



LA HOUGUETTE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Validation report

Validation dates: 7–10 November 2011

Lead validator: Joyce Cox

Type of school: Primary

Age range of learners: 4–11

Gender of learners: Mixed

Number on roll: 292

Headteacher: Danielle Cassell

Date of previous school validation: April 2006

School address: Les Paysans, St Pierre du Bois, Guernsey, GY7 9LA

Telephone number: 01481 264031

Introduction

The validation was carried out by a team of four validators, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with pupils and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising returns to the parents' and carers' questionnaire.

Description of the school

La Houquette admits children from the local area around the school. Their parents and carers have a wide range of occupational backgrounds. The great majority of children who enter Reception stay until Year 6, although the numbers who leave or enter the school other than at the normal ages is slightly higher than in some other Guernsey schools. Children's attainment on entry to the Reception classes is usually at the expected age-related levels, although an increasing number of children have speech and language difficulties.

A very small number of pupils have a home language other than English. The school has identified 28% of pupils as having learning difficulties. The majority of these pupils are placed at the School Action Plus stage that merits a higher level of provision. The school identifies the acquisition of spoken and written language as the predominant learning difficulty.

The year 2010-2011 was a time of significant change for La Houquette as six long-serving teachers left, mainly due to retirement. The majority of staff have less than 10 years of service in the school, including the headteacher. The school is organised into three phases each of which has its own leader: Phase 1 covers the Reception and Year 1 classes; Phase 2 covers the Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 classes; and Phase 3 consists of the Year 5 and Year 6 classes.

Outcomes for learners

The pupils' enjoyment of school is seen in their high attendance, well-developed behaviour and positive attitudes in most classes. Pupils make proficient progress in Reception and in the Year 1 and Year 2 classes. By the end of Year 6 they achieve standards that are well above the island's averages, notably in the proportions who reach Level 4 in English, mathematics and science. However, the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher Level 5 in writing and mathematics is only slightly above the island's averages. Although pupils make good progress in their academic skills and knowledge during their time in Key Stage 2, there is scope for more able pupils to be challenged more to make sure they attain Level 5. Pupils grow well in self-confidence, develop a strong sense of responsibility and make a good contribution to their school and wider island society. They work and play happily together and show considerable kindness towards others.

Learners' enjoyment and achievement

Lesson observations show that pupils much enjoy their learning. In most classes pupils are motivated and keen and happily participate in a range of activities. For example, Year 2 pupils thoroughly enjoyed dressing up as characters from traditional tales and engaging in various workshop tasks which culminated in a much enjoyed tea party.

The school has a calm ethos because pupils behave well, and grow into polite, thoughtful, and considerate young people. The great majority of pupils are enthusiastic about their learning, are hardworking and respond positively to teachers' requests. Their enjoyment and enthusiasm for school life is also reflected in the consistently high levels of attendance. The introduction of the 'Smart Skills' strategies has had a positive impact on all pupils' attitudes to learning.

Overall, children make proficient progress in Reception. Entering with a range of skills that are typical for children of that age, they are on course to reach the expected levels of attainment by the end of Reception. This represents improved progress compared to last year. In Key Stage 1, pupils make proficient progress overall. Standards over the past three years have been similar to the Guernsey average by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress accelerates as they move through the school so that by Year 6 they reach standards that are consistently above the Guernsey averages at Level 4 in all core subjects. This demonstrates good progress for all groups of learners in Key Stage 2. However, more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to reach the higher levels in writing and mathematics. The progress of pupils in Key Stage 1 is not as fast as in Key Stage 2. This is because Reception children and Year 1 pupils are not consistently engaged or encouraged to practise their early reading, writing and mathematical skills in relevant and interesting learning activities. They do not develop their mastery of letters and sounds fast enough.

The great majority of pupils in the school acquire skills and knowledge that make them proficient learners. They are keen to talk about their work and many pupils have well-developed oracy skills, which they displayed in discussions with validators. They are less confident in being independent learners partly because they are not given sufficient chances to show initiative or to develop their problem-solving skills in a range of situations. The school's data analysis shows that the great majority of pupils make the overall progress expected of them in relation to their age and capabilities. In 2011 Year 6 pupils exceeded

their predicted targets in science and mathematics and met their targets in English. After analysing the 2011 data, senior staff quickly realised that pupils required more focused teaching on sentence structure and punctuation to improve their writing. Consequently, literacy workshops are now in place where Year 2 and Key Stage 2 pupils receive highly effective teaching in small ability groups. Senior leaders have also set challenging targets for more able pupils at both Key Stages to attain in 2012. Validators noted that pupils are already making impressive gains in learning how to construct interesting and grammatically correct sentences with accurate punctuation. Current Year 6 pupils appear on course to exceed their predicted targets in 2012. Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective levels of personal and academic support they receive, either in the classroom or in small withdrawal sessions where they receive well-focused support from teaching assistants and visiting specialist teachers. As yet the school has limited information on more talented learners so it is difficult to judge how well they achieve from their starting points. The leadership team acknowledges that it now needs to formalise the programme for identifying and monitoring the performance of more talented learners.

Learners' personal development and well-being

Pupils' positive enjoyment and good attitudes towards learning are supported by the school's well-promoted values and caring ethos. Relationships are mutually respectful and underpin the good well-being of the pupils. Pupils' social skills are nurtured successfully through the school's effective approaches and as a consequence they build good self-esteem and are confident to 'have a go' at new experiences. There is a very high level of participation in sporting activities such as athletics, football and netball that strongly aid the pupils' team-building skills and personal leadership qualities. Younger pupils told validators just how much they appreciate the clubs organised by older pupils, which was summed up by a Year 2 boy who said that 'everyone loves the dancing club at break times as it is so much fun!'

Pupils typically work very well together in class and in other activities when given the opportunity and demonstrate good collaboration. For example, in Year 6, pupils worked with high-level enthusiasm as they decided which level of challenge they should work at when converting imperial measurements to their metric equivalent. Through such experiences pupils are able to show how well they can work together, organise themselves and set personal challenges. This is not always the case, however, and in some classes pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to think for themselves because teachers too readily explain how to tackle and solve a problem. Senior leaders are aware of the inconsistency and have introduced the 'Smart Skills' programme to help pupils build their independence and thinking skills more systematically.

Most pupils are keen to become involved in the life of the school with a high number involved in a recent school council election. The council is currently considering how to make Guernsey a safer place and is gathering suggestions to put before the island's health promotion unit. Pupils are well aware of the importance of eating healthily and know that diet and exercise are critical to a healthy lifestyle. Over 50% were involved in the annual 'Walk to School' initiative. Pupils play together harmoniously and have a firm grasp of the rules and responsibilities that are critical to achieving a happy and productive school

community. Occasionally, a few pupils do not behave responsibly at break times. The school has well-understood strategies for dealing with any incidents and is working effectively towards improving their behaviour. Most pupils willingly and conscientiously undertake responsibilities to support their community such as being monitors or house or team captains. One pupil reflected, 'I make sure that I don't just give anyone a house point when I do stair duty but instead I give one to the most sensible children.'

Pupils' spiritual and moral development is strong. Learners of all ages show a well-developed moral sense and compassion for the difficulties of others. Through many and varied charitable endeavours they work successfully to support those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are very aware of global matters such as the need for sustainability. Pupils collect recyclable waste weekly and get involved in the Bailiwick's 'beach clean' activities with their families. During 'Environment Week' the pupils undertook many challenges such as planning, designing and making a 'bug hotel' and faced various risks as they worked to improve the outdoor environment. The pupils made informed decisions after weighing up the scenarios. For example, those working in the nature area kept themselves safe and did not go outside of specified boundaries.

Pupils make a very positive contribution to their local community, for example by planting trees in the neighbourhood and performing concerts for local senior citizens. The school is very much a part of St Peter's and St Saviour's church communities with virtually all children have performed a 'selfless act' during Lent. Pupils are good ambassadors for their school when they go on school visits to London or France. The pupils' preparation for the next stages of their life is strong because of the secure growth of their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and the good development of their personal skills and qualities. In Year 6, pupils show initiative, building impressive entrepreneurial and enterprise skills as they make a range of products such as key rings, candle holders and fridge magnets that are attractive to customers and deliver a profit.

The majority of parents rightly view the personal development and well-being of their children as strengths of the school. A small minority of parents feel that the misbehaviour of a handful of children disrupts the learning of others, which the school acknowledges and is working effectively to improve. The main reason why pupils' personal development is not yet excellent is because sometimes opportunities are missed for pupils, especially in Reception and Year 1, to show personal initiative, share ideas and organise appropriate aspects of their learning. This means their experiences do not enable the full development of their independent learning skills and organisational abilities.

The quality of provision

Teaching is proficient overall and well developed in some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2. Classroom relationships are generally good and form a solid basis for pupils' learning. Some pupils have a good understanding of their targets and can explain how they can improve their work, although this is not so in all classes and marking could often be more helpful. Some lessons are over-directed by the teacher and pupils do not have enough chances to become independent learners. Some opportunities are missed for pupils to discuss what they are learning, for example by assessing each other's work.

The curriculum is proficient with some good features. It is suitably broad and balanced and effectively enhances pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem and prepares them proficiently for their next stage of education. Work in class is supplemented by an excellent programme of activities and clubs that contribute much to pupils' all-round development.

All staff are highly committed to ensuring that pupils are well cared for and consequently pupils show care and consideration for others. The school is diligent in following all agreed procedures to ensure the welfare and safety of the pupils. Children receive good support when they enter the school and when they move on to secondary school. The school has made effective changes to the ways it monitors pupils' progress, which are giving staff a good grasp of how well the school performs. It recognises that these new procedures need to be consolidated and extended.

Teaching and assessment

The positive climate that teachers have developed in the large majority of classes makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. The impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' academic progress is more variable and generally becomes more positive as pupils move through the school. Progress in Reception and Year 1 was evaluated as less than proficient last year but staff changes and focused support means that, in Reception, the children's achievement is now proficient and improving. Progress is faster in Years 2 to 4, and the school has well-focused initiatives to improve the quality of pupils' writing, which has lagged behind other basic skills. The quality of teaching across Years 5 and 6 ensures that pupils make good progress. This is seen in the extent to which pupils exceed the island's average in attaining the expected Level 4 but the teaching across the school does not yet stretch the more able pupils enough.

Pupils are very well behaved in class and most teachers have established very good relationships with them. Teaching assistants support teachers and pupils well. Where pupils misbehave or become distracted teachers are normally sensitive and skilful in bringing them back on task. Rewards and praise consolidate the good relationships and positive attitudes of the pupils and there is a well-established and stepped system of sanctions when pupils are more resistant to correction. Pupils are very willing to learn and comply well with the instructions teachers give them. They thoroughly enjoy some lessons that stimulate them to think hard and work with enthusiasm, as seen in a Year 5/6 literacy lesson in which pupils were inspired to research difficult words to improve their writing. Pupils generally show reasonable perseverance in completing their work but become restive where the work is repetitive, for example when they do similar problems in mathematics over and over again, or when they have to sit too long listening without active involvement. Some teaching is too adult-led, so that it misses opportunities to involve the pupils more actively in their learning. The school recognises, for example, the need for more investigative work in science and mathematics to increase pupils' interest and develop the skills of independent learning. Discussions that take place in plenary groups do not readily enough switch into paired talk that involves pupils thinking things through for themselves and developing their oral competence. Questioning methods usually rely on a 'hands up' approach in seeking answers that allows some pupils to sit back and coast. Peer assessment is encouraged but there was little evidence of this during the validation.

Teachers and other adults have high expectations for the pupils' behaviour and how they respect and treat one another, and this makes a good contribution to their personal development. The school is in the process of raising academic expectations through using data to set targets that will stretch pupils, and by generating and recording data to track their progress towards them. For example, in the light of data showing that children did not make enough progress in Reception in 2010/11, the school has grouped children of similar levels of attainment and set targets and review points to accelerate the progress of the children. Rising expectations are beginning to have an impact, for example in the proportion of Year 6 pupils who seem likely to attain the higher Level 5. Work is matched to the needs of individuals through setting in some years and through grouping within class, but not enough is done to provide work that will stimulate and stretch more able pupils.

Most teachers identify the learning intentions for each lesson by sharing them with the pupils. However, they are not always clearly specified in ways that allow the teacher to assess pupils' progress. When the direction of a lesson is not clear enough, pupils tend not to know what they have to do and their progress slows. Certain activities, for example historical research in Year 4 on the Tudors, generate much interest and a hive of classroom activity; but the historical learning in this case was not made clear enough in terms of what pupils need to have accomplished by the end of the session. Teachers generally have the expertise needed to teach the subjects of the curriculum and the school's leaders have identified those areas where expertise needs strengthening. Teaching methods are usually geared to the learning intentions but opportunities are missed to make learning more interesting and relevant. Pupils need more opportunities to develop the higher order skills that they need to be successful learners, something the school is promoting through its 'Smart Skills' initiative. The school has rightly prioritised the development of pupils' ICT skills as means of supporting their learning.

Teachers assess pupils' work in various ways but do not make explicit enough what they have to do to improve. For example, the marking of written work, while fairly regular and supportive, usually lacks constructive comment that informs pupils of what they need to do to improve. Written comments rarely refer to the short-term targets that pupils need to achieve to move forward. There is some good practice in this respect, for example in Year 4 where bookmarks in pupils' literacy books indicate the next steps they need to take. Generally, however, the criteria for improved performance are not clearly displayed or readily accessible to pupils.

Curriculum

Focused, effective work on encouraging pupils to be responsible citizens is paying dividends. As a result, pupils have respect for others, feel part of a close-knit school community and participate fully in school life. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community, for example, by participating in tree planting and recycling schemes to improve the environment. They respond well to the school's health promotion initiatives. For example, all pupils enjoy swimming and a good number participate in sports clubs to keep fit. Well-developed work on e-safety ensures that pupils have a good understanding of potential dangers when using the internet.

Provision for those with gifts and talents is proficient. The school identifies those who have specific talents and additional learning opportunities are provided from time to time.

However, there is no structured, coherent enrichment programme to develop pupils' skills and extend their learning. The school's self-review acknowledges that the more able are not always sufficiently stretched.

Pupils are keen to succeed and have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy being in school and their engagement with learning is strong when their work is interesting, challenging and worthwhile. On occasions, activities are mundane and work lacks stimulation and when this happens pupils lose interest and their concentration wanes. In general, there are too few opportunities for pupils to think and learn for themselves and more could be done to promote independent learning. The curriculum complies well with the outcomes and aims of the Guernsey curriculum statement. Consequently, pupils leave the school as confident, well-adjusted, respectful individuals with the necessary skills for adult life.

School data and validation evidence show that pupils' progress is inconsistent because work is not always matched to their capabilities. While curriculum planning maps the different levels of work in the subjects taught, teachers are not always using curriculum frameworks to plan lessons that provide sufficient challenge and ensure that all pupils make well-developed progress. The curriculum is not yet sufficiently personalised to meet the individual needs of all pupils. Nevertheless, much work has been done over the past 18 months to bring about improvement. There are now comprehensive schemes of work for all subjects and they are suitably implemented. Gaps in provision have been successfully remedied. For example, an ICT programme of study is now in place and the early signs are that pupils' ICT skills are developing soundly, although there is much catching up to be done in the subject. There are sufficient computers and other digital technology to support learning in a range of subjects. Teachers use the interactive whiteboards effectively to teach concepts in an interesting and interactive way. However, during the validation they were rarely used by the pupils.

A start has been made on linking subjects together to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. For example, this was done on a Year 2 workshop day where literacy, ICT and scientific skills were taught together in an innovative way to improve pupils' creative and imaginative learning. Greater attention is also being given to teaching literacy, numeracy, thinking, social and self-management skills in all subjects. While some of this work is in its infancy, evidence shows that pupils' progress is accelerating, standards are rising and collaborative and team working skills are improving.

Enrichment opportunities are excellent. They are extensive, varied and are much enjoyed. It is therefore no surprise that participation rates are high. Residential visits to England and France, and the teaching of Guernsey French, help pupils gain an understanding of their own and other cultures. The Liberation topic work and the study of the Tudors and 'Evacuee Days' provide good opportunities for pupils to gain a sense of history and local heritage. Pupils say that clubs are fun and they enjoy doing sports, lace making, gardening and being a member of the orchestra and choir. Trips to museums and farms and visits from the emergency services and church members help to broaden pupils' horizons and understanding of the world at large.

Care, guidance and support

The school ethos is warm, welcoming and mutually supportive and as a result pupils are keen to attend and enjoy being part of the cohesive learning community. Pupils are looked after well by staff who are responsive to their needs. Pupils indicate that they feel safe and that they are confident that teachers will listen to any worries they have and help sort them out. The care and support given to pupils with special educational needs is highly effective. Well-forged links with outside agencies support the learning and development of this group of pupils very successfully. School leaders have looked closely at how well small group work outside the class contributes to these pupils' effective learning and personal development and have pinpointed the best practice to be replicated during in-class group work. As a result of adults leading by example, pupils show a good level of care for one other and build positive relationships that underpin their confidence to take full advantage of the curricular opportunities provided.

There are well-developed arrangements for the safety and welfare of all pupils. The headteacher is the school's Child Protection Liaison Officer and she ensures effective liaison with parents and outside agencies to provide a secure safety net of support for those pupils who are at risk. All staff work effectively to ensure that the school's procedures fully meet Bailiwick requirements. Rigorous attention is given to health and safety around the school site with risk assessments firmly in place for all activities undertaken, including external visits. New arrangements at lunchtime mean that learners now eat their lunch in classrooms before going out to play or attend a club. The school is closely monitoring the changes to ensure that supervision best meets the welfare needs of pupils during this key time of the school day. The curriculum usefully includes a focus on e-safety in all year groups and pupils' safe use of the internet is an integral part of the code of conduct for computer use in school. The strong care and support for pupils with learning difficulties enables them to thrive. A key feature of this are the effective links with parents and carers and outside agencies, which include a range of educational, medical and social support organisations. The excellent work of the special constables at the start and close of the school day results in effective traffic management and the safety of the pupils arriving and leaving school.

Well-developed transition procedures between pre-schools and La Houquette include visits and the sharing of assessment information that result in reception-age children settling into school well. School leaders are now rightly focussing attention on developing the system for transferring information to assist a more effective transition from Reception to Year 1. Pupils are well prepared for their move to secondary school with a well-organised induction day and a good range of information assisting a smooth and trouble-free transfer. Parents identify that Year 6 circle time activities are supportive so that children feel confident and are well informed about their transition. The school has a well-developed programme for assisting the transition of pupils with a determination for special secondary schooling. With the support of external agencies pupils make several familiarisation pre-visits to their new secondary school and on occasion work with their peers from primary special schools so that they can make friends with others who will start their new school at the same time.

The school keeps a proficient check on pupils' achievements and uses technology to help data management and analysis. However, a more rigorous approach to tracking individual progress is rightly a key focus for school improvement. Pupils are being helped to understand what they will learn and what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson, and in some years are regularly assessing the standard of their work and occasionally that of others. However, pupils are not always given such a clear idea of the longer-term learning targets that they will need to reach if they are to move up a level. Overall academic guidance is not yet uniformly well developed. The quality of assessment and the way it is used to chart progress and to set targets is uneven and this is the main reason why this aspect of provision is not better than proficient.

Leadership and management

The school is well led and the new staff team is developing a strong sense of common purpose. The introduction of three phase leaders has had a major impact on ensuring staff work together effectively to review the school's work, and identify areas to improve. Parents and pupils are consulted on some issues but the school is rightly planning to extend its consultation programmes so that pupils and their parents have more opportunities to be involved. The leadership team has identified accurately its strengths and the areas where further improvement is needed. The school's track record and sense of direction indicate that it has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Self-evaluation

The school has a consultative system that involves all teaching and support staff in reflecting on the school's activities. The three phase teams are 'learning communities' who have regular meetings when they consider aspects of teaching and learning, such as reviews of written work done by pupils, and their skills for doing this are developing. The subject and area leaders completed brief but illuminating reviews of their area, which contributed to the report on evaluation and planning (REP). For example, the provision for special educational needs was effectively reviewed under each of the headings in the REP. These procedures do not make undue demands upon the staff and time is provided, for example for the phase leaders to confer with each other on a regular basis. The pupils are not systematically consulted as part of the evaluation process and the school has rightly identified this as a priority for improvement. Parents are routinely consulted through a questionnaire on the helpfulness of the annual report on their child's progress and the school welcomes any comments from them on an informal basis. This represents only limited opportunities for parents to be consulted and they are strongly of the view that they would like their opinions to be more systematically and regularly canvassed.

The REP contains much quantitative and other evidence to underpin its conclusions. The result is that its main conclusions are well justified. For example, the analysis of pupils' historic achievement provides a clear and credible account of where the inconsistencies in pupils' progress are to be found. The school recognises the need to use its data system more effectively to track pupils' progress towards their targets.

The school's managerial arrangements are well structured to allow phase leaders, as well as the headteacher, to carry out reviews of classroom practice. As part of this, the head teacher has devolved responsibility to phase leaders to carry out performance management. Trust has been established among staff in their leaders so that they are well placed to visit classrooms and support them in improving their teaching. When senior leaders visit lessons, they make accurate evaluations of their quality. The extent of lesson visits has so far been very limited and the school is at the point where this could be considerably extended as a way of improving the quality and consistency of teaching.

The conclusions in the REP are accurate in most respects and form a reliable basis for its improvement planning. The evidence in the REP and the other evidence gathered during the validation process corroborate the school's judgements that:

- pupils' enjoyment is well developed and their achievement is proficient
- pupils' personal development is well developed
- teaching and assessment are proficient
- care, guidance and support are well developed
- the school's self-evaluation is well developed
- leadership and management are well developed
- the capacity to improve is well developed.

In one area only do validators differ with the school. This concerns its curriculum. The school judged the curriculum to be well developed but validators found it to be proficient. It has a number of strengths, for example in the extent and quality of its enrichment activities and the way in which it focuses on developing the four outcomes for pupils set out in Guernsey's curriculum statement. Improvements to the curriculum have been made, for example in the regular sessions to improve writing. But work is still in progress to ensure that the curriculum is planned in such a way that it meets the differing needs of all the pupils and has sufficient, well-planned opportunities to develop the skills that pupils need to become good independent learners.

Validators endorse:

- the school's overarching priorities for improvement, which are largely consistent with their own recommendations for the school's future development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Effective leadership and management are securing good personal development and enjoyment of learning and above average attainment at the end of Year 6. Over the past 18 months there have been a significant number of staff changes. During this period of turbulence the headteacher took the opportunity to restructure and devolve leadership and increase the responsibilities held by middle managers and subject leaders. The work carried out to improve staff leadership and teaching skills is paying dividends with teachers saying that they have ownership of developments and collaborative working is boosting staff morale, which is high. The introduction of an agreed set of values and principles to inform the school's work has been beneficial. For example, staff share a common sense of purpose and a shared understanding of the school's aims. Expectations as to what can be achieved have been raised and staff welcome being involved in the self-review process, collaborative working and the greater individual and collective accountability for the standards achieved.

The headteacher is driving improvement at a good pace and the school is moving in the right direction. The school's main strengths and weaknesses are known by all. This is because effective self-evaluation has pinpointed what the school does well and what must be improved. The improvement plan focuses well on the key priorities central to the school's improvement and sets out what actions and resources must be taken to raise standards, accelerate progress and improve the curriculum.

The school is appropriately tracking pupils' progress and performance data are used to inform intervention but the use of tracking information to determine the outcomes in the school improvement plan is not sharp enough. Teachers are called to account, at regular intervals, for the progress made in English and mathematics, to ensure underachievement is quickly spotted and eliminated. Staff ensure that they use data effectively to evaluate interventions to support pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils' individual educational plans have well-developed targets which are monitored and amended regularly. The school agrees that these plans could highlight pupils' strengths as well as their development areas. Subject leaders have undertaken a range of monitoring and evaluation activities to determine how well the school is performing. As part of the performance management process all teachers have been observed teaching and strengths and areas for development have been identified to improve practice. The time is now right to be more systematic and rigorous in targeting intervention to improve weaknesses in provision and where pupil progress is too slow.

The promotion of equal opportunities is at the heart of the school's work. Provision is inclusive and staff ensure that all pupils have access to, and benefit from, all of the opportunities provided. The school is a welcoming, tolerant and harmonious place where pupils are free from discrimination and harassment. The school's outcomes are improving and variations in pupils' performance are narrowing because challenging whole-school targets are set and achieved. The school knows its local, island and national context well. The leadership has been successful in creating a highly cohesive school community that reaches out to make a difference in the local community and beyond.

The leadership of the headteacher has been instrumental in building the staff's capacity to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. Subject leaders are suitably qualified and have the necessary expertise to lead their domains. They are providing good quality professional development to improve teachers' subject knowledge and their teaching skills to raise standards. Staff training is well targeted to whole-school priorities and individual needs. Staff say that professional support has been beneficial and has given them the confidence and the required strategies to bring about sustained improvement. Resources are good and are well allocated to the school's priorities and staff are generally deployed effectively.

The partnership with parents is proficient. Parents say that they like the 'open door' policy and feel welcome when they come into school. The school is outward looking and good links have been made with local people and organisations to enrich provision and learning. Parents' views are sought annually but they are not always told about what action has been taken regarding their suggestions and concerns. They would also like to improve channels of communication, and for the school to consider some form of 'sounding board' arrangement so that parents are consulted in a systematic way.

Capacity to improve

The school has undergone significant change over the past two years. One catalyst was the high turnover of staff that the school seized as an opportunity for a significant reshaping of its management structure. This has resulted in the building of teams who for the most part work together effectively to implement the school's priorities. The school has a good track record of implementing necessary changes, such as those set out in the previous validation

report and the priorities in its action plan for 2010/11. It has maintained a level of performance in terms of the proportions of pupils who attain the expected Level 4 in English and mathematics that has been consistently well above the island's average.

Its self-evaluation has been a spur to action. Identified weaknesses have led to well-thought-out and prompt responses to deal with them. For example, the school's tracking of outcomes in writing indicated that pupils' progress was lagging behind other basic skills, and so it implemented workshops to improve them. Pupils are grouped according to their writing prowess across year groups and given very specific support on a frequent basis. This has been done in inventive ways, such as 'Kung Fu Punctuation' for Years 2 to 4, in which pupils consolidate their understanding of punctuation by enacting Kung Fu moves that represent a full stop, capital letter, question mark etc. This is great fun and fully involves boys, whose writing has been a particular concern. In certain classes the school's priorities have not been implemented and as a result the pupils' learning has been slowed but the school's leaders are fully aware of where the obstacles lie.

The school's overarching priorities in the action plan in the REP are well substantiated and there is a good, shared understanding among staff of what they are. The leadership team are strongly committed to improving the quality of education for their pupils. At the centre of the school's thinking is the need to raise standards and accelerate progress so that all pupils in all classes and subjects perform well. Improvements in teaching and assessment, and the curriculum, are rightly seen as keys to success, and the school has ambitious plans to improve target setting and classroom support for teachers. The improvement plan contains many worthwhile intentions but these need to be prioritised and set against measurable success criteria in terms of pupils' progress.

Reception

The provision in the Reception classes is proficient. The academic year 2010 – 2011 is the first year that the school has been able to compare the progress made by the Reception children with other island schools. Leaders realised that the data showed that, whilst the La Houquette children clearly enjoyed school, their progress during the past year was slower than the island's averages in all the areas of learning. One difficulty the school faced was in securing a teacher for one of the Reception classes. The current provision has improved from last year but there are still areas which need to be improved to ensure all children have the best possible start to school life.

Children clearly enjoy school, as evident in their smiling faces on arrival at school each day. They are enthusiastic and behave well and happily participate in new activities. Staff are caring, as reflected in the time and trouble they take to establish close links with parents and carers before the children start school. Throughout the validation, children were busily engaged in a wide range of activities such as role play in the doctor's surgery and writing letter shapes in the sand. Adults devise a range of tasks for children to enjoy but it is not always evident what the children are expected to have learnt in lessons. In addition, there are few opportunities for children to select their own activities or resources as all the tasks are set out for them. There are guidelines around the room to advise adults about specific language to use or how to interact with the children to move their learning forwards but these are not prominently displayed. For example, children enjoy experimenting with water and sand but it is not clear enough to all adults how their learning is to be developed.

Consequently, on some occasions children's play can become over-boisterous instead of helping them to concentrate, persevere and learn new things in a systematic and interesting way.

Children make proficient progress in their learning. Their early reading and writing skills develop satisfactorily because regular times are set aside for them to learn their letters and sounds. Additional work is required to ensure that children's spoken language is promoted on all occasions as some staff are not clear as to when or how to intervene successfully in children's learning and play to accelerate progress. Staff are starting to develop the outside area, but there is still much more to do in order to ensure that activities are sufficiently exciting and inviting and cover all the areas of learning. It is also important that the outdoor area is used as often as possible so that children can investigate and explore. Adults carefully note what children do from day to day and this information is recorded in children's attractive 'Learning Journey' books. However, assessment notes do not always fully capture children's progress in lessons and over time as thoroughly as they might. Additional work is required to ensure that the Reception team are very clear about children's levels of attainment on entry to the school so that they can use accurate assessment data to evaluate and improve the quality of the provision

Plans are underway to develop further the training for teaching assistants and new staff. The leader is working closely with the Education Officers responsible for early years and has evaluated the quality of provision and devised a detailed improvement plan. Children are mostly at the expected stage of development when they start school. Children's progress is improving and is now proficient, and on current trends their attainment is likely to be average when they enter Year 1.

Comments on the views of parents and carers

Parents and carers provided validators with completed questionnaires covering over half of the pupils. This was a good level of response. Over half of the returns were wholly approving of the school. Where parents and carers raised concerns these were typically over just one or a few matters.

Just under 20% of parents indicated that enrichment activities, such as clubs, were not as extensive as they could be. Validators found that the range of enrichment, which includes clubs, visits and residential trips to London and France, is a significant strength of the school and one that makes an important contribution to pupils' development.

A similar proportion felt that the school could give more good quality information on what is taught and on pupils' progress and some said they would like a parents' panel or forum. Validators found that there is scope for parents and pupils to be more involved in the school's decision-making processes and to have more information about their children's learning and progress.

A somewhat smaller proportion expressed concerns about the behaviour of a small number of pupils. Validators looked closely at all pupils' behaviour and spoke to several groups of pupils to elicit their views. They discovered that pupils' behaviour is well developed and the very small number of pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties are managed well and are not allowed to disrupt other pupils' learning.

Main areas for school improvement

The school's self-evaluation provided a well-argued case for the necessary improvements in the school that are set out in its action plan. The plan is well focused on the need to raise standards and accelerate progress. As the school clearly documents, pupils make good progress in a number of areas; for example, pupils with special educational needs receive effective support to promote their learning to ensure this. There are nonetheless important inconsistencies in progress that need ironing out so that all pupils learn well in all parts of the curriculum. Now that the school has put in place new management arrangements following a substantial turnover of staff, the time is right for a concerted push to improve the consistency of academic achievement.

The areas where pupils' progress particularly needs to improve are:

- phase 1 of the school (Reception and Year 1)
- writing, especially the writing of boys in phase 2 (Years 2,3 and 4)
- the outcomes for pupils capable of reaching the higher levels of achievement
- the problem-solving and other skills that will enable pupils to be more successful independent learners.

To achieve these improved outcomes, validators recommend the lines of action set out below. In large measure, these already feature in the school's planning.

- Improve provision and progress in Reception and Year 1 by:
 - using effectively the Reception baseline information and assessment data to evaluate and improve the quality of the provision
 - enhancing the quality of teaching by ensuring children and pupils are given well-planned and purposeful activities that engage and interest them and help them to attain appropriate learning objectives
 - improving the outdoor Reception area so that is used daily and contains interesting activities in all the areas of learning
 - making sure adults model language well to extend speaking skills
 - clarifying roles and expectations of all adults working in these classrooms to ensure they add to and enhance the children's and pupils' learning experience
 - improving the pupils' understanding and use of phonics in Year 1.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment by:
 - ensuring all teachers have a good understanding of the expected levels of attainment and what pupils have to do to reach their personal targets
 - specifying clearly the intended learning outcomes of each lesson, against which pupils' progress can be assessed, and ensure that pupils' activities and adults' interventions are focused on them

- ensuring that pupils have a clear understanding of how they can improve their work and move to higher levels of achievement through more constructive marking linked to learning targets, peer and self-assessment, and clearer communication of improved display of what they have to accomplish
 - using assessment data to provide challenge for all groups of pupils by ensuring that work is based upon what they already know and is sufficiently demanding for them
 - extending the classroom opportunities for pupils to be engaged in well-planned frameworks for enquiry and problem-solving activities, especially in science and mathematics, and improving the levels of interaction they have with each other.
- Develop the curriculum by:
- providing more well-focused opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and confidence as independent learners, especially through more investigations in science and mathematics
 - underpinning teachers' lesson planning to ensure work is properly matched to pupils' capabilities, including those who are more able
 - planning more coherently for the improvement of pupils' skills in ICT.
- Raise expectations of pupils through:
- setting challenging but realistic attainment targets for each pupil in key subjects
 - using the school's data system to monitor their progress towards them
 - intervening promptly to support any pupils who are falling behind their anticipated progress.
- Provide greater support for the improvement of teaching by:
- substantially extending visits to classrooms by leaders, and by other staff who wish to observe good practice
 - ensuring all staff understand and implement the school's agreed approaches to teaching and learning.
- Extend the role of pupils and parents in the life and work of the school by:
- consulting pupils more regularly on how they would like the school to improve
 - making arrangements for parents to express their views about how well the school works as a contribution to its decision-making process, and feeding back to them on what has been implemented
 - helping parents to support their child's learning at home.

Summary of report for parents/carers and pupils

Introduction

The validation was carried out by a team of four validators, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with pupils and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising returns to the parents' questionnaire.

Main findings

Pupils enjoy their time at school and they make proficient progress overall. They make accelerated progress in the Year 5 and 6 classes. Pupils' make good progress in their personal qualities. They state that they feel safe in school because they are well cared for by staff and get on well with fellow pupils. Teaching and the curriculum are proficient and the school is well led by an enthusiastic and evaluative leadership team. Pupils enjoy an excellent range of enrichment activities. There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The majority of parents expressed positive opinions about most aspects of the school. One said, 'I think this school is excellent and I wouldn't want to send my child anywhere else.' The school's careful review of its work has resulted in well-judged priorities for further improvement. The school has shown its capacity for further improvement is well developed.

Outcomes for learners

The pupils' enjoyment of school is seen in their high attendance, well-developed behaviour and positive attitudes in most classes. Pupils make proficient progress in Reception and in the Year 1 and Year 2 classes. By the end of Year 6 they achieve standards that are well above the island's averages, notably in the proportions who reach Level 4 in English, mathematics and science. Pupils grow well in self-confidence, develop a strong sense of responsibility and make a good contribution to their school and wider island society. They work and play happily together and show considerable kindness towards others.

The quality of provision

Teaching is proficient overall and well developed in some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2. Classroom relationships are generally good and form a solid basis for pupils' learning. Some pupils have a good understanding of their targets and can explain how they can improve their work, although this is not so in all classes and marking could often be more helpful. Some lessons really capture the interest of the pupils but others are over-directed by the teacher and pupils do not have enough chances to become independent learners. Some opportunities are missed for pupils to discuss what they are learning, for example by assessing each other's work.

The curriculum is proficient with some features better than this. It is suitably broad and balanced and effectively enhances pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem and prepares them soundly for their next stage of education. Work in class is supplemented by an excellent programme of activities and clubs that contribute much to pupils' all-round development.

All staff are highly committed to ensuring that pupils are well cared for and consequently pupils show care and consideration for others. The school is diligent in following all agreed procedures to ensure the welfare and safety of the pupils. Children receive good support when they enter the school and when they move on to secondary school. The school has made effective changes to the ways it monitors pupils' progress, which are giving staff a good grasp of how well the school performs. It recognises that these new procedures need to be consolidated and extended.

Leadership and management

The school is well led and the new staff team is developing a strong sense of common purpose. The introduction of three phase leaders has had a major impact on ensuring staff work together effectively to review the school's work, and identify areas to improve. Parents and pupils are consulted on some issues but the school is rightly planning to extend its consultation programmes so that pupils and their parents have more opportunities to be involved. The leadership team has identified accurately its strengths and the areas where further improvement is needed. The school's track record and sense of direction indicate that it has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Main areas for school improvement

The validation endorses the school's priorities for improvement and recommends that it improves pupils' progress in:

- phase 1 of the school (Reception and Year 1)
- writing, especially the writing of boys in phase 2 (Years 2,3 and 4)
- the outcomes for pupils capable of reaching the higher levels of achievement
- the problem-solving and other skills that will enable pupils to be more successful independent learners.

The detailed actions recommended are set out in the full report. They involve improvement in:

- the provision in Reception and Year 1
- teaching and assessment
- the curriculum
- the use of target setting
- support for teachers in the classroom
- the contribution of pupils and parents to the school's decision-making processes.