



Circular: 0032/2021

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

To: Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSPECTORATE ENGAGEMENT WITH
PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS
2021/2022 SCHOOL YEAR**

SUMMARY

This circular:

- Acknowledges the significant efforts teachers, school leaders and boards of management made to ensure that teaching and learning could be sustained safely during the 2020/21 school year
- Clarifies the arrangements for school self-evaluation (SSE) for the 2021/22 school year
- Provides information about the Inspectorate's planned advisory, evaluation and research work in schools for the 2021/22 school year
- Provides information on the Inspectorate's work on researching, supporting and monitoring the implementation of anti-bullying procedures in schools during the 2021/22 school year
- Supersedes Circular 0040/2020.

Introduction

The Inspectorate is very conscious of the very significant challenges that were faced by school principals, teachers and other school staff, boards of management, pupils, parents and school communities during the 2020/21 school year because of COVID-19. The Inspectorate's engagement with advisory, research and evaluation activities in schools during the last school year highlighted the outstanding efforts by many school leaders, staffs, boards, parents and the support services to keep schools operating safely and effectively, and to support pupils at home, while schools were fully or partially closed.



As the public health situation continues to improve, the Inspectorate looks forward to continuing its support for the work of schools in the 2021/22 school year, and to continuing the phased implementation of its inspection programme that will include incrementally a full range of inspection activity as the year progresses.

1. School self-evaluation (SSE)

1.1 School self-evaluation (SSE) in the 2021/2022 school year

Under Circular 0040/2020, the second cycle of SSE was extended until June 2021 and the third cycle was due to commence in September 2021. In light of the additional challenges faced by schools in the pandemic context and to allow consultation on the third cycle of SSE to take place, the Department of Education is extending the second cycle of SSE until June 2022. Consequently, the third cycle of SSE, which had been due to commence in September 2021, will now commence in September 2022.

In the 2021/22 school year, schools will continue with their current plans and priorities for SSE and have the flexibility to:

- Use the SSE process to help them to address the challenges that have arisen in the pandemic context. These may include for example, addressing the needs of pupils whose learning was particularly impacted during the pandemic, supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, and supporting mediation of particular curriculum areas/subjects

AND/OR

- Complete any work remaining on the aspects of teaching and learning that they had previously selected as the focus for self-evaluation

AND/OR

- Address other areas that they have identified as a priority in accordance with their school context and the needs of the children and young people in their school

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. While documentation should not be the focus of SSE throughout 2021/22, key decisions should be recorded in a way that is meaningful for the school community.



1.2 SSE and Wellbeing

In making decisions on the focus of SSE in the next year, the attention of schools is drawn to the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2025.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice was published by the Department in 2018 and updated in 2019. It sets out the ambition and vision that the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education in Ireland. The Policy included the intention that all schools and centres for education will use the SSE process to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle by 2023.

In view of the impact of Covid-19 on school activities, this date, as advised in Circular 0018/2021, is now changed to 2025. The policy can be accessed at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/wellbeingineducation/wellbeing-in-education.html>

Wellbeing resources to support this process are also available at the above link. These resources include:

- Indicators of Success and Statements of Effective Practice
- Parent, teacher and pupil questionnaires
- Focus group guidelines

A Directory of Wellbeing Services, Supports and Resources for Schools is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/af24b-wellbeing-guidance-documents-for-parents-students-and-schools/#school-staff-primary-schools>

Following an action research project involving thirty schools, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is currently developing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to support schools as they engage in a wellbeing promotion process. This national rollout of CPD is due to begin in Autumn 2021, depending on public health advice, and will continue for three years.

1.3 SSE and DEIS

A school's DEIS action plan is its school improvement plan for the purposes of SSE; no additional or separate plan is necessary.

DEIS schools should continue their DEIS action planning across the key themes of DEIS using the SSE six-step process. On the basis of the evidence gathered, schools should target their resources, specific interventions and supports at the pupils who are most at risk of educational disadvantage.



An annual review of the current DEIS plan should be conducted to ensure up-to-date information. Schools will be at different points of the three-year cycle in DEIS planning and can extend their plan for another year, regardless of the year they are in. In light of the annual review, the current plan should be amended, and targets and interventions adjusted as necessary. Schools at the end of the three-year cycle in their planning are not required to commence a new three-year plan.

1.4 Developing SSE practices in school

In the January-March 2022 period, the Inspectorate will commence work with school principals and/or deputy principals in a sample of schools, including DEIS schools and Irish-medium schools, with a view to assisting them to develop their SSE processes, including their capacity to gather, analyse and use information from school self-evaluation. As in all such developmental work, schools can choose or decline to join the project, and any reports on the developmental work in individual schools will not be published. If your school is interested in participating in this developmental work, please email esru@education.gov.ie.

1.5 Consultation on the next cycle of SSE

In preparation for the next cycle of SSE, 2022/2025, the Department and its Inspectorate will engage in consultation with all stakeholders, including principals, school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. This will provide a very valuable opportunity to consider what is working well, what the next focus of SSE should be, and what additional actions should be taken to support the use and further development of SSE in primary schools and special schools.

As part of the consultation, the Inspectorate will carry out surveys and/or focus groups with a range of education stakeholders in the September-December 2021 term. The outcomes of the surveys/focus groups will inform the wider consultation with education stakeholders on the future direction of SSE.

1.6 SSE advisory visits

The Inspectorate will continue to provide SSE advisory visits during the 2021/22 school year. Schools can apply for an advisory session by emailing info@schoolself-evaluation.ie.



2. The Inspectorate's planned advisory, evaluation and research work in schools during the 2021/22 school year

2.1 Evaluation

Over the course of the 2021/22 school year, the Inspectorate will continue its phased implementation of an inspection programme that leads incrementally to a full range of inspection activity as the year progresses. This inspection activity, which will place an emphasis on the provision of advice and support to schools, will be fully cognisant of, and in line with, the prevailing public health advice.

Initially, the main focus of our work will be on supporting and advising teachers and schools on teaching and learning through incidental inspection visits. We will also use these incidental visits to collect national information about aspects of schools' work as described in section 2.2 and 2.3 below. In addition to our programme of incidental inspection visits, we will also carry out Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections (CPSI), Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling inspection visits (SSPS), urgent follow-through inspections and limited numbers of inspections of special educational provision. We will also complete inspections commenced in the 2020/21 school year.

From January 2022, we will re-commence a broader range of inspection activities on a phased basis, including curriculum evaluations, DEIS inspections and whole school evaluations (WSE).

2.2 Research and development

During the 2021/22 school year, the Inspectorate will engage in research work that will facilitate thematic review of provision and practice in schools, and the provision of a number of composite reports that will be used for national reporting and research purposes. The information for these thematic reviews will be gathered initially during incidental inspections. The data may also be gathered during other inspection types as they recommence on a phased basis.

The research will focus on themes that are relevant to the pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, such as how schools are addressing the needs of children and young people who were particularly impacted by the school closures during the pandemic.

2.2.1 Anti-bullying

As part of its research during the 2021/22 school year, the Inspectorate will be looking at the extent to which schools are engaging with the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools, (2013)*.

Bullying behaviour, by its very nature, undermines and dilutes the quality of education. Research shows that bullying can have short-term and long-term



effects on the physical and mental well-being of pupils, on engagement with school, on self-confidence and on the ability to pursue ambitions and interests. The *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools, (2013)* give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and addressing school-based bullying behavior, and in dealing with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere.

As the 2021/22 school year progresses, the Inspectorate will, during incidental inspections, collect some information about the implementation of aspects of anti-bullying measures in schools. The areas of focus for this research will be on themes such as:

- The extent to which schools have anti-bullying policies in place in line with *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)*
- The termly reporting by principals to the board of management on anti-bullying matters as detailed in *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)*
- Annual reviews by boards of management of anti-bullying policies and their implementation
- The communication of schools' anti-bullying policies to all members of the school community (BOM, teachers, learners and parents)
- The recording of incidents of bullying behaviour in accordance with the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)*

Following the incidental inspection, the Inspectorate will:

- Provide a short written note to the school on its findings in relation to the above areas of focus; this note can be used by schools to inform its anti-bullying measures and to take any necessary actions to strengthen these
- Use the findings about anti-bullying measures arising from the incidental inspections to inform a composite report that will, in turn, inform the Department of Education's work in updating the anti-bullying national strategy and procedures for schools.

The Inspectorate will also work with schools on the collaborative development of a reflective framework to enable schools (teachers, leaders, boards) to reflect on the quality of their anti-bullying measures.

Schools' effectiveness in implementing *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools, (2013)* is already part of the range of issues examined and reported upon in whole school evaluations (WSEs). From January 2022, the extent to which schools are implementing the Anti-bullying



Procedures in relation to the five areas of focus outlined above will be reported on in WSEs and other inspection types.

An online webinar about these developments will be provided for schools and teachers in September 2021.

2.2.2 Pupils with very high levels of need

Research available to the Department suggests that some pupils with very high levels of need have struggled to engage meaningfully with their schools over the past two school years. The Inspectorate research will therefore include engagement with school management during the course of incidental inspections in a sample of schools to ascertain the extent to which pupils with very high levels of need have progressed since the full resumption of teaching and learning onsite in schools.

2.2.3 Reduced timetables

Inspectors will engage with school management during the course of incidental inspections to ascertain the extent to which, if any, schools have placed some pupils on reduced timetables. The areas of focus for this research will be on the implementation of Departmental guidance on this practice in schools, including themes such as:

- That pupils are placed on reduced timetables only on an exceptional basis where all other measures available to the school have not worked
- That the full agreement of parents/guardians is secured before the pupil is placed on a reduced timetable
- That the reduced timetable should operate for a limited time and with a plan agreed with parents/guardians as to the pupil's full resumption of school.

2.2.4 Other research themes

The Inspectorate's research will also focus on themes that are relevant to the Department's Action Plan such as Education for Sustainable Development, the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning, STEM, and creativity.



3. Further information and useful documentation

A suite of guidance materials, agreed with the education partners, to support primary schools and special schools in mediating the curriculum in the context of the 2021/22 school year is being developed and will be published at gov.ie.

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