



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills**

DES Circular 0016/2018

**To: Principals, Teachers and
Boards of Management in Primary and Special Schools**

**Re-engaging with the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process in primary schools
Amendments to requirements of circular 0039/2016**

SUMMARY

- This Circular clarifies how primary schools should re-engage with the SSE process between now and 2020
- To assist primary schools to re-engage with the School Self-Evaluation process the minimum requirements of Department Circular 0039/2016 have been amended
- In the period March 2018 to June 2020, primary schools should select either ONE OR TWO CURRICULUM AREAS OR ASPECTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (based on the domains and standards of *Looking at Our School 2016*) as the focus of their self-evaluation process (rather than the two to four areas/aspects which were required by Circular 0039/2016)
- Other than the change above, the guidance and advice contained in Circular 39/2016 remains valid
- A range of supports for school self-evaluation are available to primary schools:
 - Resources and examples of good practice are available on www.schoolself-evaluation.ie
 - A special SSE Update has been published to help schools with their re-engagement with SSE. A copy is enclosed. Further SSE Updates are available on www.schoolself-evaluation.ie

- Additional copies of *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016 – 2020 Primary* and *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* are being sent to every primary school
- Inspectors from the Department of Education and Skills will be conducting advisory visits to schools to discuss with principals and teachers the ways in which they may use the SSE process effectively
- A number of regional seminars are being held by the Inspectorate throughout 2018 at which guidance will be available and examples of good practice shared; places at these seminars will be allocated on a first-come, first served basis
- School closure: An additional planning day to assist the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum will be provided in the school year 2018/19: details will follow.

1. RE-ENGAGING WITH THE SSE PROCESS

In September 2016, the Department published circular 0039/2016, outlining the requirements on schools to continue to engage in school self-evaluation (SSE) between 2016 and 2020. To support this second cycle of SSE, the Inspectorate updated SSE materials on its dedicated website (www.schoolself-evaluation.ie) and published two related documents:

- *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016 – 2020 Primary*
- *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*.

We know that since then, for various reasons, many schools did not engage fully with the self-evaluation process. We are also aware that schools are now in a position to re-engage with the SSE process on a whole-school basis.

The purpose of this circular is to clarify how schools should engage with the SSE process between now and 2020.

You will find enclosed with this circular:

- A copy of circular 0039/2016
- A copy of SSE Update Issue 10 – Primary.

2. SSE REQUIREMENTS IN CIRCULAR 0039/2016 HAVE BEEN AMENDED

Circular 0039/2016 set out the requirements for schools regarding their engagement with school self-evaluation of teaching and learning and outlined appropriate timeframes and stages for the school self-evaluation process for the period 2016-2020. Section 4 of the circular indicated that schools should select a minimum of two and a maximum of four curriculum areas or aspects of teaching and learning as the focus for their self-evaluation process from 2016 to 2020.

The Department is aware that due to the fact that schools did not engage fully with the self-evaluation process, they may not be in a position to fulfil these requirements. As a result, **between March 2018 and June 2020 schools should select either one or two curriculum areas or aspects of teaching and**

learning as the focus of their self-evaluation process (rather than the two to four areas/aspects required by Circular 39/2016).

3. HOW TO BEGIN

Schools are reminded that school self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review. It is a way of working that involves reflective enquiry leading to action for improvement that is informed by evidence gathered within each school's unique context. In order to make re-engagement with school self-evaluation meaningful, schools should take time to investigate current teaching and learning practices, identify the area of focus and then use the six-step process as outlined in *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Primary*.

- Schools may find it helpful to examine again the graphic on page 3 of circular 0039/2016. This will assist in assessing how best to re-engage with the self-evaluation process, from a whole-staff perspective, within the school's own context.
- Schools may find it beneficial to use the remainder of the school year 2017/18 as a period of investigation about the area chosen for self-evaluation and begin the implementation phase by September 2018. The teaching and learning section of *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools*, also available in the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Primary*, should be used when reflecting on and evaluating current practice.
- The **investigation stage** involves the first steps in the six-step school self-evaluation process. Schools should take a whole-school approach to **identifying** the aspect of teaching and learning or curriculum area to prioritise. The school can then move to the **evidence gathering** phase. It is important to ensure that the evidence gathered is manageable, useful and focused. Once the evidence is **analysed**, the data should be used to draw conclusions. This will enable the school to complete a **short school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan**. The plan should have specific targets for improvement with a focus on improving learning. It should include the actions that teachers will undertake in classrooms to achieve the targets, and the monitoring and evaluating processes.
- Once the investigation stage has been completed, schools will be ready for the implementation stage. The **implementation stage** involves the remaining steps of the process: implementing the school improvement plan and monitoring and evaluating its impact on learning.
- It is important to remember that SSE is intended to support and help schools in their work. It is not designed to be a discrete task, but rather to provide an approach that can help to manage change and improvement processes. For example:
 - SSE can be used to help a school to work through the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum.
 - DEIS schools should use the SSE process to develop their DEIS action plan for improvement: the school's DEIS action plan is its SSE school improvement plan and no additional or separate improvement plan is required.
 - SSE provides each school in Gaeltacht language-planning areas with a framework for developing its own action-plan to strengthen Irish-medium educational provision.

4. SCHOOL CLOSURE

An additional planning day to assist the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum will be provided in the school year 2018/19. Details of this additional closure will follow.

5. SUPPORTING SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

A range of supports is available to schools as they re-engage with the SSE process. The supports include:

- The SSE website: www.schoolself-evaluation.ie has a growing number of resources, including videos, webinars and articles to support schools as they engage in SSE.
- The SSE Update: A twice yearly newsletter focused exclusively on SSE. *SSE Update Issue 10* is enclosed, and this, along with all previous issues are available on the SSE website.
- SSE Advisory Visits: Inspectors are available to provide SSE advisory visits to schools. These visits are not evaluative and focus on supporting schools to get the most from the SSE process. To request a visit simply e-mail info@schoolself-evaluation.ie
- Regional seminars for school leaders: The Inspectorate will be arranging regional seminars for primary school principals in the final term of the 2017/18 school year. Details of these events are available on the SSE website and will be communicated through the Inspectorate's Facebook and Twitter Feed.
- The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) continue to support schools as they engage in the SSE process. Check the PDST website (www.pdst.ie) for details.

6. QUERIES REGARDING THIS CIRCULAR

Queries in relation to this circular should be emailed to the Department's Inspectorate at

info@schoolself-evaluation.ie

Paraic Joyce
Principal Officer
School Governance Section

March 2018