

# **Graham Reeves Ltd**

*for*

**The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture**

## **External Validation of the School Self-Review and Evaluation**

### **St John's 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 John's SSRE included a visit to the school on Tuesday 21 May 2019. The visit was made by Graham Reeves. He worked alongside Tracy Willoughby, headteacher, and Karen Riordan, representing the DESC's Education Improvement Service.

#### **Context**

St John's School is situated in an historic semi-rural area. It was established 150 years ago and moved into its current building in 2003. It serves a catchment area which is geographically large but sparsely populated, with a mixture of privately owned and local authority homes, farms and large houses in private grounds.

There are 123 pupils on roll, organised into six classes plus a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Unit. 34.14 per cent of pupils are on the SEN register. This figure, which includes 5 pupils in the Unit, is considerably higher than the Island average. 13.2 per cent of pupils receive free school meals. This is lower than the Island average.

There are 8.5 full-time equivalent members of the teaching staff, including the headteacher and unit manager. There are 7 full-time equivalent members of the classroom support staff.

The school premises also accommodate a nursery and a youth club.

#### **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**
- **Leadership**
- **Teaching for Learning**

#### **Achievement against Prior Attainment**

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

- Confirm that progress in the Foundation Stage is 'effective'
- Confirm that progress in Key Stage 1 is 'not yet effective'

- Confirm that progress in Key Stage 2 is ‘very effective’
- Investigate the extent to which, within lessons and units of work, most pupils love learning and acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding, demonstrating progress in their learning
- Confirm that achievement against Prior Attainment can be judged as ‘effective’ overall.

### **Leadership**

The school judges this aspect as ‘effective’. It was chosen for consideration in order to:

- Investigate the extent to which leadership is aware of evidence-based research and encourages staff to use this
- Investigate the extent to which leaders articulate the vision and priorities for improvement and understand their role in delivering improvements
- Investigate the extent to which the school improvement process generates evidence to identify key priorities for improvement
- Investigate the extent to which leaders have a clear understanding of educational inclusion and are committed to running an inclusive school
- Investigate the extent to which responsibilities are shared across the school and leadership identifies and organises appropriate training and staff development
- Confirm that Leadership 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:

- Most staff create a growth mindset culture
- Although pupils are given some elements of choice in how they learn and what they learn this is not consistent across the school
- Staff provide opportunities to allow pupils to reflect on their learning
- Challenge, high aspiration and ambition is promoted in the majority of classes
- Assessment systems are used to track individual progress but, as yet, feedback is not used to inform future provision
- Creative teaching strategies, including the use of technology (ICT), are applied appropriately to improve the learning of pupils
- Teaching for Learning 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 in all classes
- 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 knows itself quite well and has the potential to improve.

### **Achievement against Prior Attainment**

Ninety per cent of pupils who completed the Foundation Stage in 2018 had made five or more 'jumps' in nine of the 17 strands of the areas of learning. Achievement against Prior Attainment is therefore 'effective' at this stage. According to the school's recorded assessment data, the results of pupils who completed Key Stage 1 in 2018 varied considerably from subject to subject. Taken as a whole, Achievement against Prior Attainment is therefore 'not yet effective' at this stage. A very large majority of pupils completed Key Stage 2 in 2018 had made six or more sub-levels' progress in speaking and listening (94%), reading (88.2%), writing (88.2%), mathematics (94%) and science (81.25%) over the course of the key stage. Achievement against Prior Attainment is therefore 'very effective' at this stage. Most pupils enjoy learning and are greatly engaged in it. The school believes that, within lessons and units of work, most acquire and apply skills, knowledge and understanding, demonstrating progress in their learning. It does not formally record evidence to substantiate this.

*The validation team is inclined to concur with the school's judgment that Achievement against Prior Attainment is 'effective' overall.*

### **Leadership**

Leadership is aware of evidence-based research and encourages staff to use this. Particular examples are the introduction of 'Talk for Writing', 'nurture provision', 'SEN intervention', and 'continuous provision'.

The headteacher is currently leading the staff in reviewing the school's vision, aiming to produce a version that is less wordy while maintaining the underlying values. Stakeholders largely recognise and support these values, while not all being familiar with the vision statement itself. The priorities for school improvement are based on evidence from self-review and evaluation. The school improvement plan is rightly concerned largely with the improvement of pupils' learning. It would be clearer if the success criteria were more specifically based on the expected learning improvement. Leaders have a clear understanding of educational inclusion and are committed to running an inclusive school. Inclusion – seen, for example, in the nurture provision and attempts to involve children from the Unit in the wider activities of the school – can be regarded as a particular strength.

All teachers, and some support staff, have responsibility for leading on aspects of the curriculum and/or priorities for school improvement. The school leadership supports them through, for example, enabling their participation in professional development activities.

*The validation team concurs with the school's judgment that Leadership is 'effective' overall.*

### **Teaching for Learning**

A 'growth mindset' culture is developing in the school. It is not yet fully embedded or consistently applied.

Pupils are given some elements of choice in what they learn and in how they learn it. Again, the approach to this is not yet consistent. Some staff sometimes provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. In the best lessons, teachers promote challenge, high aspirations and aspiration.

Assessment systems are used throughout the school to track individual progress. Feedback is not yet used to inform future provision. The recent introduction of a marking and feedback policy is intended to address this issue.

Creative teaching strategies, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are applied appropriately to improve learning.

*The validation team concludes that Teaching for Learning is 'not yet effective: improving', rather than 'effective' as stated in the SSRE.*

### **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 statement set out in the SSRE. It concurred with many of these, including:

- The school is open and welcoming
- It is held in high regard by parents
- Communication with parents is effective
- The school uses email as a way of keeping in contact with working parents
- There have been parent information sessions on e-safety
- The school connects with the wider community in various ways
- External visitors are encouraged in order to further enrich the curriculum
- An element of pupil voice that is well established is the School Council
- In Key Stage 2 a 'Pick 'n' mix' homework approach is popular and encourages pupils to be imaginative and creative in their learning
- Pupils with physical, emotional and behavioural needs are supported in different and appropriate ways
- The school ensures that healthy food and drink options are available and promoted at lunchtime and breaktime
- Most pupils behave well around the school and show respect for others.

### **Conclusion**

The SSRE reflects the school's outcomes quite accurately and is mostly systematic, rigorous and objective about these and about provision. Some of the judgments are not related sufficiently clearly to the relevant grade descriptors.

The school has made some recent changes in approach and is planning others. When these are consistently applied, embedded and monitored they are likely to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. In the meantime, some of the judgments in the SSRE – particularly those related to Teaching for Learning – are premature.

Bearing this in mind, the validation team concludes that the school knows itself quite well and has the potential to improve.

Graham Reeves.  
June 2019