SSE UPDATE

FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS
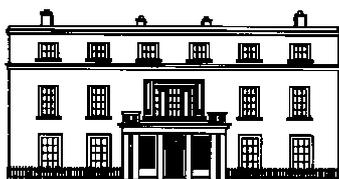
AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

SSE UPDATE

PRIMARY EDITION   ISSUE 1 – MAY 2013

Welcome!

This is the first issue of SSE Update, an e-bulletin for primary schools, which we hope will support you as you engage with the school self-evaluation process. Through SSE Update, we will provide information and clarification as you manage the SSE process and make it your own. We also hope that the regular appearance of SSE Update on the website will contribute to an e-forum, allowing schools to share effective practices and to gain insights from each other's experiences.

In the course of visiting schools to present the SSE process, we in the Inspectorate emphasised that SSE is, first and foremost, concerned with the core work of schools: teaching and learning. In your school now, you may be deciding whether you will begin the SSE process with a focus on literacy or on numeracy. We hope that you will find the first two articles helpful. Tá súil againn go mbeidh an tríú alt cabhraitheach do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus scoileanna Gaeltachta ar an gcéad dul síos.

In these articles, you'll find references to *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*; and to the *SSE Guidelines for Primary Schools*. You'll find these documents in full on the SSE web site.

You will also find in this issue some authentic accounts from schools of their SSE work to date. We hope you'll find these illustrations of the process helpful – but it's worth remembering that the documents matter only insofar as they provide a record of what is really happening in the classroom!

Finally, in response to your questions and comments on the SSE process, you will find some information and clarifications in the FAQ section on page 8.

The Inspectorate School Improvement and Quality Unit

CONTENTS

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AND THE SSE PROCESS

School self-evaluation and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy complement one another: they both aim to improve pupils' overall outcomes. Literacy encompasses reading, writing and oral skills, and these skills are interdependent. SSE with a focus on literacy needs to recognise and support this interdependence, while managing to set and work towards specific targets for the improvement of pupils' skills. Your school's three-year plan should aim to improve pupils' literacy development in the broadest way possible. For this to happen effectively, SSE of literacy needs to be implemented at whole-school level.

In your school now, you may be preparing to focus on literacy development using the SSE process. As a school, you may have identified in a general way some concerns about pupils' literacy skills. You may be concerned about the fluency of their reading; the accuracy and structure of their written work; the extent to which they can engage meaningfully with written texts; or aspects of their speaking and listening skills. The six-step SSE process will help you to identify strengths and areas for improvement in a sound, evidence-based way, to reflect on and adjust teaching and learning practices as you find necessary, to set targets, and to implement and monitor your school improvement plan.

The first step is to **gather evidence** relating to pupils' present literacy skills to provide a starting point for a systematic process of improvement. Results from standardised and classroom tests should form part of the evidence base. The suggestions and advice on gathering evidence in Chapter 5 of the *SSE Guidelines* might be useful at this point, along with some of the sample checklists and templates given in the Appendix. A balance of hard evidence (for example, what is the assessment data telling you?) and soft evidence (such as, what are your pupils or their parents telling you about what's difficult and what's helpful?) will ensure that your **analysis**, the second step, will be as well informed and comprehensive as possible.

The third step involves **drawing conclusions and making judgements about strengths and areas for development** to improve pupils' literacy skills. Chapter 3 of the *SSE Guidelines* sets out the teaching and learning quality framework. In making judgements about strengths and areas for development, a specific theme (or sub-theme) from the framework may emerge as being particularly relevant to your findings. Chapter 4 of the *SSE Guidelines* contains evaluation criteria and quality statements for each theme. Looking at your own practice against these criteria will enable you to answer the key SSE question, "How well are we doing?"

While **your school self-evaluation report**, the fourth step, should be short, it is an important record of your findings and judgements and will also help you to keep the wider school community informed. (In the area of literacy, parents' awareness and support is especially important.) The resulting **school improvement plan (SIP)** should set out clearly the SMART targets for literacy development, and the actions needed to achieve them. It's important to ensure that the targets you've set are related explicitly to your evidence and the conclusions you've drawn from it.

All teachers will have a role in **implementing** the SIP for literacy. Pupils' speaking and listening skills can be developed in every area of school life and across the primary curriculum. Reading and writing skills can be developed on a cross-curricular basis. For example, project and thematic work can involve significant reading and writing in many genres, including factual reports and accounts. Pupils will find it very helpful to learn and apply the same reading comprehension strategies across the various curriculum areas. It will be important to engage in a systematic way with the continuous and progressive development of word skills. Fostering pupils' love of reading by engaging with multiple texts and books is a vital part of developing positive attitudes to literacy.

NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT AND THE SSE PROCESS

The overarching aims of SSE and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy are linked in that they both seek to improve pupils' overall outcomes. The strategy defines numeracy as encompassing the 'ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings. To have this ability, a young person needs to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.'

Your school's three-year plan for numeracy should aim to improve outcomes for learners in the broadest way possible. For this to happen effectively, SSE of numeracy should be addressed at whole-school level.

You may currently be preparing to focus on improving numeracy outcomes for learners using the SSE process; there may be some general concerns among staff about the pupils' learning or attainment in numeracy. This might include concerns about their attitudes to aspects of the mathematics curriculum, for example their disposition towards problem solving; their ability to compute accurately and speedily or their ability to record their work appropriately.

The six-step SSE process helps to identify strengths and areas for improvement in a sound, evidence-based way. It will also allow you to reflect on and adjust teaching and learning practices as you find necessary, to set targets, and to implement and monitor your school improvement plan. SSE will be most effective where all teachers in all classrooms weave the agreed actions into their everyday practice.

The first step is to **gather evidence** relating to pupils' numeracy skills. This will provide a starting point for a systematic process of improvement. Results from standardised and classroom tests should form part of the evidence base. You might find the suggestions and advice on gathering evidence in Chapter 5 of the *SSE Guidelines* useful at this point, along with some of the sample checklists and templates given in the Appendix. A balance of hard evidence (what are the assessment data telling you?) and soft evidence (what are your pupils or their parents telling you about what's difficult and what's helpful?) will ensure that your **analysis**, the second step, will be as well informed and comprehensive as possible.

The third step involves **drawing conclusions and making judgements about strengths and areas for development** to improve pupils' numeracy skills. Chapter 3 of the *SSE Guidelines* sets out the teaching and learning quality framework. In making judgements about areas for development, a specific theme (or sub-theme) from the framework may emerge as being particularly relevant to your findings. Chapter 4 of the *SSE Guidelines* contains evaluation criteria and quality statements for each theme. Looking at your own practice against these criteria will enable you to answer the key SSE question, "How well are we doing?"

While **your school self-evaluation report**, the fourth step, should be short, it is an important record of your findings and judgements and will also help you to keep the wider school community informed. The resulting **school improvement plan** should set out clearly the SMART targets for numeracy development, and the actions needed to achieve them. It's important to ensure that the targets you've set are related explicitly to your evidence and the conclusions you've drawn from it. Each teacher will have a role in **implementing** the school improvement plan for numeracy. And, as a school, you'll need to consider how best to **monitor** the implementation of agreed actions in classrooms.

FMS AGUS AN LITEARTHACHT GHAEILGE

Tá dúshlán nach beag roimh scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus scoileanna Gaeltachta agus iad ag cur FMS i bhfeidhm. Seans go bhfuil cuid agaibh ag díriú ar fhéinmheastóireacht na litearthachta Ghaeilge. Sa chás sin beidh Gaeilge labhartha, scríofa agus léite i gceist. Tá gach gné de na scileanna sin comhtháite: trasnaíonn siad ar a chéile, tá siad spleách ar a chéile agus saibhríonn siad a chéile. D'fhéadfadh an próiseas féinmheastóireachta cabhrú libh grinnstaidéar a dhéanamh ar an litearthacht Ghaeilge. Tá sé chéim sa phróiseas féinmheastóireachta.

Céim a 1. Bailigh fianaise ó fhoinsí difriúla, torthaí ó scrúduithe caighdeánaithe ina measc. Éist go cúramach leis na daltaí agus iad ag caint. Cé chomh líofa agus atá a gcuid Gaeilge labhartha? An léann siad go líofa agus go cruinn, le dea-fhoghraíocht? Bailigh cóipleabhair na ndaltaí agus scrúdaigh na cleachtais scríbhneoireachta a úsáideann siad. Féach ar shamplaí eile dá gcuid oibre. Fiosraigh cad iad na botúin is coitianta a dhéantar sa chaint agus sna téacsanna scríofa. Cé chomh saibhir agus atá an teanga atá in úsáid, cé chomh cruthaitheach agus atá an scribhneoireacht? Cén dearcadh atá ag na daltaí i leith na teanga? Cé chomh minic agus a léann siad/scríobhann siad as Gaeilge? An mbaineann siad úsáid as na meáin dhigiteacha chun scríobh as Gaeilge? Beidh ceistneoir beag ag teastáil chun na tuairimí sin a fháil, b'fhéidir. Tá samplaí de na ceistneoirí seo ar fáil sna Treoirlínte.

Céim a 2. Déan **anailís** ar an bhfianaise seo. Tar le chéile mar fhoireann, nó i ngrúpaí beaga agus déan an fhianaise a mheá. Cén láidreachtaí agus bearnaí atá aitheanta agaibh? Conas atá an teanga labhartha agus scríofa á bhforbairt agus cén timpeallacht litearthachta atá sna ranganna? An bhfuil réimse leathan téacsanna Gaeilge in úsáid i ngach rang? An bhfuil bun-tuiscint ag na daltaí ar ortagrafaíocht agus ar chóras fóineolaíochta na Gaeilge? Cé chomh minic agus a léann/scríobhann siad réimse leathan téacsanna? Cén ghreim atá acu ar bhriathra agus ar aimsirí na Gaeilge agus cé chomh líofa is a scríobhann siad? Cad a deir a gcuid freagraí ar na ceistneoirí faoina ndearcthaí i leith na litearthachta?

Céim a 3. Ag éirí as staidéar a dhéanamh ar an bhfianaise seo ar fad tiocfaidh bhur scoil ar **chinneadh** faoi na láidreachtaí agus faoi na laigí a bhaineann leis an litearthacht. Féachfaidh sibh ar na téamaí agus ar na fo-théamaí atá sa Chreat teagaisc agus foghlama sna Treoirlínte. Aithneoidh sibh gur gá gnéithe den teagasc nó den fhoghlaim nó den mheasúnú a athrú trasna na scoile.
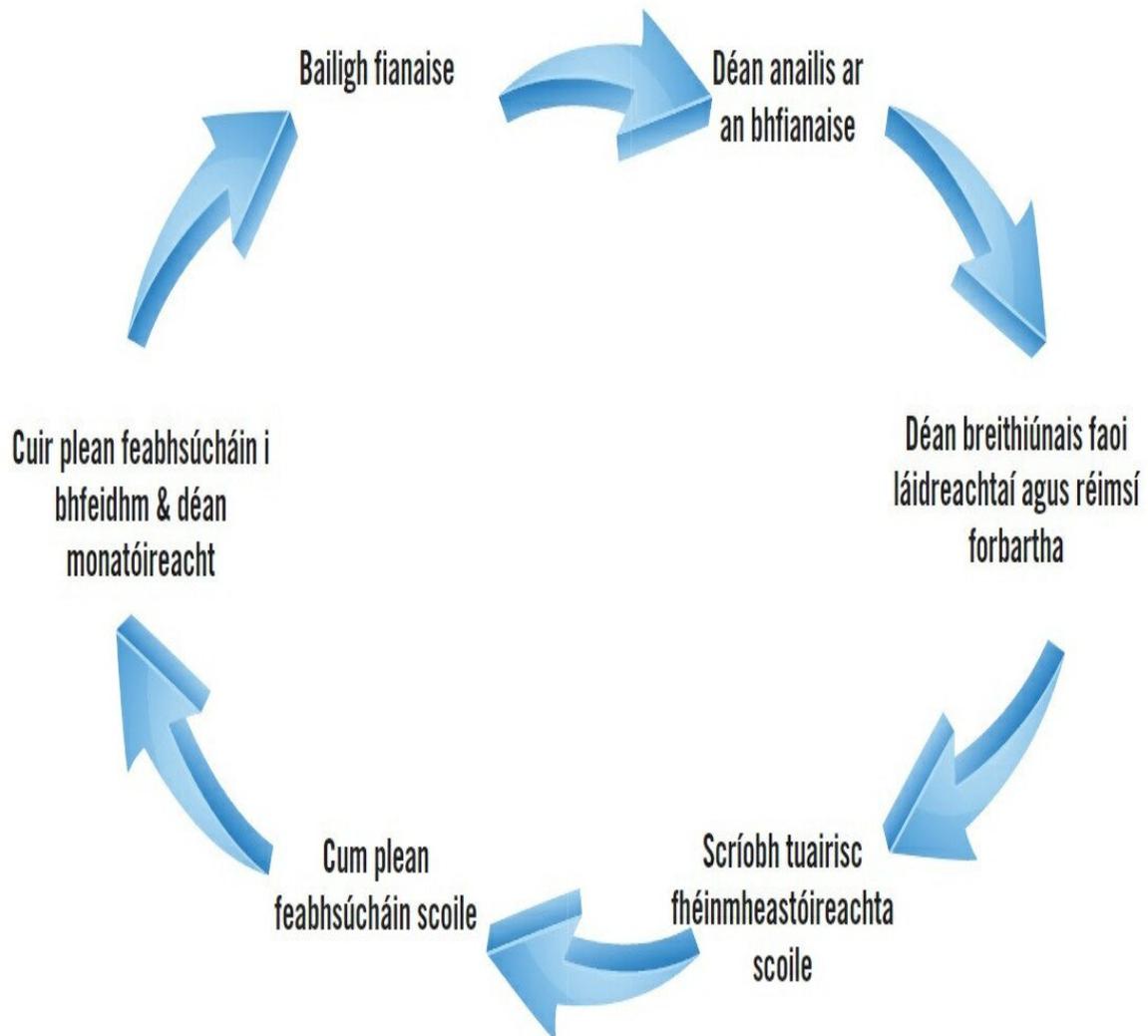
Féach ansin ar na critéir mheastóireachta atá sna Treoirlínte. Leagann siad seo amach an cleachtas is fearr. Cuir do chleachtas i múineadh agus foghlaim na litearthachta i gcomparáid leis an dea-chleachtas seo. Pléifidh sibh na buanna atá agaibh ina leith seo agus na gnéithe is práinní ar gá a fhorbairt.

Céim a 4 Scríobhfaidh sibh bhur d**tuairisc fheinmheastóireachta scoile** agus ceann gairid do na tuismitheoirí.

Céim a 5 Leagfaidh sibh amach **plean feabhsúcháin** ina mbeidh spriocanna an-chinnte deartha don litearthacht, bunaithe ar an bhfianaise. Seans go mbeidh sé mar sprioc agaibh go mbeidh bhur dteagasc chun breis béime a chur ar thrí ghné ar chontanam foghlama na litearthachta; eiseamláiriú, tacú agus scríbhneoireacht neamhspleách. Beidh rólanna ag gach duine sainithe sa phlean seo. Cuirfidh sibh plean feabhsúchain gearr ar fáil do na tuismitheoirí.

Céim a 6 Ansin tiocfaidh an chéim is dúshlánaí agus is tábhachtaí: an plean seo a chur ina steille bheatha ar fud na scoile agus lasmuigh di.

AN PRÓISEAS SÉ CHÉIM UM FHÉINMHEASTÓIREACHT SCOILE

Bailigh fianaise

Déan anailis ar an bhfianaise

Déan breithiúnais faoi láidreachtaí agus réimsí forbartha

Scríobh tuairisc fhéinmheastóireachta scoile

Cum plean feabhsúcháin scoile

Cuir plean feabhsúcháin i bhfeidhm & déan monatóireacht

THE SSE STORY SO FAR IN TWO SCHOOLS

How does SSE work in practice? How do schools actually engage with each step of the 6-step process? The following two profiles show how schools have grappled with SSE. These schools have their own story to tell, their own unique perspective on SSE. The profiles highlight the challenges faced by the schools in implementing SSE on a whole-school basis and emphasise the need to ensure that all voices, including parents', are heard.

Other authentic accounts from schools, along with SSE reports and school improvement plans, will be available in the School Profiles section of the SSE web site. This will, we hope, develop as a useful way for schools to share their experiences of the SSE process.

PEN-PICTURE 1

As a principal, I felt it timely to re-evaluate and to genuinely discuss the progress of the school with the staff, pupils, parents and Board of Management. We needed solid information about pupil progress in order to direct future learning in the school. We looked at aspects of three areas, one being Mathematics.

(STEP 1) In respect of Mathematics, we first began to collect some evidence from standardised test results in September 2011.

(STEP 2) Thinking of the Sigma T results collectively, we predicted that problem solving would stand out as an area in need of much work and development. We recorded current averages in computation at 4th and 5th class level. We examined best practice in this area. As a staff we discovered that our students were making basic mistakes in computation.

(STEP 3) This proved to us that tables and mental maths needed much more emphasis and work and that the pupils needed to be taught the importance of care, concentration and actually completing their test.

(STEP 4) We recorded these findings.

(STEP 5) At the next staff meeting, we developed an improvement plan for tables and mental maths. This process included quite spirited discussions on the teaching of tables. One of the most interesting aspects here were the variety of contributions from the teachers who had been teaching for many years and those at the beginning of their teaching careers. We agreed that the best way forward was to use a combination of all the suggestions. The main features of this improvement plan included:

→ Continuous Speed Tests in tables - orally and written
→ All teachers to begin with patterns and rhymes and to move on to "pure tables" chanted as a class
→ Teachers to move on to asking individual pupils to answer questions about tables in random order
→ Teachers to aim at increasing the speed at which answers are given
→ All teachers to bear in mind that some children need to use concrete materials for support in this area but that these children also should be showing gradual progress
→ A parents' information meeting at which these decisions would be explained to parents with particular emphasis on how they can support their child's learning of tables

(STEP 6) We implemented our actions for improvement and then compared standardised test results. These proved to us that collaboration as a staff can achieve anything! They showed a very definite improvement in computation scores. We were able to affirm and celebrate measurable improvements in the attainment levels of the cohort of pupils.

Our second School Improvement Plan will feature the specific targets for the area that we have chosen. It will be based on the SSE guidelines which are now available to us. I believe that once we get used to this process, it will get easier from year to year.

PEN-PICTURE 2

As a staff, we began formally tracking and documenting progress in literacy and numeracy in 2003/2004 using a school-devised test. We began averaging standardised test results in numeracy and literacy in 2006/2007 and comparing these results to NRIT and Nfer Nelson results to inform future planning and to help better identify children in need of support.

In light of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011, we decided as a staff to form teams with a specific focus on literacy (including Gaeilge) and numeracy. We decided to carry out a school self-evaluation of Maths, English and Gaeilge. This plan was devised before the guidelines for SSE were in place and before the SSE circular had issued to schools. The focus of our SSE embraced more areas than the guidelines or the circular suggested.

*In order to get a clear picture of our strengths and weaknesses in these areas we began to **gather evidence**. A questionnaire was sent to all Parents/Guardians in autumn 2011 and feedback was collated and discussed. A pupil questionnaire for English and Maths was administered in the senior classes. Regular formal and informal evaluation of pupil progress is carried out on an ongoing basis. All teachers maintain assessment folders for their class throughout the year, including assessment of and for learning.*

*We **analysed** all these findings and we discussed how they matched best practice in Maths, English and Gaeilge. The findings of our recent WSE were also discussed and used to inform our actions. The school's **strengths and weaknesses** in these areas **were then identified** and openly discussed by staff.*

*We wrote **our SSE report** and **an improvement plan** was devised. An oral report of our main findings was given to the parent body at a meeting of the Parents' Association.*

*We are continuing to **monitor how our planned actions are being implemented** and to what degree our targets are being met*

The staff has worked towards putting in place a three-year improvement plan for literacy. We are introducing revised comprehension strategies, guided reading and the Literacy Lift-off Programme. Having piloted Literacy Lift-Off in the Senior Infant class in March 2011, we implemented it in Senior Infants and First Class in March-May 2012. Initially a running record was completed on one child per group. This year, this has been extended to all pupils starting with Senior Infants to establish their instructional level in reading. Parents have become involved, under the class teacher's supervision. Aspects of the literacy and numeracy strategy were explained to the board and parents' association at meetings and in written communication. We purchased a number of resources to assist in implementing our actions for improvement.

In our improvement plan we set specific targets for improvement in comprehension and vocabulary. Guided Reading is to be extended to second class and new material has been purchased for this initiative. Literacy Lift-Off is also to be extended and introduced into second and third class in the second term. The need to link classroom-based work and the work of the SEN team was also identified. We decided to review team teaching to ensure a balance between the withdrawal model and in-class support, and to continue our increased emphasis on Early Intervention, diagnosing and remediating difficulties at an early stage.

THE SSE PROCESS – YOUR QUESTIONS

In the course of our SSE presentations to schools, you have asked some questions about the process. We've noted three specific areas where you have looked for clarification. We'll continue to respond to your questions in the next issue and hope that our clarifications will be helpful in your ongoing engagement with SSE.

Q. *What timeframe should we be following for the various stages of the SSE process?*

A. All schools should now be engaging in the SSE process. Many schools have gathered and analysed the evidence they require to make judgements about what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed. Some of these schools will have completed an SSE report and developed a school improvement plan by the end of the 2012/13 school year. If so, they'll be ready to implement their actions and strategies for improvement by September 2013.

Other schools are still in the process of gathering or analysing their evidence to help them draw conclusions about their areas of focus for improvement. As soon as they have identified their strengths and areas for improvement, they should complete an SSE report and develop a school improvement plan.

The final date for all schools to complete their first report and plan is the end of the 2013/14 school year. As soon as the SSE report and school improvement plan are completed, a summary of these should be provided to the school community. The board of management should decide how best to ensure that all members of the school community receive these.

Q. *How should DEIS schools manage the SSE process while also engaging in the targeted planning required for DEIS?*

A. DEIS schools should be well placed to engage in the SSE process. They are required to develop action plans to improve a range of aspects of school life, including literacy and numeracy. The SSE process will help them to ensure that the targets in their action plans relate to areas for improvement that have been identified from the analysis of reliable evidence. DEIS schools that already have three-year improvement plans in place for literacy and numeracy should review these plans as part of their ongoing monitoring of implementation and make necessary changes based on evidence as required.

The SSE process will also help DEIS schools to ensure that all improvement plans include, wherever relevant, a focus on teaching and learning. They should use the SSE process, referencing the teaching and learning framework and evaluation criteria, when reviewing and implementing plans already in place; examining new areas of focus; completing new reports; and developing new action plans for improvement.

Using the SSE process to focus on aspects of teaching and learning, such as teaching approaches or pupil engagement in learning, should lead to improvements in the quality of pupil experiences in classrooms. This, in turn, should assist in improving attendance, retention and attainment, which are the focus of ongoing planning for improvement in DEIS schools.

DEIS schools should provide a summary of their SSE report and their action plan for improvement to their school community in the same time frame as all other schools.

Q. How should schools use the legislative and regulatory checklist and the policy checklist in the SSE Guidelines?

A. These checklists are provided to assist boards of management to use the SSE process to examine and report on school policies and practices. Evaluating these aspects of school life each year will enable boards to assure their school communities that the school is being managed effectively so that pupils can learn.

Each year, the board should set time aside to review its practice in the areas listed. It should ensure that board members are familiar with the content of the relevant legislation, rule, regulation or guideline. The board will then be in a position to determine if its practice is consistent with requirements. Where requirements are fully met, the board need only confirm this using the 'yes' box. Aspects for development should be noted in the relevant column of the checklist.

Targets and actions to address aspects of practice for development should become part of the school improvement plan.

The board should provide a modified version* of the completed checklists to the school community on an annual basis, as an appendix to the summary SSE report and school improvement plan.

*A template suitable for this purpose is available in the Resources section of the SSE website.