

Validation report **Le Murier School**

Validation dates: **w/c 18 May 2015**

Managing Inspector: **Terry Carr**

Type of school: **special**

Age range of learners: **11-19**

Gender of learners: **mixed**

Number on roll: **97**

Introduction

The validation visit was carried out by a team of four HM Inspectors, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with learners and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising responses to the pre-validation questionnaires.

The context of the school

Le Murier School is a secondary special school which is co-located with St Sampson's High School. It has 97 students on its roll, comprising 69 boys and 28 girls. The range of their learning difficulties is wide. The majority of students have moderate learning difficulties. There are a significant number of students with severe learning difficulties, autism and social language and communication difficulties. Other students have a range of other special educational needs, including specific learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and sensory impairment.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learners' experiences

The quality of learners' experiences is good in Le Murier School. Most young people say that they like coming to school and enjoy learning, especially on residential trips and outings. Almost all say that they feel safe and well cared for in school. Most feel that they have an adult they can talk to if they are worried or unhappy about something.

In almost all lessons, young people are attentive and display good levels of concentration. They are engaged in learning and listen well to teachers and to each other. Young people relish opportunities to demonstrate their learning to others, often using interactive whiteboards and other information and communications technology (ICT) where appropriate. In some classes young people have opportunities to support each other by working collaboratively in pairs and small groups. Staff provide opportunities for young people to be independent in their learning. In the sensory and communication department, young people are able to move around the school independently and take responsibility for their own resources. Across the school, there is potential for young people to be more independent, to make more choices about their learning and to have a greater influence on learning.

Frequent planned activities and experiences beyond the classroom and in the community are a core part of young people's learning experiences. These include outdoor learning activities such as horticulture, sailing and canoeing. Young people in the school choir look forward to visiting the local senior citizens home to perform to the residents and demonstrate their talents.

A few young people in each year group are contributing to the school's work through their roles on the student council. Young people in this group feel that they have helped to improve the safety of their classmates by making the arrangements for boarding the school buses safer. There is scope for staff to review and extend how they involve young people in making decisions about the work of the school and seeking their views on learning and teaching approaches.

The majority of young people show that they understand their core skills targets. They can talk about how the targets help them improve and show a good understanding of what they need to do in order to achieve their targets. Young people are able to say how their targets have improved their organisational skills, timekeeping and ability to speak confidently to others.

Improvements in performance

In literacy, the majority of students make or exceed the expected progress. They understand how to listen, when to talk and show respect to their peers and to staff. At Years 7 and 8 young people wrote well structured, imaginative stories about a character's experience of the war which demonstrated a good knowledge of local history using appropriate vocabulary. Most young people can read simple familiar sentences and words and a few at Years 10 and 11 can read independently and with expression. In the sensory and communication department, young people are building

their communication skills through vocalising choices and responses to questions, matching photos to symbols and words, using Signalong and communicators to start a conversation and answer questions.

In numeracy, most young people make or exceed expected progress. Fifty per cent of Year 11 students who took the Entry Level 3 Numeracy online test achieved a pass. Across the school, young people are developing well their understanding of money, number, time, shape, handling data and measurement. In Years 7 and 8, young people were able to work out time in five minute intervals. Young people can apply their numeracy skills in other areas of the curriculum; for example, when measuring angles in art when creating bunting. They are also able to apply skills in money and number in real life contexts such as shopping and working out amounts of ingredients in cooking. Young people at Key Stage 5 are using money in meaningful contexts by purchasing weekly shopping items and working out if the correct change has been given. In the sensory and communication department, young people are recognising coins and are able to use coins to make up specific amounts.

In health and wellbeing, young people are aware of different aspects of healthy living and learning to make informed choices. Where appropriate, young people benefit from physical education classes each week. They enjoy swimming in the shared pool. Young people are learning to cook a wide range of healthy meals. A few young people can apply their learning at home by cooking healthy meals for their families. Young people talk confidently about aspects of their learning in personal, social and health education. The 'Deciders' programme which is delivered by teachers along with the school nurse, is helping young people to develop resilience and a range of coping strategies.

In ICT, most young people make or exceed expected progress. All of the Year 11 students passed the Entry Level 3 ICT Foundation Skills examination. Years 7 to 11 students are developing skills in using tablets, laptops and desktop computers. They can log on to the Internet using WiFi. They use a range of generic software to write reports and flyers. Students can adjust the format of text in a document, use presentation software to communicate about an excursion and use spreadsheets to manipulate and display data. Across the school, students are developing the ability to use ICT to find things out and for personal entertainment. Senior students are able to upload files to the 'cloud' and download them on either of the platforms which they use.

The school is very successful in enabling students to move to college placements and gain qualifications in construction, engineering, catering and salon services.

The school recognises and celebrates the personal achievements of students at assemblies and by giving school certificates and awards. Examples include giving points and stars in Year 9 for good behaviour and demonstrating good study skills. Young people gain confidence as a result of the positive relationships with staff and by taking part in the wide range of learning experiences both in classes and through outdoor learning. All Years 7 and 8 students had a residential experience last year. Young people have been successful in developing skills in sailing, swimming and other sports activities. Their notable achievements have been accredited by Duke of Edinburgh awards. Commendably, 28 Years 10 and 11 students gained a Bronze

award and 15 are working towards a silver award. Students demonstrate a sense of responsibility by raising money for charities. They have been successful in taking part in many work experience placements. The school does not provide sufficient opportunities for young people to gain external awards for their academic or wider achievements.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Teaching for effective learning

The quality of teaching throughout the school is good. In almost all classes, the learning climate is positive and staff create a calm, purposeful and supportive environment in which young people are happy and ready to learn. Staff use a range of teaching approaches well which result in enjoyable and motivating learning experiences. Worksheets are over used in a few lessons.

Staff have a very good knowledge of young people's strengths and additional support needs. They use this knowledge effectively to plan lessons and to respond to the needs of learners in the course of learning. Teachers and support staff show patience and encouragement in engaging young people with learning tasks. Most are sensitive and intuitive in responding to young people's needs and work hard to help them overcome any anxieties. In a minority of classes, teachers provide challenging questioning which enables young people to develop critical thinking skills about their learning. In a few lessons, learning lacks challenge and teachers are not addressing fully the learning needs and abilities of all learners.

In most lessons, learning is progressive and builds on previous activities. Teachers share learning intentions with students but this is not consistent across the school. In a few lessons, teachers use success criteria well to help staff and young people assess the learning that has taken place. In a minority of lessons, staff provide helpful feedback to encourage young people in their learning. This feedback supports young people know themselves better as learners.

Across the school, teachers use ICT well to support learning and help young people develop ICT skills. The effective use of ICT adds interest to lessons and motivates young people. Teachers often use a range of interactive software, as an introduction to a lesson or to reinforce learning. In the sensory and communication department staff make good use of ICT to help young people improve their communication skills with tablets and text talkers.

Meeting learning needs

Overall, staff meet the needs of most young people well. In the best examples, teachers encourage young people to take responsibility for their own learning, ask challenging questions and provide helpful individual feedback so that young people are clearer about what is expected of them. In most lessons across all stages, teachers provide careful and well-considered support for learners with more complex needs through a wide range of communication aids such as symbols, pictures and ICT. The pace of learning is suitable in most lessons through well-structured, timed

tasks and the use of a suitable range of resources. Young people, particularly at the senior stages, are not consistently challenged appropriately in their learning and teachers' expectations of what they can achieve are sometimes too low.

The school manages the transition of young people well. At each transition, the school and partner agencies ensure that the learning and health needs of young people are identified and appropriate plans are put in place to support them. Staff make effective use of standardised tests to identify needs. The multi-disciplinary meetings with the school nurse, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), speech and language therapist, education psychologist and clinical psychologist provide a breadth of expertise which helps to identify needs and provide support for each individual young person. Partner services provide a wide range of effective support to staff and young people including helpful advice on communication aids, bespoke learning programmes such as sensory communication programmes, mobility programmes. All key partners are very keen to provide professional advice on the most appropriate targets for the young people whom they support and wish to move to a system where therapy targets are not separate.

The school encourages parents and young people to take part in the regular reviews of progress and takes account of their views. Staff review targets regularly with key partners, young people and parents. There is scope for further involvement of key partner agencies and parents more directly in setting appropriate targets for young people with individualised education plans (IEPs). The regular reviews of young people who may need specialist support is helping young people and their families to receive appropriate support when they need it. Students are not always aware of either their personal targets or what they need to do to improve in their learning. All young people with IEPs are making good or better progress towards targets.

Curriculum

The school has a clear rationale of preparing young people for life after school, by giving them the skills and experiences to prepare them for further education and work and by giving them skills to live fulfilling lives as independently as possible. Not all parents have a clear understanding of this rationale or how it is implemented in the life skills and work skills pathways. The curriculum policy statement specifies that there are collaborative learning opportunities with St Sampson's High School. These are not well developed.

The school staff has developed their own bespoke curriculum which takes account of the unique Guernsey context and the needs of the students. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is delivered through a series of topics and through discrete lessons in numeracy, literacy, ICT and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The topics in the curriculum are adjusted each year by staff teams to take account of students' interests and topical issues such as the Liberation of Guernsey in 1945. All teachers link their lessons to the main themes at each stage to make learning coherent and joined up. This approach to planning learning helps students to make connections between lessons but presents a challenge to staff to ensure that learning is progressive in each curriculum area and that the whole curriculum has appropriate breadth. The literacy, numeracy and ICT outcomes are defined in well-conceived, progressive frameworks. These skills are consolidated and reinforced by embedding

them throughout the curriculum in the topic work. The school's speech and language therapist works closely with class teachers providing whole class therapy interventions such as 'Shape Coding' and advice on ways of communicating. Hearing and visual impairment services provide programmes of support for young people with a sensory impairment, including mobility training where appropriate, professional development training for staff and home visits to support parents.

The frequently planned activities and experiences that take place beyond the classroom and in the community are a core part of young people's learning experiences. These include outdoor learning activities such as horticulture, sailing and canoeing. Other structured opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and off-island residential experiences are key aspects of the curriculum. Links with local organisations and sports clubs, for example in fencing, sailing and mountaineering, ensure that opportunities for young people can be extended as appropriate into a wider range of activities beyond traditional competitive sports, such as cricket and hockey which are also available to pupils. Through learning in class and beyond the classroom the school aims to develop students' core skills. These outcomes are specified within the school's own skills framework. Some of these core skills are not clearly defined, have a limited range and lack rigour.

Young people prepare for life and work through opportunities to develop enterprising and creative skills. They have very good opportunities to take part in work experience locally in retail, catering, fire services, banks and construction. Years 10 and 11 students in the work skills pathway have one afternoon each week at the college on a link course. The options include City and Guilds construction, engineering and college based courses on catering and the performing arts. Salon services are also available. Students in construction, engineering and catering are taught in the same classes as students from St Sampson's High School.

Well planned transitions from Key Stage 2 to 3, and Key Stage 4 to 5 are strengths of the school. Young people joining the school from primary schools attend on a number of occasions and there are good opportunities for staff visits to the primary and secondary schools. The transition co-ordinator works closely with young people in Year 6 in the primary schools and prepares them well for moving to Le Murier School.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Improvement through self-evaluation

Overall, school improvement through self-evaluation is satisfactory. The work of the school is monitored mainly by senior leaders visiting classes to observe lessons. These activities of the senior leadership team are carried out with a view to improving student achievement and enjoyment and sharing good practice. The school does not involve sufficiently young people, parents and the school's partners in evaluating the quality of its provision.

The programme of classroom visits is preceded by a paper to staff on the focus for these visits. The headteacher and other senior leaders monitor lessons with formal visits to each class and through more informal observations of lessons. Verbal feedback is provided to teachers and the results of each round of learning walks are

collated. Classroom observations are not sufficiently rigorous and senior leaders do not spend enough time in each class to enable them to evaluate the impact of the observed teaching strategies on students' progress and attainment. They do not provide written feedback to teachers after discussing lessons and suggesting ways of improving practice. The school does not share its good practice well and few teachers take part in observing each other's lessons. The development of students' knowledge and skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT is monitored well by senior and middle leaders. Core skills, devised by the school are similarly monitored. Teachers share their plans by placing them on the shared areas on the school's ICT system. These are very lightly monitored through discussion at team meetings which are organised by stage and carried out weekly. The school is piloting a new performance management model. This is encouraging staff to reflect on their own targets as well as that of their teaching teams.

The self-evaluation activities have helped the school to improve its practice. Teachers report that some of the lesson observations, especially in maths, have helped them to reflect on and improve their practice. As a result of the staff's work in introducing the literacy, numeracy and ICT frameworks, student progress is more assured and their progress is monitored well. Senior leaders produce a school improvement plan each year and this has helped the school to focus on important strategic priorities. The plan has an appropriate number of strategic targets and detailed action plans for each target. The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team monitor the progress the school makes with the plan.

Leadership of improvement and change

The headteacher has been very successful in building teamwork and a positive ethos in the school. There is now a well embedded and very positive culture of collegiality and teamwork across the school. Senior leaders are very supportive and encouraging of staff. They encourage staff in their departmental groups to work together to take forward development priorities.

The headteacher is innovative and with the co-operation of staff has developed the unique curriculum at Le Murier School with a view to meeting the needs of all students and preparing them for life after school. The piloting of Guernsey's new teaching standards and approaches to professional review and development is also an indicator of the school's commitment to school improvement. As a teacher of ICT, the headteacher has developed a very well-considered, innovative course which is up to date and helps students to develop relevant ICT skills.

The school has demonstrated a capacity to evolve at a steady pace. The introduction of frameworks in literacy, numeracy and ICT and the improved use of data and tracking of students' progress have shown how the school has improved since the 2011 validation visit. Senior leaders should now provide more challenge for staff to stimulate further developments and capitalise and build on the strong collegiate ethos. Staff should be encouraged to develop as reflective and enquiring practitioners who are able to act as critical friends to one another. The school could be more outward looking in seeking new approaches to curriculum development and assessment and accreditation in order that the school sets itself ambitious targets for continuous improvement. Staff should consider creative ways of working together with

St Sampson's High School for the benefit of both staff and young people in both schools. Overall, senior leaders need to spend more time on strategic leadership issues.

Stakeholders' views

Most parents who responded to the pre-validation questionnaire said that they were happy with the school and almost all felt that their children enjoyed school and were becoming more confident. Most parents feel that communication between the school and home has improved in recent years. They appreciate the use of social media to keep them up to date about school successes and young people's achievements. The school has recognised the need to engage parents in a more systematic way in the life and work of the school and in their children's learning.

A few parents feel strongly that there is a lack of flexibility and personalisation in terms of progression pathways for their children. They would like to see more opportunities for their children to access appropriate aspects of their learning within St Sampson's High School. A few parents feel that the activities and lessons their children experience are not challenging enough. Parents of young people in the sensory and communication department feel that they are frequently asked for their views and that they play a key part in their child's education. They thought that they received good advice from staff.

Summary

Capacity for improvement

The relationships between staff and students are strong. Students participate well in lessons. The curriculum has a strong focus on developing life skills and students also develop appropriate skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Teachers and other staff are committed to the school and work very well together for the benefit of the young people. Leadership across the school has enabled the school to develop at a steady pace. The school is in a good position to build on these strengths, raise its aspirations and move forward. It should ensure that it holds on to the very important benefits which young people get from the work experience and outdoor education programmes.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- The caring and welcoming ethos of the school where staff and young people feel valued.
- The teamwork among all school staff and their contributions to improving the learning experiences of young people.
- The confident and courteous young people who engaged well in lessons.
- The development of many young people's personal and social skills through their participation in outdoor education and the Duke of Edinburgh award.
- Transitions from Key Stage 2 to 3 and from Key Stage 4 to 5.

We discussed with staff and the Education Department how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Review the core skills framework to make them more progressive, coherent and rigorous.
- Improve the curriculum by providing greater breadth at each stage and by ensuring that there is a progressive development of knowledge and skills in each curriculum area.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching by making explicit the learning intentions and the skills being developed in each lesson.
- Provide a wider range of qualifications to accredit young people for their academic achievements and their personal and social development.
- Develop further the social and academic integration of its young people with their peers in St Sampson's High School.
- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation and involve young people, parents and the school's partners in evaluating the quality its provision.

Here are the evaluations for Le Murier School.

Improvements in performance	satisfactory
Learners' experiences	good
Teaching for effective learning	good
Meeting learning needs	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	satisfactory
Leadership of improvement and change	satisfactory

What happens at the end of the validation visit?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this validation. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the Education Department will inform parents about the school's progress.

Terry Carr
HM Inspector

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Appendix 1

<p>Excellent</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Outstanding or sector leading</p> <p>An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p>Very Good</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Major strengths</p> <p>An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Important strengths with areas for improvement</p> <p>An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p>Weak</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Important weaknesses</p> <p>An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p>Unsatisfactory</p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>