteacher from Castle Rushen High School and Paul Craine, Co-ordinating Adviser for 11-19 Education.

#### 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 good learning environment. The school is working hard to develop the Upper School site.

There are 1344 students on roll with a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:14.2. 12.7 per cent of the students receive free school meals. This is slightly below the average for the island. 19 per cent have special education needs at 'school action', 'school action plus' or 'high level need'. This is slightly below the Island average. 4 per cent are learning English as an additional language.

A Significant Strength of the school is its approach to transition between primary schools and Key Stage 3.

#### Focus of the Validation

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

- Teaching and Learning
- Distributed Leadership
- Attainment

## **Teaching and Learning**

The school judges this aspect as 'Good'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to:

- Confirm that Learning and Teaching is Good overall
- Confirm that students are developing the skills and capacity to learn independently, for example, using assessment information to improve their progress
- Confirm that assessment information is used to inform planning and teaching
- Investigate if students are becoming more engaged in their learning as detailed in the areas to be developed
- Confirm that high expectations lead to the students being motivated and challenged

## **Distributed Leadership**

The school judges this aspect as 'Good'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to order to:

- Confirm that Distributed Leadership is Good overall
- Confirm that Senior leaders distribute responsibility throughout the organisation, holding leaders to account for school improvement
- Confirm that Senior leaders motivate others and encourage creative thinking and innovation
- Confirm that leaders at all levels are accountable for school improvement

## **Attainment**

The school judges this aspect as 'Good'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to:

- Confirm that Attainment is Good overall
- Confirm that Key Stage 5 results are good
- Confirm that Key Stage 4 results are satisfactory but are showing a marked improvement over the past two years, particularly in the key indicators of 5 A\*- C GCSE pass rate
- Investigate Key Stage 3 results
- Investigate the range of evidence the school has for attainment in the 6Rs dispositions

## **The Validation Activities**

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

- toured both of the school sites, led by students on each occasion
- observed lessons and other activities

- looked at a number of documents
- met with a group of teachers
- met with the Education Support Officers
- met with a group of parents
- met with subject/aspect leaders
- met with the senior leader responsible for data
- met with the senior leader responsible for professional development
- met with the leader responsible for SEN
- met with support teachers
- ate lunch with the students

## Findings

### Summary

The school knows itself well. It is in a good position to improve further.

### Teaching and Learning

Teachers set high expectations and lessons engage, challenge and motivate students. Teachers demonstrate good levels of subject knowledge. Many lessons have clear learning outcomes which are appropriately shared with the students. There is a need to sharpen up objectives and success criteria in some lessons. Key Stage 5 students and many Key Stage 4 students are clear about how they are to be assessed and where they need to improve. They are able to assess their own work and are using the information they gain to improve their progress. Key Stage 3 students are less clear about the use of learning objectives and targets. Students in mathematics are always aware of their learning.

Teachers show a good command of their subjects and give formative feedback to students. They make use of assessment information to plan for lessons to take students forward in their learning. This was particularly evident in Key Stage 5.

Students are improving their skills to learn both collaboratively and independently.

*The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that **Teaching and Learning** is 'Good'.*

### Distributed Leadership

There is a new senior leadership team and many new middle leaders. It is clear that the school's leadership is grounded more in activity to improve learning than in positions or roles. It is very likely that this will become a significant strength.

Senior leaders are distributing aspects of leadership to all colleagues. Middle leaders are fully responsible for improvements in their areas or aspects and they, in turn, are encouraging their teams to be responsible for developments. Middle leaders shared developments and explained

how they are being encouraged by senior leaders to be creative, take risks and innovate. They described leadership in the school as 'exciting'.

The school's approach to school development planning is one where all teachers are encouraged to contribute. Good use of learning data is helping the school to identify the most appropriate interventions for improving learning. All leaders are accountable for school improvement.

Professional development is a contributing factor to the successful move towards distributed leadership.

*The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that **Distributed Leadership** is 'Good' and suggest that it is on course to be a Significant Strength.*

## **Attainment**

Based on the 2013 assessment information and the Island's criteria, attainment in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. The percentage of children attaining well is 27.5 per cent in English, 65.5 per cent in mathematics and 47.8 per cent in science. Attainment in mathematics is good.

Based on the 2013 assessment information and the Island's criteria, attainment in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. The percentage of children attaining well (A\*-B) in GCSE is 42 per cent. 30 percent of students attained an A\*-B in English and 32 per cent in mathematics. There are variations between subjects with 17 out of 25 subjects exceeding the Island's mean. Results in religious education (RE) are consistently high. Key Stage 4 results have improved significantly in English and mathematics in the past 3 years. Projections show that this progress should continue this year.

There is no guidance from the DEC about what constitutes good attainment at Key Stage 5. In 2013 36.2 per cent of Key Stage 5 students attained an A\*-B grade which is below the Island average of 42.3 per cent. 96.4 per cent attained grades A\*-E which is in line with the Island average.

The school has a good tracking system in place and, through effective analysis of learning data and interventions, gaps in attainment are being narrowed.

The school produced very limited evidence to support a judgement that attainment in the 6Rs is Good. This does not mean that students are not developing in this area. Students are developing these dispositions and the school's judgement of Good in this aspect of learning is valid. Some teachers would benefit from greater clarity about the use of Core Skills, Elli Dimensions and the 6Rs.

Attainment will be Good by the end of this academic year if the school's projections are realised.

*The external validator does not concur with the school's judgement that **Attainment** is 'Good'. There were different interpretations of the criteria to be used in defining what constitutes good attainment.*

## Other Areas Considered

As well as the three specific aspects of the SSRE on which it focused, the validation team also considered other judgements set out in the SSRE. It concurred with several aspects including:

- Behaviour in the school is a significant strength. Students are punctual and ready to learn. They demonstrate good relationships with their peers and with adults. This contributes to a very good climate for learning.
- The school has an inclusive approach to post 16 learning.
- The lower school learning environment is good. The school makes good use of space at the upper school site.
- The inclusive Progress Zone is a strength of the school. It is anticipated that 90 per cent of students will be supported in the zone.
- The school is at the beginning stage of an approach to developing the pupils' 'mindset'. This has the potential to transform learning in the school.
- The Key Stage 5 lunchtime debate demonstrated how students are directing their own learning.
- Bullying is not an issue in the school. The school positively works with all stakeholders to ensure that this remains the case.
- Career guidance in the school is very good. Students feel prepared for their next steps in life.
- The school is well regarded by parents.
- Appraisal is being used very well to target both the school's priorities and the individual's professional development.
- The school is successfully focusing on the development of the whole person and not only targeting academic results.

## Conclusion

The validation team concurs with the school about nearly all judgements that it tested. The one aspect where there was a difference of opinion about a judgement is where there were different interpretations of the criteria.

The SSRE is generally well written, using the grade descriptors to inform its judgements.

The school knows itself well. The new senior leadership team has set out a clear vision for improvement and gaps in attainment are being narrowed. The behaviour of students is a significant strength and this reflects the care shown by all adults in the school for them as individuals.

The school is in a good position to improve further.

Howard Marshall  
November 2014