

SSE UPDATE

PRIMARY EDITION

ISSUE 2 – OCTOBER 2013

A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

This is the second issue of SSE Update, an e-bulletin for primary schools, which we hope will support your continuing engagement with the school self-evaluation process.

During the summer, we surveyed a sample of school principals to ask them about their schools' experience of the SSE process so far. We wanted to know what had been helpful to their schools in getting the process under way; what further resources we could provide on the SSE website; and what aspects of the process might, in their view, prove challenging. We also met the SSE advisory group, on which all the education partners are represented, and heard their views.

We have included in this issue of SSE Update articles that deal with some of the areas raised during these consultations.

You'll find an article looking at how Chapters 3 and 4 of the SSE Guidelines can be applied as a 'lens for learning', through which classroom practice can be evaluated and areas for improvement identified. The key idea here is that school improvement happens in every classroom and therefore involves every teacher.

Effective target-setting poses challenges. Are the targets soundly based and realistic? Do they emerge from good evidence-gathering and analysis? Are they SMART enough for you to measure how well they have been achieved? See page 3 for more on this topic.

Schools are aware of the need to have an SSE report and a school improvement plan (SIP), and the piece on page 4 aims to help you ensure that the SIP reflects a meaningful process, and doesn't become an end in itself.

Tiocfaidh tú freisin (lch 5) ar alt a bhaineann le cúrsaí Gaeilge, cúrsaí Gaelscolaíochta agus cúrsaí teanga. Tugann an t-alt seo léirgeas ar an dea-thionchar a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag an bpróiseas féinmheastóireachta ar theagasc agus ar fhoghlaim na Gaeilge.

We hope that you will find this material useful, and we'd welcome feedback and suggestions to info@schoolself-evaluation.ie.

The Inspectorate School Improvement and Quality Unit

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THE SSE PROCESS: A LENS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING



As you are working towards the development of your SSE report and SIP in your school, here are some key points to keep in mind. The most important thing to remember is that SSE is not an end in itself. Instead, it's a process that you can apply to any aspect of learning where you want to bring about improvement. For example, literacy can be examined through the lens of SSE by applying the 6-step process to the teaching and learning of oral language, reading and writing.

The second key point to remember is that school improvement happens in the classroom, and comes down to the quality of the learning that takes place there. You can begin to evaluate the quality of learning in your school, using the Teaching and Learning Quality Framework to focus on teaching approaches and learner experiences. The Framework is on page 24 of the *Guidelines*. Your school can use it to select the theme or sub-theme that is most likely to lead to an improved quality of learning.

For each theme and sub-theme, the *Guidelines* set out evaluation criteria and quality statements. The criteria are in bullet points; the quality statements are in paragraphs. Your school can use either or both to evaluate teaching and learning and place it on a quality continuum ranging from significant strengths to significant weaknesses. Treat them as benchmarks of standard that denote significant strengths in learning and teaching.

SSE should be a constructive, productive process, so the next key point is crucial: *make haste slowly* when evaluating your strengths and weaknesses. Your evaluation will guide you in writing your SSE report and in devising your School Improvement Plan. In the impetus to produce a SSE report and a SIP and to identify targets and related actions for improvement, don't forget to "stop and stare". Take time to draw conclusions about the evidence gathered and how it fits in with the Teaching and Learning Framework and the evaluation criteria.

It's really important to gauge how your school's teaching and learning compares with standards of best practice. And it's vital to really think about the Teaching and Learning Framework so that the targets you set, and the actions you plan to achieve them, focus on classroom practice. Unless you measure yourself against statements of significantly strong practice, you won't be able to ask "How are we doing?" and, more importantly, "What should we be doing in order to improve?"

Devising a good, useful SSE report and SIP is, in some ways, a very simple task. There are short templates to complete, indicating strengths and actions for improvement. At another level it's a more complex process involving analysis and judgement, then target-setting and action planning. So when your school is devising its SSE report, ask yourselves a few key questions:

- Have we considered that SSE is a lens through which all learning can be evaluated?
- Have we gathered enough appropriate evidence about our teaching and learning practices, and have we analysed it carefully to give us reliable information?
- Have we used the Framework to look at our teaching approaches and learner experiences?
- Have we measured our practice against the evaluation criteria in the guidelines?

Asking these questions will ensure that the *products* of the self-evaluation process – the SSE report and SIP – truly reflect each step taken along the way. And the targets you set will be realistic, soundly-based, and focused on attainable improvement. Ní beag sin!

EFFECTIVE TARGET-SETTING IN THE SSE PROCESS

Target setting is a crucial part of the SSE process. It's the essential link between what you have found out from the data you have analysed, and the actions you're going to take to bring about improvement. However, schools can have difficulty with this stage of the process. Perhaps your data analysis has thrown up something unexpected, so the actions you thought you'd be taking have to change. Perhaps you're anxious to get that improvement plan down on paper, and you're cutting short the time needed for clear thinking in order to set effective targets. But getting it right when it comes to target setting is the key to a successful SSE process, so it's worth spending time on.

What do we know about effective target setting? Firstly, you require baseline data – for example, reliable information about where your pupils are at with regard to attainment, attitudes to learning, expectations of themselves, and so on. Next, analysing this data will point up strengths and weaknesses in the current situation. This leads to the third SSE step: making judgements and drawing conclusions from the data. Remember that data doesn't provide the answers; its function is to lead you to the right questions. What needs to be improved? Which of the present findings would you target as a priority for development?

Once you've drawn conclusions from the data analysis, the next step is to discuss and agree where you want your school to get to. In other words, what would represent improvement? Let's think again about the data, and consider how you can best use it to set targets. The data you've got could be 'hard' data: for example, 45% of your pupils score at or above the median percentile in standardised literacy tests. The data could be 'soft': for example, 30% of your senior pupils have negative attitudes towards Mathematics. Using such baseline data, you can state your school improvement targets in simple, measurable terms.

The mention of measurement can often give rise to uneasy feelings in schools. There's a perception that if what is *measurable* is emphasised, what is *valuable* will be overlooked. But learning how to measure what you value is essential if you are to be confident that school improvement has happened. And, while 'school improvement' seems like an impersonal thing, what it actually means is that teachers can be certain their work has had a positive impact, and pupils can experience a sense of pride in the real and measurable progress they have made.

Now, back to the targets themselves! The acronym SMART is well-known and helpful. There are some variations in how it's explained, and the list below contains most of them. (The first word in each line is the one referred to in the *Guidelines*, but the others are worth bearing in mind also.) Each component of the acronym is significant, and it's easy to see that setting SMART targets is not a job to be rushed.

- S**pecific
- M**easurable and manageable
- A**ttainable, appropriate, agreed
- R**ealistic, relevant, recorded
- T**ime-bound

In considering what's specific and measurable, it may be useful to state your target as a percentage change in the current situation. In considering what's attainable and realistic, you need to decide: how much change? Too little, and your target remains in the comfort zone; too much, and you're setting yourselves up for failure. Your timeframe will depend on the rate of change you think is desirable and workable.

Finding the 'Goldilocks' target – the one that is just right – will involve different considerations in every school, and should make for a very constructive discussion of what improvement will actually look like in your school, and for your students.

DEVELOPING YOUR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

School self-evaluation should be a paper-light process. However, some written account of what you have done and what you plan to do is invaluable. It gives you a record of the **conclusions** you've been able to draw from analysing your data; the **priorities** you've identified; the **targets** you've set; and the **actions** you're going to implement to achieve those targets. These four linked areas – conclusions; priorities; targets; actions – are essential components of your SSE report and school improvement plan (SIP).

You'll find a template* for the SSE report on page 62 of the *Guidelines*. Using the template will help to ensure that you have a record of the focus of the evaluation, the context factors you considered, and the findings that emerged from your analysis of the evidence. However, the SSE report isn't just a record of what you did. Its main purpose in the process is to help you as a school to home in on the question: "what do these findings tell us about what we need to do now?" For that reason, the most important aspects of the SSE report are the **conclusions** you've reached about the strengths and weaknesses in your current practice and, arising from these, the **priorities** you've selected for action towards improvement.

Let's turn now to the SIP. This is where you will record your school improvement **targets** and the **actions** linked to them. The previous article gives some advice on setting SMART targets. But what will really make a difference and bring about improvement is how you *use* the targets you've set. You're using targets well where you:

- identify the best strategies and resources to reach the targets
- monitor your progress towards the targets
- amend the targets or strategies in the light of experience

Your SIP should take account of these three elements of effective target-using.

First of all, the SIP should be specific about the actions and strategies your school has selected; who will implement them; and what resources will be used. You need to identify actions and strategies that are likely to be successful, so consider what you've found out about your strengths and weaknesses. What is working already and needs to be used more widely? What ideas can you take from the evaluation criteria and quality statements that might address the weaknesses in practice you have identified? The essential question is, what can every teacher do every day in every classroom to work towards the agreed targets?

Your SIP should reflect the fact that it's a record of work in progress, so it also needs to take account of the other two elements mentioned above: monitoring of progress, and amending targets or actions where changes are required. To support these elements effectively, your SIP needs to state how you will know when you've achieved the target. What are your success criteria? And what timeframe have you set out for reviewing progress and targets?

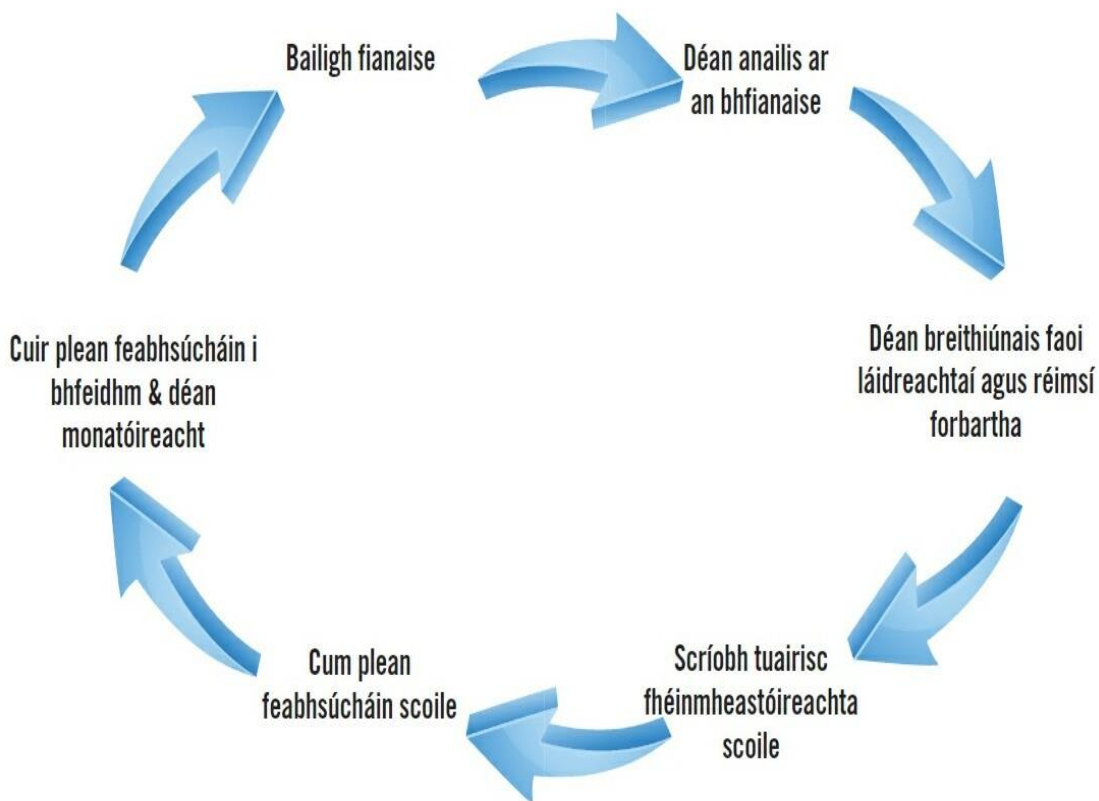
For the SSE process in your school to be meaningful and successful, you need to ensure that it follows a logical progression from one step to the next. Sometimes, the temptation to run ahead of your evidence is strong. It's possible that the actions you've identified haven't been articulated clearly enough to show how they are linked to your conclusions and priorities, or how exactly they will achieve your improvement targets. Writing your SSE report and developing your SIP provides you with an opportunity to check that each step of the process is part of a clear and logical continuum.

It's worth bearing in mind that the more your SSE report and your SIP show the links between each stage of the process, the more useful they will be to your school as you chart your school improvement journey. It will also be much more straightforward to provide a summary SSE report and SIP for your school community. *You'll find templates for reports and plans at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/index.php/resources/.

FMS: ÁIS CHUN FOGHLAIM TEANGA A CHINNTIÚ AGUS A NEARTÚ

Do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge tá dhá ghné ag baint leis an teanga – foghlaim na Gaeilge agus foghlaim trí mheán na Gaeilge. Tá go leor rudaí ag tarlú sa scoil lán-Ghaeilge ó cheann ceann an lae ó thaobh fhoghlaim na Gaeilge de: tá daltaí ag foghlaim teanga ón múinteoir, tá siad á foghlaim óna chéile sa rang agus lasmuigh de.

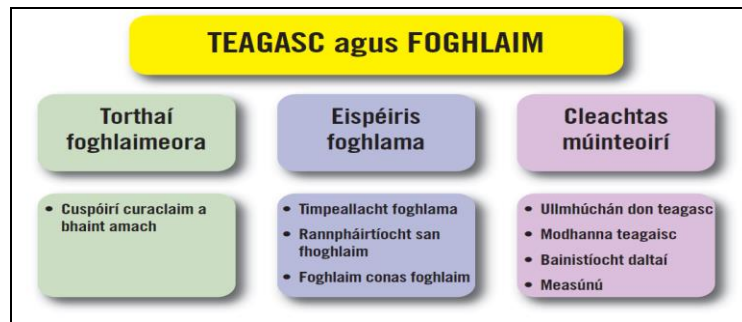
Glactar leis sa chomhthéacs seo go bhfuil ceisteanna faoi leith ann ar gá díriú orthu. An bhfuil Gaeilge ar a dtoil ag na daltaí? Cén leibhéal gnóthachtála atá acu sa teanga? An bhfuil dóthain Gaeilge ag na daltaí i ngach rang chun an fhoghlaim nua a shealbhú? Cé chomh tacúil is atá gníomhaíochtaí foghlama do shealbhú seo na teanga? An bhfuil gach ceacht ina cheacht teanga? An bhfuil úsáid shaibhir na teanga trasna an churaclaim agus lasmuigh de mar dhlúth-chuid de bhur gcur chuigí múinteoireachta i bhur scoil? Agus ceist amháin eile: conas a chabhróidh **an próiseas FMS** libh cúrsaí teanga a mheas sa scoil?



Má tá deacracht le gné ar bith de seo seans gur gá filleadh ar an **gCreat Teagaisc agus Foghlama** agus féachaint ar na fo-théamaí. Is féidir anois grinnstaidéar a dhéanamh ar **thorthaí foghlaim** agus ar **na heispéiris foghlama** atá i bhfeidhm i bhur ranganna/bhur rangsheomraí/bhur gceachtanna. Nó b'fhéidir go mbeidh oraibh scrúdú a dhéanamh ar **chleachtas na múinteoirí**. Beidh **na fo-théamaí** cabhrach anois. An fiú timpeallacht foghlama na ndaltaí a scrúdú? Cé chomh teanga-shaibhir is atá an prionta sa timpeallacht? Cé chomh rannpháirteach is atá na daltaí san fhoghlaim? In ullmhúchán na múinteoirí an bhfuil foghlaim chéimniúil na teanga á pleanáil, an bhfuil na cuir chuigí teagaisc oiriúnach don rang agus cén cineál meastóireachta a dhéantar ar an bhfoghlaim?

Má chinneann sibh, mar shampla, nach bhfuil na cuspóirí curaclaim á mbaint amach ó thaobh na teanga de, is féidir libh leas tairbheach a bhaint as na **ráitis cháilíochta**. Déanann siad seo cur síos ar chaighdeán agus ar dhea-chleachtas. Tabharfaidh siad deis daoibh bhur gcleachtas féin a chur i gcomparáid le dea-chleachtas agus cinntí a ghlacadh faoin gcaighdeán atá sroichte agaibh i bhur

scoil. Beidh sibh ábalta ansin pian feabhsúcháin a chumadh bunaithe ar an bpróiseas tagarmharcála seo.



Thar aon ní eile tugann an próiseas FMS seans don scoil géarmhachnamh a dhéanamh ar an bpróiseas foghlama. Déanann an scoil machnamh ar an teagasc agus ar an bhfoghlaim chun a chinntiú go bhfuil gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sásúil. Má tá sibh ag féachaint, mar shampla, ar ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí sa teanga, idir labhairt, scríobh agus léamh, mar atá rianaithe san Imlitir, tá croícheisteanna ann ar gá don scoil a fhreagairt le linn an phróisis seo.

- Conas a chinntimid go bhfuil foghlaim theangeolaíochta na ndaltaí ag forbairt?
- Cé chomh mór agus a éiríonn linn inár scoil gnóthachtáil na ndaltaí a ardú sna scileanna teanga?
- Cé chomh maith agus a dhíríonn an teagasc inár scoil ar riachtanais foghlama na ndaltaí ó thaobh na teanga de?

Nuair atá freagra tugtha do na saincheisteanna seo beidh an scoil ábalta díriú ar an gcéad chéim eile: díriú ar fheabhsúchán agus an feabhsúchán sin a choimeád. Cuirfidh an scoil an **Plean Feabhsúcháin** i bhfeidhm agus leanfar ar aghaidh ar déanamh monatóireachta ar a bhfuil ag tarlú.

Seans go mbeidh oraibh fillleadh ar na cinntí a glacadh agus iad a athdhearadh muna bhfuil siad insroichte. Tá foghlaim thábhachtach i gceist anseo; ní próiseas líneach atá san FMS ach próiseas ciorclach: tá **sé chéim** sa phróiseas seo. Nuair a théann sibh tríd na céimeanna difriúla, uaireanta is gá fillleadh ar an gcéim a chuaigh roimis le bheith cinnte go bhfuil nascanna cuí a ndéanamh agus leanúnachas tógalach á chinntiú. Is féidir leis an bpróiseas FMS, mar sin, a bheith mar áis luachmhar don scoil lán-Ghaeilge agus sibh ag iarraidh fócas a chur agus a choinneáil ar ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí, go háirithe ó thaobh na teanga de.

THE SSE PROCESS IN 2013/14 – A FEW PROMPTS

The SSE process was introduced to schools in 2012/13. In beginning their SSE journey, schools were advised to start small and build on what they know. Useful prompts at this stage of the process are:

- *How are we doing in this specific area?*
- *How do we know?*
- *What else do we need to find out?*
- *Do we need to find out more from our pupils?*

Once you've gathered the evidence, the next step is to turn data into information:

- *Have we turned our standardised literacy and numeracy test results data into information for ourselves?*
- *As well as relating our pupils' learning outcomes to national figures, have we looked at them closely enough within our own school context? Year-on-year?*
- *What have pupil/parent questionnaires told us about how we are doing, and what we might need to look at again?*
- *Have we used external evaluations to the full?*

When making judgements about your current practice, use the quality continuum. Remember that identifying your strengths is a very useful step towards addressing the areas that need improvement.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant Strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weakness

- *What can we learn from what we are doing well?*

Your SSE report* needs to be clear about the conclusions you've arrived at, and the priorities you've identified. It's also a brief record of the steps you've taken so far. Part of this step of the process is ensuring that your school is operating in line with Department regulations and all relevant legislation. Your school also needs to prepare a summary SSE report for the school community, so that parents are aware of the SSE process in the school.

- *Have we used the SSE report template in the Guidelines (pages 62-3) or on the SSE website to help us prepare our own report?*
- *Have we used the most up-to-date checklist on the website to ensure we are compliant and have all the necessary policies in place?*
- *Are we ready to write a summary report for our wider school community?*
N.B. The summary report has to be available to the whole school community by June 2014.

Your school improvement plan (SIP) is the companion document to your SSE report. Look again at page 4 of this bulletin for guidance in writing a useful and comprehensive SIP.

- *Is the SIP we are developing clear on targets; actions; people responsible; success criteria; timeframes?*
- *Are we ready to write a summary SIP for our wider school community?*
N.B. The summary SIP has to be available to the whole school community by June 2014.

*You might like to look at some completed SSE reports and SIPs in the primary section of this website