



Re- Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

Ballakermeen High School

Ballakermeen High School achieved Investing in Children status in February 2006. In order to reevaluate the school I met with pupils from the school council on March 20th 2007.

The School Council, which consists of a male and female from each year group, a member of the special unit and some sixth formers, continues to meet every two weeks in PSE. New members have joined but some have remained on the council and there is a new election plan being developed. The council is keen to ensure that **all** young people in the school have the opportunity to influence school life and so access to the councilors is promoted in assembly and tutor groups. The councilors are also accessible as they move around the school. In addition to this a suggestion box is being developed which can aid anonymity, especially in relation to anti-bullying.

Some of the councilors, **Olivia, Caitlin, Shara, Charlotte, Tom and Andrew** informed me of all of the work they've been involved in over the last year, some of the changes they've been able to effect, as well as some of the obstacles they've managed to overcome through dialogue with supportive staff.

Does the school council continue to be effective?

Dialogue

The school council continues to be supported by two link teachers and reps meet the school's Leadership Team on a regular basis where issues raised between meetings are discussed.

In addition to this over the last year the school has been instrumental in developing ways of involving the young people in the school, in wider debates around school issues and politics outside of the school.

All Ballakermeen students had the opportunity of taking part in the school's first on-line election for the School Council. A total of 763 students – 65% of enfranchised voters – cast their vote via the school's "Moodle" e-learning environment. This is a web based system which everyone with Internet connection can access.

The new School Council intends to use Moodle to conduct their own surveys on the wishes, needs and aspirations of the students who elected them. Jane Critchley, School Council Coordinator said: "The members of our new council are looking forward to polling the opinions of their fellow students on a wide range of issues, from the wearing of school uniform to bullying and environmental awareness."

With 16 and 17 year olds on the island now able to vote in the House of Keys elections, Ballakermeen High School held a question and answer forum

involving prospective MHKs, Sixth Form and Year 11 students based on the format of the popular BBC TV programme “Question Time”.

Two “Question Time” events took place on 13th and 20th October respectively. The events were staged in the school’s purpose-built Studio Theatre and were chaired by Manx Radio’s Roger Watterson. Both sessions were recorded to feature in a pre-election special on Manx Radio.

18 election candidates from Douglas and Onchan bravely agreed to subject their views to the scrutiny of some of the keenest young minds on the island. Ballakermeen Sixth Form students were asked to produce a series of questions to put to prospective election candidates and were keen to take the opportunity to become better informed about the choices available to them in the election”.

The purpose of the events was to raise awareness of local politics amongst the young people, but also to provide prospective MHKs with the opportunity to find out more about the issues, concerns, wishes and aspirations of young people as they prepare for the role which they aspire to undertake in shaping their future.

A wide range of questions were put to the prospective MHKs such as:

“Transport off the island is prohibitive, in price and frequency, for us poor students. What can be done to help us?” **Rachel Kelly**

“What are your views on the recruitment of school teachers? It seems to be getting harder to persuade quality teachers to come to the island and the retention of those already here is difficult.” **Jonathan Tavalera**

“What do you plan to do about the fact that there is nothing for teenagers to do on the island.” **Alex turner**

“Do you think it is suitable that Manx Telecom has a monopoly on Mobile phone networks on the island?” **Laura Bevan**

(see appendix for list of all of the questions)

Change

Bike Sheds – All costs have been met from various sponsors including Barclays and Bike Style in return for logos being displayed on the sheds. This has been achieved through hard work and persistence on the part of the councilors. Having being told by some teachers that riding a bike with a bag on your back is a health and safety issue the councilors researched the issue and found that this was not the case and raised it again at the leadership team meeting. As a result they were able to go ahead with the plan for bike sheds. They are now looking for a suitable site and then the sheds will be erected.

Food – There is much greater variety in the canteen as a result of suggestions from young people in the school who were fed up with the routine menu. This has led to members of the school council having regular discussions with staff to further increase the variety as a result of suggestions put to the councilors in tutor groups. Also the queues were too big, now that years 10 and 11 go out the changes mean that there’s more room.

Uniform – There is a split in the school as to whether or not blazers should be worn in the summer and although teachers are expected to allow pupils to take their ‘blaser’ off in hot weather the rule has been applied inconsistently. As a result of discussions with the reps the Leadership Team agreed to clarify the rule with all staff and request consistency in it’s application.

Merit System – The inconsistency of the merit system has been a frustrating issue for council members. It appears that Sets 1 and 2 only get around 100 per year whereas sets 3 upwards get around 500. The council is to find out the views of young people in the school in relation to this in order to put a fairer system in place.

Charity Events – The council intend to carry out a ‘bag packing’ event at Marks and Spencers. Events such as these are conditional on gaining staff support. However, the council said that on the whole the teaching staff is very supportive.

Buddy System - There are 1 or 2 ‘buddies’ for each group. The ‘buddies’ meet every Friday, but are available every day at break and lunchtimes for anyone requiring their confidential service. As a result of concerns over bullying on the buses, a ‘sixth form watch’ has been set up to anonymously check out what’s happening in order to improve the situation.

Budget – The budget is agreed by the Leadership Team and is mainly for administration. However, the council is looking at ways to generate more income for the sports hall.

Staff recruitment – Young people’s involvement in staff recruitment wasn’t viewed as important at the present time, however a discussion revealed that the councilors felt this would be beneficial and resolve some issues which have arisen in the past.

Conclusions

For the purpose of this evaluation the information presented demonstrates the range of issues covered by the school council and the system by which these issues are addressed. The wider discussion which took place with the reps revealed that, there is a recognition that, the systems in place need to be developed in order to ensure that there is an opportunity for all students to have a say. From the evident commitment of the school council and the supportive staff to work together to achieve change, I am in no doubt that they will continue to strive to improve the already impressive system in order to achieve this.

There is clear evidence of dialogue between the school council, students and staff. More importantly, as a result of this dialogue, school life at Ballakermeen High School continues to change for the better.

Along with the young people involved in this evaluation, I therefore have no hesitation in recommending that Ballakermeen High School continues to be an Investing in children member.

Maria Brannen
Investing in Children
September 2007

Appendix I Ballakermeen High School

Question Time 2006: What our students want to know....

Year 12

Tutor Group	Questioners	Question
AQ 12HS7	Sophie Barraclough (1) James Gilmour (2)	1. Why do you want to become an MHK? What difference can it make? 2. What are your views on the possible introduction of an upper speed limit? Do you agree with what appears to be a "creeping" extension of speed restricted areas?
JB 12MD8	Rachel Kelly (1) Jonathan Tavalera (2)	1. Transport off the island is prohibitive, in price and frequency, for us poor students. What can be done to help us? 2. What are your views on the recruitment of school teachers? It seems to be getting harder to persuade quality teachers to come to the island and the retention of those already here is difficult
HM 12LPS3	Joe Lynch (1) Katy Stimpson(2)	1. The population of the Isle of Man is growing at an astounding rate each year. We as voters would like to know why the government currently has no proper immigration policy and what they intend to do about this problem. 2. Why do you promote healthy food so much then make it more expensive than junk food?
WF 12CC2	Alex Turner (1) Julie Cretney (2)	1. What do you plan to do about the fact that there is nothing for teenagers to do on the island? 2. In the case of two candidates being elected to one constituency, do you think that you would be able to work well together even if the other candidate holds radically different views to your own?

Year 13

Tutor Group	Questioners	Question
KB 13MD6	Laura Bevan	1. Do you think it is suitable that Manx Telecom has a monopoly on Mobile phone networks on the island? 2. What will you do to reduce costs for getting off the island?
SB 13PPS2	Tori Creasey (1) Aaron Fahey (2)	1. Do you feel that the reason for the lack of response from under 18 voters is due to the general lack of knowledge and understanding of Manx Politics? Do you intend changing this and how would you go about it? 2. Do you recognise as a potential MHK a certain resentful hostility towards the increasing number of immigrants on the island from local people? If so, what do you intend to do about it?
PS 13LY6	Michael Brady (1) Adam Killip (2)	1. If elected would you guarantee to uphold the right of students to have their tuition fees paid for university course? 2. How can spending £11 million on a parliament building be justified when pensioners are having to bail out the MEA with government loans?
JL 13CPS1	Clare Fitzgerald(1) Becky Pate(2)	1. The IOM is prominent in sports, drama and music – why are there no courses at the IOM college which would continue this and more scholarships and bursaries to UK universities? 2. We would like more choice of popular stars and entertainment facilities (shopping malls, UCI etc..) what are future plans to accommodate these suggestions?
AG 13HY5	Ben Lambden	1. Do you think it is fair that 16 year olds are allowed to vote but not to go into pubs? 2. The death rate on Manx roads appears to be well above the UK national average. What measures do you think need to be put into place to reduce the accident rate?