

Dear Parents and Carers,

An external validation visit was undertaken at Ballacottier School on the 11th and 12th June as part of a programme of external validation visits of schools and educational services commissioned by The Isle of Man Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC).

During the visit, the external validation team considered key areas of focus which were explored in collaboration with school leaders to validate school leaders' own evaluations, and the following areas of strength, growth and development were identified.

The following areas of strength were identified during the external validation visit:

- Relationships are at the heart of the school and help to make it a happy, safe, and positive place to learn. Families feel welcome because the school maintains an open-door approach, making it easy for parents, carers and staff to talk to each other. Parents, carers, learners and other members of the wider community speak warmly about the school and are proud of its values and culture. One parent said, "I couldn't be happier with the school." Another said, "Teachers promote positive attitudes and values." People feel included and connected to the school community, with staff working well together and as a team.
- Positive behaviour and attitudes can be seen across the school. Leaders place a strong focus on values, clear expectations and positive relationships. Adults understand what is expected and show this in the way they work with learners each day. Learners are polite, confident and proud to talk about their school. They care about their learning and about their school community. Celebration assemblies and other forms of recognition help learners feel known, valued and included. As a result, the school is calm, focused and welcoming. Learners understand the behaviours and attitudes that help everyone
- The headteacher has set a clear direction for the school, helping leaders and staff to take more responsibility for improving the school. Teachers are becoming more involved in shaping what learners are taught and how they learn. Staff share ideas, take ownership and work together to move the school forward. Governors know the school well. They offer helpful support and ask useful questions. Parents recognise the positive progress being made and feel that the school is moving in the right direction.
- There have been positive developments in the Specialist Provision Centre. The school is strengthening how it supports learners with different needs. This is helping more learners access the curriculum. In mathematics, there is now a stronger focus on key knowledge and skills before new ideas are introduced. There is also greater clarity in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This includes improvements to the outdoor area. These changes are improving the experiences of the youngest learners.

- Staff work together to share ideas and improve teaching across the school. Teachers and leaders talk about what is working well and what could be better. This teamwork is helping the school improve. There are also positive developments in literacy and writing. Staff are giving more attention to the important knowledge and skills learners need so they can make progress.
- Teachers know their classes well. They use different ways to check how learners are getting on during lessons, including verbal feedback, questioning and discussion. When this works well, it helps teachers identify gaps in learning, address misunderstandings and help learners think more deeply. The school is also starting to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can support feedback and help learners improve their work.

The following areas of growth and development were identified during the external validation visit:

- Leadership should continue to be developed across the school. Leaders at all levels should be supported to check the difference their work is making. This will help make sure that improvements are carefully planned, checked regularly and make a positive difference to learners' experiences and outcomes.
- The school should develop a more consistent approach to checking what learners understand during lessons. This will help teachers know when learners need extra support, more challenge or further explanation. It will also help staff adapt their teaching more effectively so that all learners can make the best possible progress.
- Learners should have more chances to share their views about school and learning. This will help them play a more active role in shaping their learning and experiences. It will also help ensure that the curriculum reflects their needs, interests and hopes for the future.
- The school should continue to refine the curriculum by focusing on what learners know, remember and can do over time. This will help build knowledge and skills from year to year. It will also help learners develop a deeper understanding and apply what they have learned as they move through the school.

The aim of the external validation visit was to promote continuous improvement and to deliver consistency, share best practice and deliver positive outcomes for children and young people. The visit was undertaken by an independent external validation team from Etio.

The external validation team looked at a wide range of evidence presented by school leaders, including the school's self-evaluation, and sampled the work of the school during the visit. These activities were focused on key areas based on the self-evaluation of the school and included visits to a cross-section of lessons, meetings with staff, Governors and learners, gathering the views of parents and carers and where appropriate scrutiny of documentation.

The areas of growth and development identified, as part of the external validation visit are being reviewed and actioned by the school as part of a continuous cycle of self-evaluation, further detail can be found by visiting the school website, with regards to the context of the



school, the latest school dashboard overview, attainment data and the school's key priorities and focus areas for the academic year.

Kind regards

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External Validation Team