

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

## **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 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 Ballasalla SSRE culminated in a visit to the school on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014. The visit was made by Graham Reeves. He worked alongside Lyn Ashworth, headteacher, and Geoff Moorcroft, Coordinating Adviser for Primary Education.

#### **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.

The current building was opened around 60 years ago and there have been a number of alterations and extensions over the past 20 years. Accommodation includes a newly refurbished library, a large hall that is used for sports and dining, a hard-standing playground and a playing field. A 'community house' in the school grounds is used by a youth club and senior citizens group and is available to the school for meetings.

There are 90 pupils on roll. This number has fallen from 145 five years ago and is predicted to fall further in the future. There are four classes, 5.5 full-time equivalent teachers including the headteacher, one full-time education support officer and a full-time nursery nurse.

#### **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

- Achievement against Prior Attainment
- Assessment

- Care

### **Achievement against Prior Attainment**

The school judges this aspect as 'Satisfactory'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- the school has appropriately high expectations of children's progress
- pupils acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding, demonstrating progress in their learning
- Achievement against Prior Attainment is Satisfactory overall.

### **Assessment**

The school judges this aspect as 'Good'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- detailed and accurate feedback to pupils provides information linked to target setting and next steps
- assessment information is used to inform planning to ensure learning is challenging and meets the needs of pupils
- Assessment for Learning is a strength
- Assessment is Good overall.

### **Care**

The school judges this aspect as 'Good'.

It was chosen for consideration in order to confirm that:

- the vast majority of pupils find school a safe and secure environment
- behaviour guidelines and established routines promote responsibility for self and peer well-being through mutual respect
- Care is Good overall.

## **The Validation Activities**

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

- toured the school
- observed lessons and other activities
- looked at a number of documents
- talked with a group of staff members
- talked with a group of pupils
- talked with a group of parents.

# Findings

## Summary

Based on the contents of the School Self Review and Evaluation, the school does not know itself well enough. The SSRE needs to be reconsidered and revised so that it better reflects the school's strengths and areas for development. Only then can it be used to create a valid plan for the improvement of pupils' learning.

## Achievement against Prior Attainment

Most pupils in the Foundation Stage make more progress than is generally expected for the Island. Most pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 make better than expected progress in English, mathematics and science. Children with special educational needs generally make very good progress.

*The validation team concludes that Achievement against Prior Achievement is 'Good', rather than 'Satisfactory' as stated in the SSRE.*

## Assessment

The school has some good processes for assessing pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. These processes include pupils' self- and peer-assessment. At the moment assessment of attainment and progress in other subjects is less developed. The school uses summative assessment to make evaluative judgements about pupil progress. It needs to make more systematic use of its considerable assessment information to inform the curriculum and to set targets and identify 'next steps' for individual pupils.

Teachers make good use of praise and encouragement in their feedback to children. The use of developmental feedback is less common.

*The validation team concludes that Assessment is 'Satisfactory', rather than 'Good' as stated in the SSRE.*

## Care

The school provides a safe and secure environment for pupils. Its behaviour guidelines and established routines promote responsibility for pupils' well-being and mutual respect. Pupils know they can approach any adult in the school for support. They develop a sense of safety at school. The school has developed links with external agencies (including the Pre School Assessment Centre, Services for Children, Fit 4 the Future and the Thriving Families Project) to ensure relevant intervention. It has established routines to ensure that any incidents are recorded and reported. Care of pupils is clearly something to which the school attaches great importance.

*The validation team concurs with the school's judgement that Care is 'Good'.*

## Other Areas Considered

As well as the three specific aspects on which it focused, the validation team also considered other judgements set out in the SSRE. It concurred with a number of the school's judgements including those that:

- Pupils understand that a healthy diet impacts positively on their physical well-being.
- Pupils feel sufficiently secure in their relationship with adults in the school to discuss their needs.
- The school is developing a skills-based curriculum.
- Teachers use their planning to set objectives and define focus groups.
- The school has a positive ethos.
- The school adopts teaching strategies that are matched to pupils' needs.
- The development of the '6Rs' is reflected in the learning environment.
- All class bases have reading corners and role play centres designed to encourage independent learning and play.
- Central hall and corridor displays are used effectively to celebrate pupil achievement, application and effort.
- All pupils learn about the cultural heritage of the Isle of Man.
- The school is held in high esteem by parents and the wider community.
- Parents are grateful for what the school provides for their children both academically and socially.
- Subject leaders have a collective responsibility for monitoring and evaluation and for auditing training requirements.
- All staff are encouraged to take risks in planning, the delivery of new projects to provide challenge and enjoyment for both staff and pupils.

The validation team also considered the school's statement in the SSRE that it judges Attainment as 'Action Required'. It agreed that results in English, mathematics and science at the Key Stages 1 and 2 are generally lower than the Island averages for these subjects. It also noted that attainment in the '6Rs' was generally 'Satisfactory' with elements of 'Good'. It therefore found that Attainment overall is 'Satisfactory' rather than 'Action Required' as stated in the SSRE.

## Conclusion

Based on the contents of the School Self Review and Evaluation, the school does not know itself well enough. In some respects the SSRE does not do the school justice. In many places it is descriptive rather than evaluative. It is often not related to the agreed level descriptors and it fails to mention some important aspects of the school.

The SSRE needs to be reconsidered and revised so that it better reflects the school's strengths and areas for development. Only then can it be used to create a valid plan for the improvement of pupils' learning.

Graham Reeves  
March 2014