



**Date:** 17/06/2020

**Circular Number:** 0040/2020

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

**To: Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards**

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSPECTION AND  
SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION FOR THE 2020/2021 SCHOOL YEAR**

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

### **Summary**

This circular

- sets out adjustments to arrangements for school self-evaluation and school inspection that recognise the considerable challenges faced by teachers, school principals, boards of management, pupils, parents and school communities in the 2020/21 school year
- acknowledges the significant efforts teachers, school leaders and boards of management have made to support pupils at home during the period of school closure in 2020
- clarifies the arrangements for school self-evaluation (SSE) for the 2020/2021 school year and notifies schools that there will be no new requirements for SSE in this period
- encourages schools to use SSE to plan for and address the challenges involved in the return to schools in the 2020/21 school year and/or complete SSE work that would normally have been completed in March-June 2020
- provides information on the Inspectorate's advisory, research and evaluation work in schools in the 2020/21 school year
- supersedes Circulars 0039/2016 and 0016/2018 concerning school self-evaluation in the period 2016-2020.

## **1. Context of this circular**

In March 2020, the government closed all schools for public health reasons, due to the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus). When schools closed, teachers and school leaders were requested by the Department to put arrangements in place to provide for continuity of learning and schooling for their pupils.

The Department recognises that closing schools initiated a challenging period for school leaders and teachers as they worked to support children's wellbeing and learning, the wellbeing of teachers and school staff, and to change approaches to teaching and learning. The particular challenges faced by those pupils who are homeless or marginalised, learners with special educational needs and those families who are experiencing stress and uncertainty are also acknowledged by the Department. Throughout the period, individual schools and teachers were able to make significant efforts to support pupils at home and they experienced both challenges and successes during this unprecedented time.

Following the planned re-opening of schools in line with public health advice, additional challenges are likely to emerge across a wide range of areas, including the organisation of the school's daily routines and pupil and staff wellbeing.

## **2. School self-evaluation in the 2020/2021 school year**

Under Circular 0039/2016, the second cycle of school self-evaluation (SSE) was due to cover the period from September 2016 to June 2020 and a third cycle was due to commence in September 2020. The Department of Education and Skills recognises that because of the extended period of school closure that has taken place since 12 March 2020, pupils, parents, teachers, principals and boards of management may have been unable to engage in SSE activity during this time. In view of this, the Department of Education and Skills is extending the second cycle of SSE until June 2021. Consequently, the third cycle of SSE, which had been due to commence in September 2020, will now commence in September 2021.

This means that there will be no new SSE requirements for schools in the school year 2020/21.

In the school year 2020/21, schools will have the flexibility to:

- Use the SSE process to help them to address the challenges that will arise from the re-opening of schools in line with public health advice. These may include, for example, issues concerning the organisation of the school's daily routines, pupil and staff wellbeing, adjustments (if required) to curriculum and assessment, and changes to teaching, learning and assessment practices

AND/OR

- Complete work on the aspects of teaching and learning that they had selected as the focus for self-evaluation in the period 2016-2020.

As schools use the SSE process to identify the key actions that are relevant to their own context, they may find it useful to include additional or adjusted targets/actions in their existing school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan. As always, while documentation should not be the focus of SSE throughout 2020/21, key decisions should be recorded in a way that is meaningful for the school community.

### **3. The Inspectorate's advisory, research and evaluation work in schools in the 2020/2021 school year**

The Inspectorate will adjust its programme of work to support schools and the education system as the return to school takes place. The specific activities included in the Inspectorate's work will be kept under review and will evolve in line with public health advice and the prevailing health circumstances.

#### *Advice and research*

The main focus of the Inspectorate's work in the first term of the 2020/2021 school year will be on its advisory work in schools. Through this work, inspectors will support school leaders, teachers, boards of management and school communities to provide effectively for the learning and progression of all children and young people – with a strong focus on the needs of vulnerable learners.

The Inspectorate will also engage in research work through which it will seek to identify and disseminate examples of effective practice where schools have been successful in addressing the needs of learners whose schooling has been disrupted and the curricular and other challenges posed by the return to schooling. The research will seek to gather and use the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, parents and learners to inform good practice throughout the school system.

The Inspectorate will also advise and support schools as appropriate in the implementation of public health advice relating to the health, safety and welfare of the school community in the context of guidance from the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills and other relevant authorities on creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

The Inspectorate's advisory and research work will be conducted through school visits or remotely in line with public health advice.

Schools will also be offered the opportunity to participate in Inspectorate-led advisory sessions. While the specific focus of each session will be determined by the school principal and senior management in line with the particular context of each school, possible themes for discussion could include areas such as ensuring that the

wellbeing of the school community is supported; identifying the strengths in teaching and learning in a blended learning environment; or assessing and providing for the current needs of learners. Schools can apply for an advisory session by emailing: [info@schoolself-evaluation.ie](mailto:info@schoolself-evaluation.ie)

### *Evaluation*

During the first term of the 2020/21 school year, the Inspectorate will focus on the advisory, support and research work above. Inspection activity will be confined to a small number of priority inspections, including: work to complete inspections commenced prior to 12 March 2020; a number of Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections; urgent Follow-through Inspections; and a limited number of other necessary inspections.

### *Further development*

It is envisaged that advisory, research and evaluation work will continue in the second and third terms of the school year 2020/21 and the Inspectorate is also planning for a carefully phased recommencement of a limited programme of normal inspection work in this period.

## **4. Completing the publication process for reports arising from inspections undertaken in 2019/20 year**

When school closed on 12 March 2020, a number of inspection reports were being processed for issue to schools for either factual verification or school response in preparation for publication on the website of the Department. As school boards and staff did not have access to school buildings from 12 March 2020, none of these reports was issued to schools. The Inspectorate will issue these reports to primary schools from 18 June 2020 but the normal time limits for the return of factual verification forms and school response forms will be extended to 11 September 2020.

However, if a school receives a report for factual verification or school response prior to 30 June 2020 and wishes to return the appropriate factual verification or school response form before 11 September 2020, the forms will be processed by the Inspectorate as soon as practicable.

Reports that were ready for publication in March 2020 will be published shortly on the website of the Department.

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