



Circular 0040/2012

**To Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff
of Post-Primary Schools**

IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Summary

This circular

- Sets out why school self-evaluation is important
- Describes the process of school self-evaluation
- Explains the purpose of school self-evaluation
- Suggests how time should be allocated to self-evaluation
- Outlines the actions required and the targets that schools are expected to achieve
- Indicates the support available to schools for school self-evaluation.

Please bring this circular to the attention of all teaching and other relevant staff and to all members of the school board of management.

1. WHY IS SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION IMPORTANT?

Teachers frequently reflect on their work and the learning that their students achieve. For many years, teachers and school boards of management have used the school development planning process to identify what is working well in their schools and what might be improved.

School self-evaluation is a way in which this process of reflection, improvement and development can take place in a more systematic way.

Teachers in Ireland and in many other countries have shown that by reflecting on their practice regularly, they can improve the learning achieved by their students. This happens when the main focus of school self-evaluation is on what happens in classrooms.

All schools are required to engage in systematic school self-evaluation from the 2012/13 school year onwards.

The introduction of systematic school self-evaluation complements the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. It will also support the introduction and roll-out of a reformed junior cycle programme.

2. THE SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

School self-evaluation (SSE) is a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review. During school self-evaluation the principal, deputy principal and teachers, under the direction of the board of management and the patron, and in consultation with parents and students, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school.

The process requires schools to **gather evidence** about teaching and learning practices, to **analyse** the evidence and to reflect on the findings in order to reach conclusions and to make **judgements** about their strengths and weaknesses.

The school self-evaluation process and the school improvement plan must be informed by assessment information, including information about literacy and numeracy, and other forms of evidence, such as the views of students and their engagement in learning and in school life.

The school will record its own judgement about its performance and the quality of its work, in the form of a concise **school self-evaluation report**. A summary of this report should be made available to the whole-school community.

As a result of the school self-evaluation process each school will produce a short **school improvement plan**. The plan should contain specific and measurable targets to improve outcomes for learners. It should act as a guide for improving teaching and learning activities in the school. Schools should make a summary of the school improvement plan available to the whole-school community.

3. PURPOSE OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

The central purpose of school self-evaluation is to improve the overall quality of education in the school and in particular to improve learning outcomes for students. In order to achieve this, school self-evaluation should become an integral part of whole-school and classroom practice and should focus on teaching and learning.

School self-evaluation will help to support teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Schools are asked to focus on the quality of aspects of teaching and learning, including literacy and numeracy, across all subjects and programmes. When strengths and areas for development have been identified, targets to improve outcomes for students should be set. This will assist schools in devising a three-year school improvement plan. The plan will support and guide teachers as they implement improvements in each aspect of teaching and learning.

4. TIME FOR SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

For many years, schools have allocated time to enable teachers and principals to engage in school development planning. In recent years, the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) has provided additional hours for this work. Many schools have placed a particular focus on reviewing and improving their practice in literacy and numeracy within their planning work since the publication of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The introduction of school self-evaluation will complement and help to integrate this work.

To ensure that adequate time is available for school self-evaluation, principals should:

- Ensure that school self-evaluation is a core part of their school development planning time
- Ensure that planning time is made available to enable whole-staff involvement in school self-evaluation.

School self-evaluation should enable teachers to focus on reviewing and improving how they teach and how students learn, rather than focusing on creating documentation.

5. SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION: THE FIRST CYCLE, 2012-2016

From 2012/13, schools are required to engage in school self-evaluation. A whole-school approach to the self-evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning, including literacy and numeracy, should be adopted.

Generally schools should engage in school self-evaluation of one aspect of teaching and learning across all subjects and programmes each year. However, it is acknowledged that the process may take more time in the early stages.

Over a four-year period from 2012, all post-primary schools should engage in school self-evaluation and produce three-year improvement plans for numeracy¹, literacy² and one aspect of teaching and learning across all subjects and programmes.

English medium schools should engage in self-evaluation of literacy in English, numeracy and one aspect of teaching and learning over the first four-year period. Irish medium schools should engage in self-evaluation of literacy in Irish, literacy in English and numeracy over the first four-year period.

In the school year 2012/13, schools should start the process of self-evaluation. In that year they should **select one** of the following options: **literacy, numeracy, an aspect of teaching and learning**. In subsequent years, schools should select again from the above options so that, within the four-year period, a school self-evaluation report and a three-year school improvement plan for literacy, for numeracy and for one aspect of teaching and learning across all subjects will be completed.

Schools should adopt a whole-school approach to evaluating and improving the area selected for self-evaluation. Each year:

- Each subject department engages in self-evaluation of the subject with a specific focus on the area selected
- The school completes a school self-evaluation report that identifies strengths and areas for development in the area selected
- The school devises a three-year school improvement plan for the area selected, which becomes part of the overall school plan
- Each subject department begins to implement the strategies outlined in the school improvement plan
- The implementation of the school improvement plan devised in the previous school year is monitored.

The school self-evaluation process may be slower in the early stages. A school may have completed the self-evaluation report, devised a school improvement plan and started implementation in 2012/13 or it may have only completed the school improvement plan by the end of 2012/13 and begun to implement and monitor the plan in 2013/14. As soon as the school self-evaluation report is completed and the school improvement plan has been devised, and no later than the end of the school year 2013/14, the board of management should make arrangements to prepare a summary school self-evaluation report and a summary school improvement plan and should make these available to the whole-school community.

As soon as possible in the school year 2013/14, schools should begin the implementation of the three-year school improvement plan developed in the previous school year (or continue implementation if this has already begun). They should then choose another area of focus and follow a similar process as in the previous year.

As soon as the first two improvement plans have been completed and are being implemented and monitored, and no later than the beginning of the school year 2015/16, schools should select a third area for self-evaluation and follow a similar process as in previous years.

6. SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION IN DEIS SCHOOLS

All schools are required to engage in school self-evaluation from 2012/13 onwards. Schools within the DEIS programme have been required to develop and implement school improvement plans (called DEIS action plans) as part of DEIS since 2006/07. DEIS schools should continue developing and implementing DEIS action plans for improvement in order to meet the planning and reporting requirements for DEIS. The school self-evaluation process, as outlined for all

¹ Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings

² Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. Literacy for learners in English-medium schools and settings should be understood primarily as literacy in English. In the case of Irish-medium schools, literacy should be understood as both Irish as the first language of the school and English.

schools, will help DEIS schools to make informed judgements about their practice and about the areas requiring improvement.

Frequently, the action plans developed in DEIS schools have focussed on the review and improvement of literacy and numeracy. In schools where thorough review and improvement planning for literacy and numeracy have already been completed and recorded, the school should continue to focus on monitoring and implementing the action plans developed to date. In such schools, as the school self-evaluation process is developed on a continuous basis, the focus may be redirected to teaching and learning in areas other than literacy and numeracy.

7. SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

In order to assist schools to engage in the process of school self-evaluation, a number of supports have been put in place.

7.1 Guidelines

The Inspectorate has prepared *An Introduction to School Self-Evaluation of Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools* which is available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

The Inspectorate has also prepared guidelines to support the school self-evaluation process. *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* is available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

The Guidelines contain a framework for evaluating teaching and learning, along with evaluation criteria and quality statements to assist schools in making judgements about the quality of their own work. Sample tools to help schools gather evidence and make judgements are also included.

A school self-evaluation report template and a school improvement plan template are provided in the Guidelines. A checklist to assist schools in examining their adherence to legislative and regulatory requirements, which should be completed annually by boards of management, is also included.

7.2 School support

The Inspectorate and members of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) will provide support to schools in the area of school self-evaluation. The support is intended to assist schools in developing their understanding of school self-evaluation.

In order to facilitate all teaching staff to attend support sessions, schools are asked to assign a portion of the additional time allocated under the Croke Park Agreement to school self-evaluation. This will enable presentations about school self-evaluation to be made and questions and queries to be answered.

It is planned that support will be delivered to schools over the course of the school year 2012/13 and the school year 2013/14.

7.3 Online support

Web-based support for school self-evaluation is also provided. The range of online materials and support will be developed and will grow over time. The support will include:

- Electronic versions of the Guidelines, which include the quality framework, evaluation criteria, quality statements and tools, to enable schools to access the sections of relevance to their current needs
- PowerPoint presentations explaining the purpose and process of school self-evaluation, which may be useful to school leaders at staff or group meetings
- Short video clips to illustrate particular aspects of school self-evaluation
- School self-evaluation materials generated by schools which they are willing to share with others.

8. QUERIES REGARDING THIS CIRCULAR

Queries in relation to this circular should be e-mailed to the Department's Inspectorate at:

SSE_Feedback@education.gov.ie

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