

Developing a School Plan

Guidelines for Primary Schools



School Planning



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An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science
Ireland



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Foreword



Foreword by the Minister for Education and Science,
Mr. Micheál Martin, TD

Schools are unique communities bringing together diverse individuals in order to help children develop to their full potential. Schools face many challenges and planning to meet these challenges is a vital part of the school's work. These *Guidelines* have been developed and published to help with this task.

The educational needs of our children must act as the principal stimulus for educators to guide all school planning for the welfare of our pupils in the years that lie ahead. I am confident that these *Guidelines* will contribute substantially to the work of schools in planning for the future and in adapting to change, while still retaining commitment to the values and standards which have been part of primary education in Ireland for decades. The *Guidelines* are part of a package of supports/resources on school development planning which I am putting in place for all primary and second-level schools.

The publication of the *Guidelines* is timely in the context of the recent Education Act. The *Guidelines* will help schools to fulfil their duties as outlined in the Act. The aim of the *Guidelines* is to assist schools in delivering quality in their own educational settings. They will help teachers to look at their own schools, to review what is currently taking place, and to influence and to guide the development of the School Plan. The *Guidelines* place a particular emphasis on collaboration within the entire school community.

I wish to express my gratitude to all who played a part in the preparation and production of these *Guidelines*. In that regard, I wish to thank especially the representatives of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Catholic Primary School Managers' Association, National Parents' Council—Primary, Association of Primary Teaching Sisters, Church of Ireland Board of Education and the Teaching Brothers' Association who worked on the Consultative Committee during the preparation of the *Guidelines*.

School development planning provides, I believe, an exciting opportunity for helping our schools to take ownership of their development. I and my Department will do everything we can to assist schools in their work.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Micheál Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Micheál Martin



Acknowledgements

A considerable number of people were involved in the design and compilation of this publication, *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools*. In particular, the contribution and dedicated commitment of the following are gratefully acknowledged:

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1

In primary education today, much greater emphasis is placed on viewing the work of the school as a single unit rather than on considering it as a group of individual independent classrooms. Consequently, corporate and co-operative planning has become a common feature in the work of many primary schools. This has found particular expression in the development of school plans in a very large number of schools.

1.2

The valuable contribution which school planning can make to schools has been formally recognised by a wide range of educational interests. For some time, the practice of formulating school plans has been endorsed and promoted by the Department of Education and Science, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the National Parents' Council-Primary and the managerial bodies. The availability of published documentation from education centres as well as from teachers' unions has contributed substantially to the implementation of school planning within a growing number of schools. These developments are reflected in section 21 of the *Education Act, 1998* where the important role that school planning can play in promoting effective schools is recognised by making it incumbent on all boards of management to arrange for the preparation, dissemination and review of school plans. (A copy of the relevant section is contained in Appendix 8 of these *Guidelines*).

1.3

It is intended that *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools* will serve as a resource for schools as they seek to advance the process of school planning. The purpose of the *Guidelines* is to assist the principal and teachers in a primary school to produce a *School Plan* in consultation with the board of management and with the parents of the pupils attending the school. As every primary school is unique (in relation to its staffing, its pupils, its support structures and the availability of resources) the strategies employed for preparing and producing a *School Plan* will vary from school to school.

1.4

The development of a *School Plan* will take time. It is essential, therefore, that time is made available for this purpose so that planning can become an integral part of the life of the school.



Chapter 2

The School Plan

2.1 The need for a School Plan

It is accepted that the most effective organisations are those which place a great emphasis on clarifying their aims and objectives, as well as engaging in corporate, collaborative and comprehensive planning in order to achieve those aims and objectives.

The school is also an organisation and likewise needs to be effective. In order to be so, it needs to enable all its partners to join in the clarification and statement of its aims and objectives and to agree on strategies to achieve them. School-based planning is the most important means through which this is done.

To assist the school in becoming effective and in promoting school improvement, a strategy is necessary to harmonise the sometimes differing expectations of teachers, boards of management and parents. Collaborative school planning and the production of a *School Plan* can provide a framework for the development of such a strategy.

While the *School Plan* will ensure adherence to the school's own aims and objectives, it will also enable all partners to be aware of and to subscribe to the stated over-arching aims of the education system as expressed

- by statute
- in curriculum guidelines
- in the circulars of the Department of Education and Science
- in accepted national policy reports and documents.

2.2 Purpose of the School Plan

The *School Plan* has as its essential purpose the achievement of school effectiveness as well as being a significant support for school improvement. It will help the school to realise its stated aims and objectives which will be firmly directed towards meeting the present and anticipated needs of the pupils. It will help to ensure quality in teaching and learning throughout the school. In helping to achieve effectiveness, the *School Plan* will direct attention towards those areas of school activity which are accepted as being essential in ensuring effectiveness.

Features of effective schools

The following are regarded as important features of schools which are effective:

- purposeful leadership by the principal
- curriculum planning and development
- appropriate communication structures
- teacher/classroom preparation
- intellectually challenging teaching
- an environment in the classroom which is conducive to learning
- a positive climate
- parental involvement
- assessment and record keeping
- consistency in the implementation of agreed policies.

The *School Plan* will serve as a basis for the work of the school as a whole and also for evaluating and reporting on whole school progress and development.

2.3 Definition of the School Plan

What is a School Plan?

The *School Plan* is a statement of the educational philosophy of the school, its aims and how it proposes to achieve them. It deals with the total curriculum and with the organisation of the school's resources, including staff, space, facilities, equipment, time and finance. It includes the school's policies on such key issues as: *pupil assessment, special needs, record-keeping, staff development, teachers' preparation, homework, the code of behaviour, home-school links, equal opportunities in the curriculum for girls and boys, intercultural education, health and safety standards.*

What does a School Plan contain?

A *School Plan* contains *two* main sections. The *first* section deals with the total curriculum to be implemented in the school. The *second* section describes a range of policies and practices which largely have to do with administrative aspects of school life. Some of these policies will change very little from year to year.

The School Plan and school development

The *School Plan* is concerned with the creation of realistic targets which lead, if achieved over a period of time, to improvements in the education offered to children. The *School Plan* provides a shared long-term vision for the school. It establishes priorities for action and provides a mechanism for reviewing progress. The *School Plan* enables the school to control the direction and pace of its own development in a professional way.

2.4 Process of planning

School planning is essentially a process in which policy and plans evolve from the ever-changing and developing needs of the school community. An important dimension in this process of planning is the collaborative effort and co-operation that takes place between the principal, the teachers, the board of management and the parents of the pupils attending the school. The involvement of all the partners in this collaborative exercise enables each to make its own special contribution which in turn is complemented by the contributions of the other partners.

The process involved in school planning is of paramount importance to all those engaged in the exercise at all stages of the plan's development. Effective school planning involves constant review, design, implementation and evaluation.

2.5 Product

It is recognised that the outcome of the process of planning results in a product. This will take the form of a document or a series of documents.

As already stated, this product will include policies which are almost permanent features of the *School Plan* and will also include other policies which will be open to more frequent review and development.

Over a number of years the teachers in many primary schools have become involved in the process of school planning as a collaborative effort. This has resulted in the production of documents or plans which are of particular use to teachers in their schools. In general, these plans contain modules on the organisation and administration of the day-to-day activities of the school as well as statements on the curriculum and its implementation.

2.6 Consultation

In the process of school planning a significant role will be played by the principal, the teachers, the parents and the board of management. From this collaborative and consultative process a product, the *School Plan*, will be formulated thus ensuring the continuing enhancement of the education provided for the pupils in the school.



Chapter 3

First Steps in School Planning

3.1 Partners in planning

- The board of management will play an important role in supporting the school in producing and developing the *School Plan*.
- The principal in consultation and in co-operation with the teachers will be mainly responsible for initiating, designing and formulating the *School Plan*.
- Appropriate consultation with and involvement of the parents will be necessary for the complete development of the *School Plan*.
- The board of management will ratify the *School Plan* subject to the approval of the patron in relation to those aspects of the plan which concern the school's values and ethos.
- The commitment of all the partners to formulating a *School Plan* is essential.

3.2 Initial steps

While schools differ from each other in many important aspects, the process of formulating a *School Plan* has many features which are common to all schools. The planning strategies and tasks in devising a *School Plan* will generally follow the same sequence in all schools, though the time-scale and the degree of formality will vary according to the size and circumstances of the school.

In order to ensure success in the process of school planning some *preparatory exercises* or *activities* will be helpful. In order to get started any of the following activities could be considered :

- seeking advice and support from the local education centre
- seeking advice and support from the Incareer Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science
- organising a talk for the staff on planning and school improvement by an external speaker
- inviting a principal or a teacher from another school where progress has already been made in planning to make a presentation to a meeting of staff, board of management and parents' representatives

- meeting with a group of teachers, who have been involved in planning, with a view to gaining from their experience
- requesting an external facilitator with expertise in school development, to assist staff in school planning
- reaching agreement on the most appropriate structure for planning and on the consultation process to be adopted while accepting the need for flexibility.

3.3 Strategies for formulation and development

The following initiatives might be considered in the early stages of the development of a *School Plan* :

- setting up staff working groups to work on particular aspects of the *School Plan*
- involving the principal, deputy-principal and post-holders to perform special tasks related to specific segments of the *School Plan*
- requesting teachers with special knowledge or skills to do specific tasks in relation to planning
- encouraging teachers at particular levels (e.g. infants) to plan the co-ordination of their own work as an initial step towards co-ordinating the work of the school as a whole
- involving teachers in study and research and in the presentation of discussion and position papers on areas which affect the dynamic life of the school
- conducting special staff meetings to deal with the *School Plan*
- using questionnaires designed specifically to elicit opinions on curricular aspects or on particular areas of school life in general
- using broadly-based working groups involving staff, board of management and parent association representatives to develop aspects of the *School Plan*.

3.4 Assisting school planning

Attached to these guidelines are a number of appendices which can be copied and utilised by the principal and staff of a school to identify the aspects of school life which are most in need of urgent planning and development.

Appendix 1: School curriculum questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to ascertain which area of learning in the context of the total school curriculum is considered by the staff/group to be most in need of review.

Appendix 2: School development planning in mathematics

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assist the staff of a school to review mathematics in an in-depth manner with a view to formulating or revising a school plan in mathematics for the whole school. Likewise, similar questionnaires could be developed and used for reviewing and planning other areas of the curriculum.

Appendix 3: General questionnaire on reviewing and planning organisational issues

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assist the staff of a school to review the general organisation and administration of the school with a view to selecting areas that are most in need of review and planning.

Appendix 4: Techniques for group work on school development planning

Section A: The following techniques are described briefly as they may be of assistance to staff in their group discussions :

- Brainstorming
- Rounds
- Buzz Groups
- Snowballs
- SWOT Analysis.

Section B: Conditions for conducting effective group activities including staff meetings are vitally important. The notes in this section on the learning environment and on the equipment that can be used are intended to assist staff to collaborate effectively in ensuring successful planning meetings.

Appendix 5: Guidance on formulating a gender equality plan

Appendix 6: Guidance on formulating an information and communication technology plan for a school

Appendix 7: Guidance on formulating a policy to promote environmental awareness and care

Appendix 8: Section 21 Education Act 1998



Chapter 4

A Model for School Planning

4.1 Planning model

- Each school community will decide to use a particular model for producing a *School Plan* which is best suited to its own situation and needs.
- For the purposes of these *Guidelines*, it is suggested that the following model, which has four main stages, might be considered by schools :

Stage I : Review of current practice and provision

Stage II : Design of plan

Stage III : Programme of implementation

Stage IV : Evaluation

- These stages form a cyclical process which continually underpins the work of the school.
- As planning is integrated into the life of the school, it becomes a regular aspect of the work of the school rather than a detached exercise.
- *This process of planning will ensure that goals and targets related to the pupils' development and learning needs will be chosen, as well as the adoption of plans and strategies to achieve those targets. In this sense, the planning process will be inherently child-centred.*

4.2 Stage I : Review of current practice and provision

- At this stage, the curriculum and organisation of the school are reviewed. This review will allow opinions and facts to be gathered and views to be expressed on a wide range of issues relating to school life. (Initially, it may be agreed to carry out small-scale reviews in a selected key area, e.g. mathematics in junior and senior infants, home/school links, spellings, etc.)
- Decisions on aims and objectives and their review will be very important in the initial stages of planning. They will also be useful points of reference in the later stages of the development of the *School Plan*. The review of aims and objectives will be a powerful means of generating a shared sense of purpose and vision among the school community and will ensure a continuing commitment to achieving the school's fundamental purposes.

- The review stage can be used to identify priorities, strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities in the context of pupils' needs.
- All the partners can contribute to the review process. The feedback gathered from teachers, parents, boards of management and pupils will give staff visible support for their work and commitment to future plans. Wide consultation at this stage will ensure that the *School Plan* is grounded in the views of all those most intimately committed to the educational welfare of the pupils.

4.3 Stage II : Design of plan

In designing the *School Plan*, in terms of curriculum delivery (content, methodologies, use of resources) and school organisation, it is desirable that there would be agreement and clarity on the following :

- long-term priorities
- short-term priorities
- selection of manageable goals
- setting attainable targets
- an appropriate time-frame
- the tasks or projects to be undertaken so as to implement goals
- identification of resource requirements
- methods and modes of assessing and reporting.

4.4 Stage III : Programme of implementation

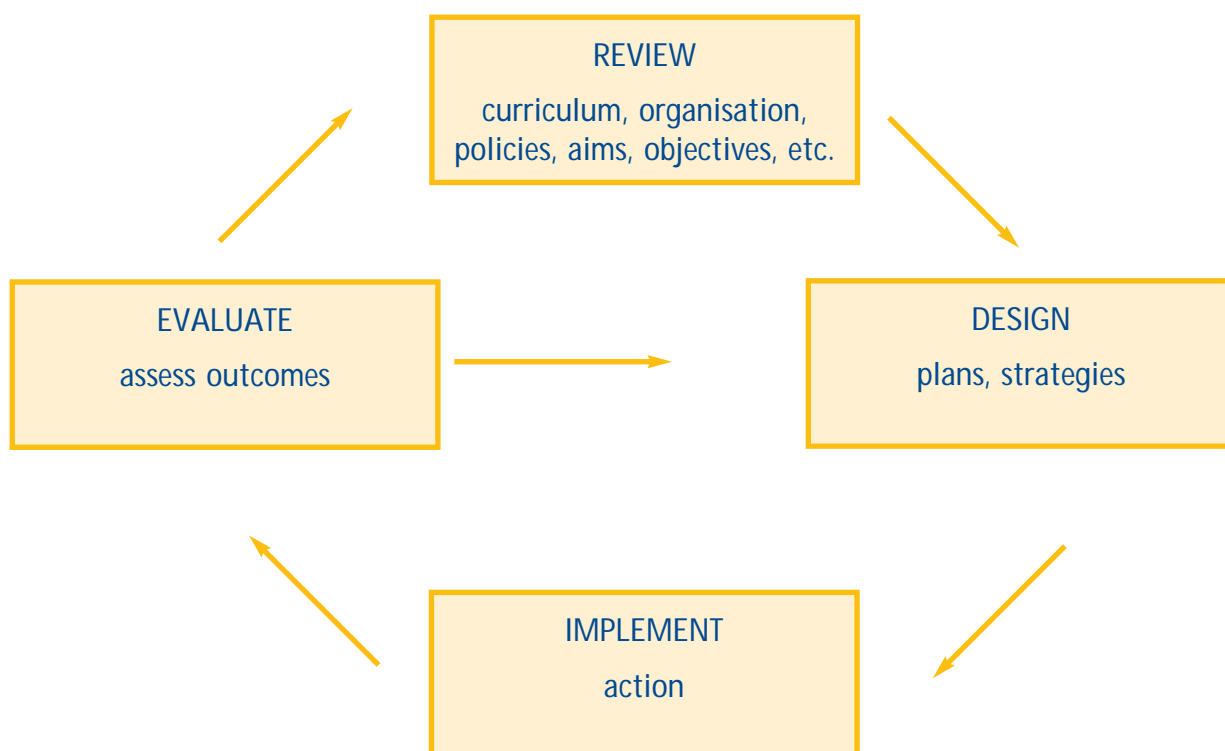
- Implementation is the important action stage of the planning process. If possible, mechanisms should be put in place by which teachers can be supported in their work and also by which difficulties can be highlighted and appropriately addressed. Review meetings (attended by the full staff or smaller groups) at which peer support and advice can be shared are useful in this context.
- The principal will strive to ensure that the climate in which the planning and implementation take place is positive, forward-looking, collaborative, equitable and supportive.

4.5 Stage IV : Evaluation

- Evaluation of the progress towards meeting the goals and targets of the *School Plan* is an integral part of the planning process.
- This evaluation reviews the extent to which it has been possible to achieve the goals and targets which were set. It takes account of the experience of all those involved in the tasks which were undertaken to achieve the targets.
- When it is agreed that the particular goals have been met, it will then be possible to identify other priorities at a further review and thus continue the cyclical dimension of the process.
- Where it has not been possible to achieve the goals fully, the process of identifying difficulties and barriers is undertaken and this is central to the further development of the *School Plan*.
- Where goals have not been met, the next stage in planning will aim at generating revised goals or revised strategies, as appropriate.
- This evaluation stage is an invaluable learning and mutually supportive exercise for all concerned in school planning. Clearly, it requires a strong element of trust and openness among the partners.

4.6 Four stages of planning

The above *stages of planning* can be represented as follows :



4.7 Planning issues

In formulating the *School Plan* the school will focus on issues such as :

- philosophy and aims
- context factors
- school policy - organisation
- staff development
- home-school partnership
- school policy - curriculum
- school-based evaluation
- gender equality.

4.8 Ongoing development of the School Plan

- It is important to point out that some parts of the *School Plan*, once devised, will not need to be changed very much, for example, the school's philosophy, having been carefully thought out, will hardly change fundamentally over the years.
- Policies on such issues as homework and safety will not usually be subject to change on a regular basis.
- Other parts of the *School Plan* will need to be adapted to changing circumstances.
- Priorities for development and action will arise on a regular basis from the ongoing review conducted by the school. These priorities will cover both curricular and non-curricular areas.



Chapter 5

School Philosophy and Aims

5.1 Uniqueness of a school

- Each primary school community is unique. It has its own pupils and teachers, its own set of parents, its own board of management, its own patron, its own particular school context and environment.
- The ethos of the school community, i.e. the totality of the attitudes, aspirations, expectations, beliefs, goals and traditions held by those in the school and the relationships that exist within it, as approved by the patron, is expressed in the school's philosophy.
- In formulating the *School Plan*, the school will outline its own philosophy. All the partners play an active role in this exercise.

5.2 School philosophy

In formulating its own philosophy and in reflecting on its own ethos, a school may wish to consider some of the following:

- its view of the true purpose of education and how it proposes to achieve it
- the uniqueness and importance of every human being
- the potential for growth and development that exists in each person
- the acceptance of diversity among people
- the importance of encouraging self-actualisation
- the importance of developing a positive self-concept in each individual
- the promotion of gender equality in all aspects of school life
- the cultivation of opportunities for social participation
- the importance of fostering co-operation

- the place of the school in the community
- the expectations of the school's community.

5.3 School aims

Aims are broad general statements that outline the educational purposes and goals which the school seeks to attain. The formulation of such aims is an active, dynamic process. It will be helpful to a school in formulating its own specific aims to draw on the following resources:

- current documentation available from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- the aims outlined in the various chapters of *Curaclam na Bunscoile, Teacher's Handbook, Parts 1 and 2*
- suggested aims as outlined in the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990 : pages 10-12)*.

In general, the school's aims will seek to promote the intellectual, physical, social, personal, spiritual, moral and aesthetic development of all its pupils.

Suggested aims

In particular, the following examples may serve as a guide to schools in their own formulation of aims :

- to foster an understanding and critical appreciation of the values (moral, spiritual, religious, social and cultural) which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have been traditionally accorded respect in society
- to nurture a sense of personal identity, self-esteem and awareness of one's particular abilities, aptitudes and limitations, combined with a respect for the rights and beliefs of others
- to promote excellence and equality in the development of the educational potential of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged through economic, social, physical or mental factors
- to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes, a spirit of inquiry, and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively
- to develop expressive, creative and artistic abilities to the individual's full capacity
- to foster a spirit of self-reliance, innovation, initiative and imagination
- to promote physical and emotional health and well-being

- to provide pupils with the necessary education and training to support the country's economic development and to enable them to make their particular contribution to society in an effective way
- to create tolerant, caring and politically aware members of society
- to ensure that Ireland's young people acquire a keen appreciation of their local, national and European heritage and identity
- to foster in pupils a global awareness and a sense of responsibility for the long-term care of the environment.



Chapter 6

School Context Factors

6.1 Context factors

It is important that each school is aware of all the factors that influence the work of the school. In turn, these factors will influence the school's approach to school planning. Many of the factors will be common to all schools; for example, the work of all schools will be influenced by official curricular documents, staffing schedules for national schools and other policy initiatives from the Department of Education and Science.

However, local conditions and circumstances will vary from school to school. The particular context in which each school operates will be a significant factor in the planning process and must be acknowledged and taken into account during that process.

6.2 Awareness of context factors

The following context factors will be relevant in most schools:

- the age and differing abilities of the pupils, including those with special needs
- the pupils' socio-economic background
- the location of the school
- the catchment area of the school
- the quality of the school environment
- the condition of the school building
- the level of maintenance throughout the school
- the general facilities available in the school
- the availability of resources, materials and equipment
- staffing levels
- the training, interests, attitudes and specialisms of the teachers

- the support of the board of management
- the availability of parental and other support
- the expectations and educational aspirations of parents
- transport factors.

6.3 Impact of context factors

There should be a general awareness among the teachers of the extent to which these context factors have a positive or negative influence on the teaching and learning process. The *School Plan*, in order to promote effective learning and teaching, will seek to maximise positive context factors and, where possible, to remove or minimise the effects of negative context factors.



Chapter 7

School Policy - Organisation

7.1 Policy formulation and implementation

- The principal of the school plays a pivotal role in the formulation and implementation of school policy.
- The formulation of basic policies on many aspects and routines of daily school administration should receive very careful consideration.
- Consultation is of paramount importance in drawing up such policies.
- Consistency by all concerned in the implementation of agreed policies is essential in the effective running of the school.
- The *School Plan* should include details of the responsibilities held by post-holders. These will encompass administrative and organisational aspects of school life as well as delineating curricular responsibilities.

7.2 School policies

Clear school policies need to be formulated on matters such as the following:

- the enrolment practices of the school
- the organisation of pupils for learning purposes
- the provision for pupils with special needs
- safety procedures within the school
- the promotion of environmental awareness and care
- the code of behaviour and discipline
- the anti-bullying code
- the provision of equality of opportunity for girls and boys in the total curriculum
- the arrangements for the education of the children of the Travelling Community

- homework for the pupils
- home-school partnership and liaison
- the recording and dissemination of information related to pupil progress
- the implementation of special responsibilities allocated to post-holders
- the arrangements for staff meetings
- the rota for supervision during recreation periods and the duties of teachers on supervision
- the daily roll call and the maintenance of roll-books and other school records
- the listing, maintenance and acquisition of teaching materials
- the timetable for the allocation of shared accommodation and equipment
- the development and utilisation of the school library
- the role and use of information and communication technology
- the involvement of personnel such as classroom assistants and speech and language therapists.

7.3 Communication

Good communication between all members of the school community is one of the key attributes of an effective school. By engaging teachers and other members of staff, parents, members of the board of management and the patron in an ongoing collaborative process, school planning, of itself, can help to enhance communication within the school. However, the *School Plan* should also specifically address the issue of communication and should help to make all the partners aware of the mechanisms which may be used to learn about the work of the school, to share information, seek help and advice, and to participate fully in the life of the school. For example, the *School Plan* will help to make all the partners aware of issues such as

- the role of the board of management in administration, policy and planning
- how to bring issues to the notice of the board of management
- the procedure for informing teachers, parents and others about the outcomes of meetings of the board of management
- the ways in which parents, other partners and the wider school community are informed about the work of the school (e.g. school notice boards, newsletters, booklets, talks, general meetings, annual reports)

- the role of the parents' association
- the availability of a parents' room
- the arrangements for parents and teachers to meet to discuss pupil progress (e.g. how a meeting may be arranged)
- the role of the home/school/community liaison teacher
- the ways in which members of staff are kept informed of issues within the school and how they can communicate their views to each other and to the other partners (e.g. arrangements for staff meetings, use of the staff notice board, how information and publications are circulated, how members contribute to, and learn about the work of the board of management)
- how specific issues which require widespread dissemination are to be communicated (e.g. the school timetable and calendar, school security matters, the policy on environmental awareness and care with specific reference to the school in its community).

7.4 Equality of opportunity

One of the basic tenets of primary education is that equal opportunities should be provided for all children in the delivery of the total primary school curriculum. This implies that each school will need to plan in order to provide opportunities for all children to develop their educational potential to the full.

In many schools there are some children who are disadvantaged socially, emotionally, physically or intellectually. It is imperative that schools identify these pupils as early as possible in their school careers. A special effort needs to be made, in the context of the *School Plan*, to ensure that adequate provision, in terms of resources and teaching, is made available for the benefit of these pupils.

In relation to equality of opportunity the following are among the issues to be considered with a view to putting appropriate strategies in place:

- teachers' expectations of pupils
- consistency in pupil assessment
- ensuring equality of amount and quality of interaction time when teaching boys and girls in the same classroom
- provision of equal opportunities in the curriculum for girls and boys, e.g. organising games, playing games, selecting songs, organising art and craft activities, organising work on the computer(s), cooking, knitting, etc.
- allocation of curriculum time, school space, school facilities and school equipment
- allocation of tasks within the classroom.

The guidelines in the manual *Gender Matters* (designed as a trainer/facilitator aid and available on request from the Laois Education Centre, Portlaoise) will be helpful in relation to developing and implementing a gender equality policy in schools.

7.5 School code of behaviour

It is incumbent upon every school to have a code of behaviour. Such a code will be devised through consultation and co-operation between the board of management, the principal, the teachers, the pupils and the parents. All teachers, parents and pupils need to be fully aware of the implications of the school's code of behaviour. This code should be in keeping with the Department's circular on the subject.

The purpose of the code of behaviour is the cultivation of self-discipline, positive attitudes, tolerance and co-operation in every pupil. The strategies for the implementation of the code need to be clearly set out so that there is full co-operation between the parents, teachers and pupils.

The following considerations should be helpful when devising the code of behaviour:

- ensuring that the code is related to the age and level of development of the pupil
- strategies for the encouragement of pupils in all areas of their development
- the development of pupils' self-esteem
- the promotion of self-discipline
- the school rules and their implementation
- the approved sanctions and how they are to be executed
- the value of class and school assemblies
- the function of the board of management
- the involvement of the parents in the drawing up and implementation of the code
- the involvement of the pupils
- the role of the principal
- the role of the individual teacher
- procedures for monitoring and reviewing a school's code of behaviour.

The publication, *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, which was issued to all schools in September 1993, will be helpful in relation to certain aspects of the development of the code of behaviour.



Chapter 8

Staff Development

8.1 Promoting staff development

The *School Plan* has an important part to play in the promotion of staff development. In this regard the *School Plan* will usually include initiatives and steps that can be taken to promote the professional development of the staff. In order to achieve this, it is necessary in the first place to identify the *professional needs of the teachers*. This can be achieved in a number of ways, but chiefly through

- a school self-review system
- dialogue at school level
- a school report furnished by an external evaluator, e.g. *Tuairisc Scoile*.

8.2 Teacher evaluation

Some schools may decide to have a policy which would encourage teachers to evaluate their own work. This policy should not be threatening and should provide options for teachers in evaluating what they do in the classroom.

In this context, the following strategies might be considered:

- responding individually and privately to checklists
- examining pupil attainment (progress) to see if trends emerge which indicate possible strengths and weaknesses in instruction
- devising and participating in an agreed appraisal system.

8.3 Implementation of staff development

Examples of initiatives which might be taken to cater for staff development are as follows:

- the provision and development of a staff library
- the development of an inservice education programme
- investigating courses of study that could be undertaken by the staff, for example a course in remedial education

- the organisation of school-based curriculum days
- issuing invitations to guest lecturers to come and speak to the teachers
- requesting individual teachers to report to the whole staff on the more successful and novel aspects of their teaching programme and also on aspects of courses, conferences, etc. they have attended
- the provision of financial aid, with the assistance of the board of management, for staff development.



Chapter 9

Home-School Partnership

9.1 Parents as partners

- In the process of educating its pupils, the school recognises parents as full partners. The parental role confers on them the right to active participation in their child's education. This includes their rights as individuals to be consulted and informed on all aspects of their child's education.
- The involvement of parents in the formal education of their children complements and acknowledges their central role in their children's development.
- The development of a strong and effective home-school partnership is an essential element in the life of the school and as such is an important component of the *School Plan*. The board of management will play a vital role in the development of a formal home-school links policy. This policy should be drawn up in collaboration with the parents.

9.2 Strategies

The following approaches are offered as possible opportunities for developing an effective home-school partnership:

- *Creating a climate of openness*
A welcoming climate can be created in many ways, for example, the tone of correspondence between the school and home and the provision of opportunities for informal meetings of staff, parents and members of the board of management.
- *Involving parents*
Where necessary, the board of management may give support to parents in the setting up of their own association. In this way, parents can be helped to collaborate in the development of school policies and plans. Structures and processes need to be devised to promote this collaboration and facilitate its implementation.
- *Listening to parents*
Opportunities can be provided for schools to hear and learn from the knowledge, skills and experiences of parents, especially in relation to their children's development and continuing education.

- *Supporting parents*
Parents will benefit from a range of supporting activities to help them in their involvement with their children. This will involve the school working with parents so that they can be enabled to identify their needs and supported in meeting them. This could include, for example, a parent education programme on child development.
- *Providing information*
Parents should be informed about the work of the school in a variety of ways, for example, through parent-teacher meetings, a school handbook or school newsletters.
- *Sharing information about pupil progress*
Parent-teacher meetings, school reports and school journals will enable parents to be kept informed of their children's progress and provide a mechanism for a two-way flow of information from home to school.
- *Securing parental support for learning*
Strategies for securing the active support of parents for many aspects of the children's learning can be included in the partnership plan, for example, paired reading programmes, homework supervision, etc.

9.3 Positive co-operation and collaboration

In communicating with parents, the opportunity should be taken, where appropriate, to make them aware of the importance of the following factors, with a view to helping in their children's education:

- a positive, co-operative attitude towards school and teachers
- interest in their children's experiences at school
- consistent encouragement and motivation of their children
- the provision of quality experiences for their children
- regular monitoring of homework
- school attendance and punctuality
- good behaviour.

At all times parents must feel that they are welcome and valued in the school. They need to realise that they can play a major role in the education of their children in collaboration with the teachers and the board of management.

As part of the normal interaction and communication between home and school it will be both necessary and useful to provide parents with details of the *School Plan*.



Chapter 10

School Policy - Curriculum

10.1 School curriculum

The curriculum consists of all the learning experiences designed or encouraged by the school as its programme to promote the educational aims and objectives of the school for its pupils.

These learning experiences include

- the formal programme of lessons planned by the school
- the hidden curriculum which is the learning inferred by pupils from the way the school sets about its task, the way in which it is organised and managed, the example the teachers provide, what they appear to value and the quality of relationships in the school.

10.2 Principles

The core principle in the primary school curriculum is that it is child-centred. The focus of education is the child. This core principle acknowledges the integrity, potentialities and needs of each child. Other principles and characteristics arise from this core principle.

These are:

- the curriculum should cater for the full and harmonious development of each child. This implies certain desirable characteristics in the curriculum, such as breadth, balance, relevance, continuity and systematic progression
- the curriculum should make allowance for individual differences in pupils
- the curriculum should make due allowance for the value of co-operative group-work, pupil activity and directed discovery methods in teaching and learning, especially in the areas of concept formation and skill acquisition
- the curriculum should make allowance, where desirable, for integration, correlation and linkage
- the curriculum should take into account the environment in which the child lives and learns.

10.3 Planning the curriculum

By outlining an approach to the different areas of the curriculum, the *School Plan* will

- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the pupils
- develop and maintain cohesiveness and progression throughout the school in the delivery of the curriculum
- assist the teachers in managing learning in their classrooms
- guide the teachers in their preparation
- provide scope and strategies for parental involvement and support
- cater for parents' information needs regarding the curriculum.

10.4 Curricular areas

The *School Plan* will outline the school's approach to the different curricular areas. While allowing for flexibility, these outlines will try to ensure systematic progression in the approach from class to class in order to develop cohesiveness in the curriculum as a whole. There will be a similarity of approach in planning the various curricular areas, although some outlines will contain particular emphases relevant to specific subject areas.

The following issues will be relevant in the preparation of plans for each curricular area:

- the *aims* of that particular area and its special value in promoting the development of the pupils
- the *extent* of a particular subject area and the special attention to be paid to any parts or sub-sections of that area
- the *curricular content* for each level in the school
- the *pedagogic principles* underlying this particular curricular area and the most effective *teaching methodologies* and *organisational arrangements* for enabling pupils to learn efficiently and effectively
- the necessary physical and human *resources* to support learning and teaching within that area
- the *assessment and evaluation* of pupil progress in that area.

10.5 Overall curricular strategies

While each curricular area will have its own key priorities the focus of the total school curriculum will acknowledge the following principles:

- the curriculum is focused on the learner
- the strands of the curriculum will enable children to learn in different ways
- the curriculum will support teaching approaches that are flexible and respond to different learning needs
- the curriculum promotes learning for understanding through a range of active learning approaches
- the curriculum outlines problem-solving strategies that enable children to become independent learners
- the focus on the learner promotes teaching approaches that can enable every child to experience success at school.



Chapter 11

School Evaluation

11.1 School evaluation policy

Since the school is a dynamic organisation it is necessary for the principal and the staff to be constantly aware of changing circumstances. Teachers, individually and as members of the staff, will wish to know how effective the school is as an organisation in achieving its aims and objectives. As outlined in Chapter 3, regular school review and school evaluation must, therefore, be an integral part of the school's planning process. A whole school policy on evaluation will assist the teachers, under the direction of the principal, to assess pupil achievement and progress and will help to ensure uniformity and continuity of approach between classes and within the school.

A *School Plan* on evaluation will contain policies on

- *school review*: strategies which enable the principal and staff to evaluate the organisation, administration and curriculum of the school on an ongoing basis
- *pupil assessment*: strategies which allow for appropriate assessment of pupil achievement and development.

11.2 School review

A school review is designed to allow all the partners to express opinions on issues affecting the school as a prerequisite to the formulation of policy. The appropriateness of this policy and of its implementation will in turn become the subject of further review. In this way, the process of school review can be seen as a cyclical process and therefore it will be necessary for the school to have a plan for reviewing its progress on an ongoing basis.

The *School Plan* should outline procedures for the creation of an effective review and evaluation system.

Such a system would

- gather a wide range of opinion on issues
- assist in achieving consensus
- help to clarify objectives
- help to establish priorities and provide direction for future action
- help to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses
- help to lead on to implementation, monitoring of progress and further review.

11.3 Pupil assessment

The assessment of the pupils' development is central to the work of the school. Consequently, assessment procedures are an integral part of school policy. A *School Plan* on assessment will

- describe *strategies for assessment* of pupils over as many areas of development as possible
- emphasise the importance of *early identification* of pupils with specific numeracy and literacy problems
- outline specific strategies for monitoring the progress of pupils with *special needs*
- outline procedures for *recording and reporting* on children's development, involving the parents where possible
- have a firm link between assessment and *decision-making* with regard to future strategies, content, or methodology in the classroom
- ensure the availability of *finance* to purchase tests.

11.4 Strategies for assessment

The evaluation policy in a school will recognise the holistic nature of the child. Quantitative and qualitative assessment strategies will be employed to assess pupil progress and achievement at both the formative and summative levels. The evaluation policy will give direction with regard to testing, the use of child profiles, the use of teacher observation, the retention of samples of pupils' work, concept-mapping as well as pupil self-evaluation. This policy could be based on the following:

- *Cognitive development*
A school will have a policy on the use of standardised tests. This policy will outline the type of standardised tests to be used, the frequency of their use and the need for proper interpretation of results. The school policy will also endorse the use of teacher-made tests, teacher vigilance and observation and commercial non-standardised tests as well as 'spellings' and 'tables' in this area of assessment.
- *Affective, social and emotional development*
The school will note the importance of qualitative assessment in the affective, social and emotional development of the child and in those areas of the curriculum that do not lend themselves to quantitative marking systems. The school policy will emphasise the importance of teacher vigilance and teacher observation in all aspects of the child's development and especially in areas of the curriculum, such as arts education and physical education. The school's assessment policy should also emphasise the importance of vigilance in observing pupils at play and in their behaviour in the classroom and in the school generally.

11.5 Early identification

The early identification of pupils with problems in learning language and/or mathematics is probably one of the more important functions of the school. The school needs to devise strategies for assessment including a range of diagnostic tools, which will allow teachers to identify the pupils who are failing to acquire literacy and numeracy skills especially in the early years of their schooling. The involvement of parents and other professionals will be helpful in this exercise. The school's assessment policy may also outline the range of such tests which have been adopted in the school.

11.6 Special needs

There will be pupils in the school who, for one reason or another, will need special help at periods or all through their school lives. The *School Plan* should help to ensure that the progress of these children is regularly monitored, so that the curriculum provided for them is appropriate to their needs and abilities.

11.7 Recording and reporting

The school will need to ensure that a record of all major assessment outcomes is available to the principal and to the teachers in the school.

The school will ensure that a system is in place to enable parents to have access to their own children's school records. It will be important to provide opportunities for parents to enable them to discuss with teachers assessment outcomes as they affect their own children.

The school policy will make arrangements whereby inspectors of schools and other personnel will have access to all assessment outcomes when appropriate.

11.8 Decision-making

The *School Plan* will emphasise the need for teachers to assess pupils with a definite purpose in mind. Assessment is undertaken to serve a definite need and decisions taken as a result of the assessment should lead to action. As well as being of use to individual teachers, assessment outcomes will also be considered on a whole school basis in order to further ensure cohesion and continuity within the school generally.

11.9 Finance

The plan for acquiring finance for all aspects of an assessment programme is related to the acquisition of resources generally within the school.



Appendix 1

School Development Planning School Curriculum Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to ascertain which broad area of the school curriculum is considered by the staff or group to be most in need of review. All members of staff would be asked to complete the questionnaire below. An analysis of the completed questionnaires will indicate which areas of the curriculum are most in need of review and development.

Subject	Very Good	Progressing Well	Requires Attention
1 Gaeilge			
2 English			
3 Mathematics			
4 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education			
History			
Geography			
Science			
5 Arts Education			
Visual Arts			
Music			
Drama			
6 Physical Education			
7 Social, Personal and Health Education			

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for Initial Review of Mathematics in School Planning

The table below could be used by teachers for the *initial* evaluation of mathematics in the school. It could be used at all class levels but might be used in conjunction with a more elaborate questionnaire listing areas of content or objectives in greater detail. This would enable teachers to evaluate the teaching and learning of specific aspects of a strand of the curriculum: for example, within the area of number in senior classes a further questionnaire might help teachers to examine the teaching and application of place value, number operations, fractions, decimals, percentages, etc. An analysis of the results of the questionnaire will give a good indication of the areas of mathematics that may need further development.

Areas of the curriculum	Very good	Satisfactory	Needs review
1. Number			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Computation and algorithms			
c) Application to problem-solving			
d) Recording			
e) Memorisation of number facts			
f) Range of methodologies used			
g) Availability and use of resources			
2. Algebra			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			
3. Shape and space			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			
4.1. Measures: length, weight, capacity			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			

Areas of the curriculum	Very good	Satisfactory	Needs review
4.2 Measures: time			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			
4.3 Measures: money			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			
5. Data handling and presentation			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			
6. Chance			
a) Acquisition of concepts			
b) Application to problem-solving			
c) Recording			
d) Range of methodologies used			
e) Availability and use of resources			

Appendix 3

School Development Planning Organisational Issues: General Questionnaire

Area for Review	Very good	Satisfactory	Needs review
1. Communications in the school			
2. Board of management involvement			
3. Staff involvement in decision-making			
4. Parental involvement			
5. Home-school-community links			
6. Staff professional development			
7. Staff meetings			
8. Role of post-holders			
9. Teacher deployment			
10. Induction of new teachers			
11. Time-tables and rosters			
12. School calendar			
13. Record keeping			
14. School enrolment policy			
15. Infant education			
16. School-based evaluation			
17. Gender equality issues			
18. Provision for exceptionally able pupils			
19. Provision for pupils with special needs			
20. Inclusion of pupils with special needs			
21. Homework			
22. Extra-curricular activities			
23. Health and safety for all			
24. School rules			
25. Daily routines			
26. Code of behaviour			
27. School policy on bullying			
28. Resources/funding			
29. School environment (grounds, buildings)			
30. Information and communication technology			
31. Library facilities			
32. Educational outings			
33. Transition from junior to senior school			
34. Transition from primary to post-primary school			
35. Administration of school schemes (free books/milk, book rental etc.)			
36. Role of ancillary staff			
37. School transport			



Appendix 4

Techniques for Group-work on School Development Planning

Introduction

There are a number of useful techniques, which allow groups to work effectively in dealing with particular issues. Each technique outlined here is suitable for groups of up to about twelve people (larger groups should be subdivided). The facilitator should use the techniques as appropriate for particular situations and purposes.

Section A : Techniques in group work

(i) Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a means of getting a large number of ideas from a group in as short a time as possible. It is effective in problem-solving and decision-making situations, and in promoting the involvement of the participants in generating different ideas and perspectives.

Procedure

- The facilitator states the topics/issues, purposes and guidelines for the brainstorm.
- Participants contribute ideas, which are recorded on the flip chart or board.
- When all ideas generated have been listed, clarification, questioning and discussion can be used to reduce the list to take account of duplication and relevance of the ideas to the topic. Allowance should be made for consensus in drawing up the group's short-list.
- Prioritising of ideas can be achieved by means of 'dotmocracy'. Each participant allocates adhesive dots to the final agreed short-list of ideas, three dots to what he/she considers the most important idea, two dots to the second most important and one dot to the third in importance. A total of all participants' dots will show the group's table of ideas in order of considered importance.

Guidelines

- During the brainstorm, do not allow any discussion or evaluation: suspend judgement.
- Accept all ideas, even those that appear 'way out'; repetition is also acceptable, it can be dealt with later.
- Allow for cross-fertilisation or building on others' ideas.
- Encourage the ideas to keep coming but avoid indicating approval or criticism of them.
- Record the ideas as briefly as possible, utilising the contributors' own words—use single words or short phrases.
- Be aware that certain aspects of brainstorming, for example, accepting even the wildest ideas, do not find favour with some participants, so outlining the purpose and guidelines in advance of the brainstorm is vitally important.

(ii) Rounds

This is a technique for sharing and exchanging ideas and experiences. It is useful for review purposes, as it helps to disseminate information and expand the range of participants' perceptions of the subject. Unlike the brainstorm, where the board or flip chart is the focus of the group's attention and participants do not necessarily need to see each other, members of a round should be seated in a circle so that everyone can see everyone else.

Procedure

- The facilitator states the topic/issue.
- Members, in turn, are invited to recount an experience, give an idea or identify a problem related to the topic.
- Participants may 'pass' if they wish, although an opportunity should be allowed again for them to contribute at the end.
- Contributions are not recorded as in a brainstorm, although the facilitator may summarise when the round is complete.

Guidelines

- Do not allow contributions to be interrupted or challenged, although occasionally it may be useful to ask for clarification or elaboration.
- Encourage contributions but do not endorse or criticise them.
- When the round is complete, a more open discussion may take place.

(iii) Buzz Groups

Buzz groups are used in the course of a presentation or talk when the plenary work is interrupted to allow the audience to break up into smaller groups to discuss the topic as a whole or different aspects of it.

Procedure

- The facilitator divides the whole group into smaller groups, allocating a topic to each one. Sometimes this will involve groups of two or three discussing the main topic or some aspect of it for a short period of time (five to ten minutes). Issues raised here can be fed back into the plenary session in an open forum.
- On other occasions, participants will be divided into groups of five or six to discuss particular aspects of the main topic over a longer period of time (30 - 40 minutes).
- In this case, each buzz group will have a chairperson, whose job it is to keep the discussion focused, and a secretary or reporter, who records the members' inputs and usually reports back to the reconvened plenary session.

Guidelines

- Allow sufficient time for buzz groups to work : frustration will result if the discussion is continuously being aborted.
- On the other hand, do not allow too much time as it may cause the discussion to stray from the point.
- Ensure that issues for discussion are clearly delineated and limited in scope.
- Encourage the buzz groups by circulating amongst them during discussion.

(iv) Snowballs

This is a technique used to arrive at a conclusion in a convergent fashion. It is useful in situations where groups have to reach a decision on a course of action to be taken or on an order of priorities to be established in relation to a topic or issue. Everyone involved has an input to make, but the collegial nature of the work means that not all contributions will feature in the group's conclusions. The essential ingredients of the process are discussion and negotiation.

Procedure

- The facilitator outlines the topic or issue.
- Each person writes down her/his individual response.
- Individual participants form pairs, compare their responses and try to agree a joint view.
- Pairs combine to form groups of four which in turn attempt to reach a combined response.
- All sub-groups come together as the main group, review the various responses and work towards consensus.

Guidelines

- Allow sufficient time at each stage for a decision to be reached by negotiation.
- Stress that each individual contribution is valuable, but that there is a need for consensus to be achieved.

(v) SWOT analysis

This is a tool used to examine current reality within the school. The results of this analysis enable staffs/groups to set attainable goals for the future. The term SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

Procedure

- Participants, individually or in groups, identify the school's strengths and weaknesses and note them on a chart.
- Arising from discussion on these, opportunities for and threats to future development can be identified and noted.

Guidelines

- Advise participants to think of strengths and weaknesses in terms of
 - resources : human and material
 - performance over time
 - management
 - relationships involving all stakeholders.
- Key words and phrases should be used in noting participants' responses.

Section B : The learning environment

The physical environment in which groups will work should not be disregarded or cursorily dismissed in planning for a working session. Many meetings have been known to fail to realise fully their objectives because insufficient care was taken in advance over this most elementary aspect of preparation. Irritations within the physical environment, such as personal discomfort due to inappropriate temperature, lighting, ventilation, noise or seating, can all militate against the successful participation of the group members.

The room arrangement, including furniture and equipment, is something over which the facilitator can have some control, and so a short time spent in advance in ensuring that these elements are as good as they can be will result in greater group effectiveness. The following are some points to consider in preparing the meeting place:

(i) Room

- Is the room large enough/too large?
- Is it convenient, for example not close to a source of extraneous noise?

- Are there clear signs, for the room itself, toilets, refreshment area?
- Are other rooms/space available for breaking up into sub-groups?
- Is the temperature/ventilation adequate?
- Is the lighting sufficient? Can the room be darkened if necessary for using slides or overheads?
- Are there any obstructions which might block lines of sight?
- Are there sufficient power points, will additional leads be necessary, will flexes cross the floor?

(ii) Furniture and equipment

- Are there sufficient suitable chairs?
- Can they be moved?
- What arrangement of chairs is best? (An open horse-shoe or U shape is probably best for presentations to groups of up to 20 while a circular shape is clearly best for group work.)
- Will tables be required? (Sub-groups may need them if recording the participants' view on charts)
- Is appropriate equipment available and in working order?

(iii) Visual aids and equipment

It is said that a picture speaks a thousand words. Certainly, it is true that when something is both seen and heard at the same time it has a greater chance of being retained by the audience. Knowing how to use visual aids and equipment properly will enhance greatly the efforts of a facilitator. Of equal importance though, is knowing when to use each item. Aids should only be used because they add to the value of the learning experience and not simply as gimmicks. The material and content of a presentation will largely dictate which aids and equipment are most appropriate.

The following aids and equipment may be suitable for presentation and group work:

- flip chart
- whiteboard
- chalkboard
- overhead projector
- handouts.

Flip chart

The flip chart can be used to record ideas and to illustrate key points. Pages can be prepared in advance for a formal presentation (leave a blank sheet in between each prepared sheet for taking feedback during sessions) or can be written on in the course of the training situation. The pages from a flip chart serve as the group minutes and memory, thus maintaining focus while also encouraging involvement and participation.

The following points should be noted when using a flip chart:

- ensure that everyone can see the flip chart
- do not talk while writing on the flip chart
- face your audience when referring to the chart and stand to the side
- use a heading on each sheet
- write key words only - try to use participants' exact words
- print in block letters about 5cm (2 inches) high
- limit recording to not more than 10 lines per page - leave a clear space between the lines
- use numbers, stars or bullets to highlight each input
- use colour - blue and black for lettering, red and green for headings, numbers, underlining or highlighting
- if the sheets are to be a record of the groups' inputs, display them on the wall in sequence.

Many of the above points apply also to using a whiteboard or chalkboard.

Overhead projector

The overhead projector is very suitable for small to medium sized groups. Overhead slides can be prepared in advance by using a word processor or acetate pens. Soluble markers (erasable) can be used on rolls of acetate enabling the presenter to write in front of the audience in the course of the meeting.

The following points should be noted when using an overhead projector:

- ensure that everyone can see the screen. Nobody should be nearer to the visual than two widths of the screen or further from it than six widths, and the heads of those in front should not block the view of those behind. Bear in mind too that anyone outside a 45 degree angle from the centre of the screen will see a distorted image
- make sure that the image is focused and squarely lined on the screen
- acetates should be presented in the proper sequence, thus avoiding fumbling and mix-ups
- use a pen to point on the acetate and not on the screen
- use a card to mask off items you do not yet want to talk about - move the card to reveal the next points when you are ready
- make sure that there is not too much information on each acetate and that the lettering is not too small (use no more than six words per line and six lines per acetate if possible)
- maintain eye contact with the audience : do not look back at the screen to read each point, you can see exactly what your audience is seeing by simply glancing at the acetate in front of you on the overhead projector
- switch off the projector when it is not in use.

Handouts

The scene where people emerge from presentations or working sessions laden down with large bundles of handouts is a familiar one. Too often these are either stored or discarded unread. In many instances it is because too much irrelevant and unnecessary material has been included thereby causing recoil and a strong desire to simply abandon the handouts. What to leave out is probably as important as what to include, therefore, in drawing up handout material.

The question of when to distribute handouts should also be considered carefully. If the purpose of the handout is to outline the content and direction of the course or session, then clearly participants should be given it at the beginning. Do remember though, that people will begin to read it there and then, so the presenter ought not to attempt to immediately embark upon the main body of the work as he/she will not have a fully attentive audience. The use of handouts to summarise the work of a session or to give information is very valuable, and by and large, these should be distributed at the end.

The following points should be noted when using handouts:

- give titles to handouts and use headings for different sections
- use phrases or words which capture the essential points rather than sentences, and highlight these with numbers, letters or bullets
- keep the layout simple and clutter-free; maintain a logical sequence in the information.
- use clear, precise and simple language: phrases or short sentences, concrete nouns, active verbs
- check for typographical errors
- allow sufficient time for participants to read handouts or to fill in questionnaires or surveys, if these form part of the handout material
- leave space on the handouts for participants to write their own notes
- do not read the handout to your audience word for word; draw their attention to particular points if they have the handout in front of them.



Appendix 5

Formulating a Gender Equality Plan

Equal opportunities should permeate all parts of the *School Plan*. One way to ensure that this issue is not overlooked is to have a heading 'equal opportunities implications' for every section. Additionally a discrete section focussing on equality matters and cross-referenced to other parts, where appropriate, is most desirable.

The gender equality plan should assist all the school partners in achieving a balanced and inclusive learning environment for the boys and girls in the school. The planning process should include the following:

- conducting a gender equality review
- drafting a school equality policy
- setting appropriate long-term goals
- agreeing concrete, realisable short-term targets
- implementing a gender equality action plan
- monitoring and evaluating the action plan.

School gender equality review

The following questions may be useful in focusing on progress to date:

- has the school a gender equality policy?
- what changes in the promotion of equal opportunities have taken place in the past three years?
- what equality issues are staff most concerned about right now?
- who should be involved in drawing up the school plan?
- do all other aspects of the school plan have a gender equality perspective?
- who is currently responsible for reviewing text and teaching material?
- are school administrative and organisational procedures fair and balanced?
- is the language of the school, both spoken and written, bias-free and gender fair?
- are school documents gender proofed before issuing?

A school equality policy

The formulation of the school equality policy will be concerned with the following:

- the reasons for an equality policy
- the aims and objectives of the equality policy
- who will be involved in the formulation of policy
- curricular issues to be addressed
- non-curricular issues
- extra-curricular activities
- administrative issues
- organisational issues
- hidden curriculum and gender equality implications
- priorities to be set
- how the policy will be implemented
- resources required
- the timeframe
- how will it be monitored and evaluated
- date and mechanisms for review.

Goal-setting

Once the review has taken place decisions can be made as to what needs to be done next. It is important to pick the issues which are of most relevance to the school and are seen as of most concern to the staff. The equal opportunities dimension of more than one issue can then be focussed on concurrently; for example, if teachers are concerned with play activities in the schoolyard, discipline and assessment, it would be sensible to focus on the equal opportunities dimension of the language, the procedures and the strategies in use throughout the school. Long-term goals can be set for a three-year period.

Targeting

Specific and achievable targets should be set for the short-term. Detailed plans should be made for an academic year.

Targets should be:

- clearly stated
- undertaken by named personnel
- have resources allocated
- timed
- monitored.

Implementing a gender equality action plan

The implementation of the gender equality policy should result in revised practices in the following areas:

- language of the school
- administrative procedures
- classroom interaction practices
- evaluation and monitoring processes
- teaching and learning strategies.

Successful implementation should also contribute towards

- promoting greater awareness of equality issues
- helping pupils to achieve their potential regardless of their gender
- promoting a supportive and inclusive learning environment which will foster the development of the self-esteem of boys and girls
- contribute to the breaking down of stereotypes and to the opening up of opportunities for all pupils.

Monitoring and evaluating the gender equality action plan

In monitoring and evaluating the *School Plan* cognisance should be taken of the following:

- the need for review
- the cyclical nature of planning
- the necessity for a school-wide approach
- tracking progress
- keeping the partners informed and involved.

It will be necessary to continue to ensure that the equal opportunities implications of all newly-developed plans are carefully and fully considered.



Appendix 6

Formulating an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Plan for a School

Purpose

This appendix should serve as a guidance and discussion tool through which a school, the staff and partners within the community can build an ICT plan for the school.

Introduction

Preparing a plan is an essential step in the adoption, development and implementation of ICTs in your school. It will give expression to a rationale for adopting ICTs in the first place, develop a mechanism for dealing with issues of maintenance and training and provide a framework for planning for the future.

The rate at which ICT is developing means that the best ICT strategies in schools are flexible ones, which can be reviewed regularly. Given the growing importance of the new technologies in teaching and learning, the school's ICT plan should be an important part of the *School Plan* for the school.

It is best to have a clear vision of what technology can do for the school in order that a technology 'best fit' is achieved. The plan should then determine the quantity and quality of the technology required.

In preparing an ICT plan the following questions should be addressed :

- Why is ICT required in our school?
- What can it offer our pupils and teachers?
- How can it improve the administration of the school?
- How can it offer a relationship between the school and the wider community?

Investing in technology is not an end in itself. But an effective plan will recognise that the teaching and learning experience can be enhanced in any number of ways, only some of which involve heavy investment in technology. Using ICT equipment to teach computing and to enhance skills in this area is only one aspect of its role in education. However, computers and other related equipment are also elegant tools which, when integrated across the curriculum, offer one way to enhance the quality of education for all participants.

Information and communication technologies can also be a very effective and attractive means of providing educational support to children with disabilities or specific educational needs. Information and communication technologies can be used to encourage co-operation, teamwork, planning, research and writing, visual literacy activities, collaborative and child-centred learning, and much more.

The integration of ICTs into the curriculum is central to an effective plan. This has consequences for staff training. If teachers are unfamiliar with information and communication technologies the required integration will not happen. Therefore, the *School Plan* must take account of the needs of the staff in terms of training and familiarisation.

The development of an ICT plan should be linked to development in all subject areas. Periodic reviews by the various class teachers should contain reference to ICT developments in the different curricular areas.

Preparing the plan

1. Carry out a school review

A review of the school's resources should be carried out to determine the level of ICT provision already in place. This should include:

- a survey of the hardware and software currently being used
- the degree to which the facilities are being used, and the purpose for which they are being used
- the availability of suitable rooms and other infrastructure

Developing the use of ICTs across the curriculum demands more than the purchase of hardware. Is there somewhere to put it? Is it possible to build a network around the school? Is the equipment to be located centrally or in individual classrooms? How much benching and wiring is required? Who will manage it?

- the level of training the staff will require
- the number of staff that are familiar with computers
- the platform on which they are most comfortable
- the willingness of the staff to incorporate ICT into their teaching
- their willingness to attend training
- special needs
- the most appropriate training programmes

Staff should be made aware of the variety of training programmes available from the In-Career Development Unit and the National Centre for Technology in Education as well as of the possibilities for progression to diploma and masters programmes.

2. Make provision for ICT development

Planning for ICT is a *process* by which members of the school community formulate a working strategy for the development of ICT in the school. The ICT plan that is developed must recognise the context in which it is to be implemented. It must focus on school environment, self-review, particular needs of pupils, curriculum and other goals, interests and experience of teachers, professional development needs, etc.

The school should invite people with experience in ICTs to offer advice and give direction to those involved in school planning. The inclusion of strands from within and outside of the school will ensure that the plan will reflect the needs and aspirations of the school.

3. Prepare a rationale for the plan

- Is there a real need to incorporate and integrate ICT into the school's curriculum?
- Does the school agree that the integration of ICT into the curriculum may enhance teaching and learning?
- Will the approach adopted by the school focus on developing skills?
- Decide how the use of technology enhances the pupils' learning. What is different about learning with ICT?
- Establish a means of monitoring and evaluating the plan.
- Decide how ICT can be integrated appropriately into the various parts of the curriculum.

4. Evaluation

The following points should be considered :

- who is to evaluate the plan and when
- that evaluation should be seen as a dynamic in altering an ICT plan when appropriate
- the frequency with which the plan should be reviewed.

5. Prepare a policy statement

A statement expressing how the use of ICT will develop in the school is central to the structure and content of the ICT plan.

This statement should consider:

- the role of technology in the school
- the level of competence the pupils will achieve
- the means by which instruction will be delivered
- liaison with the wider community
- equality of access in using ICT
- the role of ICT in curriculum delivery
- ongoing incareer development of staff.

6. Special needs

Consideration should be given to the special needs of some pupils and the added value technology can bring to their educational experience, whether they are in a special school or integrated into a mainstream class. Technology can also be a useful tool to help teachers manage special needs children who are integrated into ordinary classes. For the purpose of the plan it is best to interpret special needs in the broadest sense possible, for example:

- children with physical disabilities
- mentally handicapped children
- children with hearing or vision impairment
- children with social, emotional and/or behavioural problems
- traveller children
- children of refugees/asylum seekers and other non-native English or Irish speakers
- children of refugees with language or learning difficulties/disorders.

Different types of technology, or more often, additional peripheral items and software can mean the difference between enabling these children to participate and excluding them further from the mainstream.

Some additional categories of hardware/software which could be considered to cater for their needs include:

- larger monitors
- different computer interfaces (e.g. touch screens)
- special computer control devices (e.g. joysticks etc.)
- special printers and scanners (e.g. Braille printers)
- assistive/adaptive communications software (e.g. voice production software)
- assistive/adaptive educational software.

ICT can also be used imaginatively to improve the curriculum for talented and gifted pupils.

7. Develop the role of an ICT co-ordinating teacher

Schools should explore the importance of supporting and encouraging individual teachers to take on leadership roles in ICT development. The allocation of a post of responsibility for such a role is one avenue worth investigating. The inclusion of ICTs in the curriculum presents fresh challenges to teachers and boards of management. The role generally includes the following tasks:

- to co-ordinate the compilation and production of the ICT plan
- to facilitate training
- to develop strategies for integration of ICTs across the curriculum
- to liaise with senior management and advise in ICT strategies
- to evaluate the use of ICT in the school
- to develop a means by which the ICT system can be maintained and upgraded.

8. Goals

Decide upon reasonable goals for the programme. The goals should include:

- identifying clearly where the integration of ICT is possible
- recognising the areas where integration is not feasible
- selecting a suitable infrastructure
- the quantity and quality of the hardware to be purchased
- the percentage of the budget required for software
- the percentage of the budget required for repair and maintenance
- provision for upgrading the system
- evaluation of software
- the level of training which is required and achievable
- the areas to be targeted in the training of teachers
- the deployment of ICT equipment around the school
- access to and availability of appropriate software.

Is there a designated computer room or will the equipment be located in classrooms or in a remedial education room? What is the level of access to the technology by pupils with special needs?

9. Budgetary provision

In the context of the Technology Integration Initiative of Schools IT2000, provision must be made for the purchase, development and maintenance of ICT equipment peripherals, and software and plans should be developed for maintenance and upgrades. With regard to this initiative, staff will consider the following:

- Are staff aware of the rules and regulations involved in purchasing equipment and software?
- What allowances are made for repairs and maintenance as much as for purchasing hardware and software?
- What are the minimum specifications allowable and feasible?
- Has provision been made for insurance cover?
- What plans are in place to add to the grant aid by local fund-raising or other measures (e.g. tax concessions)?

10. Health and safety

Management and staff should be aware of the health and safety requirements pertaining to the use of ICTs and should endeavour to comply with such regulations.

11. The next step

Having considered the items discussed above, and completed the necessary surveys, research or interviews to get information and advice, the school should set about drawing up a plan. This can be produced in several drafts, often evolving from one person's idea to a whole school project. The final plan should have a definite date for a first revision, and a plan or mechanisms for further revision. Meanwhile, it is important that the document is accessible to those who are meant to benefit from it.



Appendix 7

Formulating a Plan to Promote Environmental Awareness and Care

The *School Plan* in relation to the environment should be constructed in such a way as to encourage, direct and aid all the school partners to co-operate in achieving an environmentally sustainable school. The *School Plan* may incorporate the following:

- drafting a school environmental policy
- conducting an environmental review
- implementing a school environmental action plan
- monitoring and evaluating the action plan.

1. School environmental policy

The formulation of the school environmental policy may be concerned with such matters as:

- the reason for such a policy
- the aims and objectives of such a policy
- the parameters of such a policy
- identifying those who will be involved in formulating it
- how the plan will be implemented
- the issues to be addressed by the plan
- how the plan will be made available and to whom.

The formulation of the policy will be guided by the principle that all the school partners will work together to ensure that the management of the school and the teaching and learning programme will contribute to the development of an environmentally sustainable society.

2. Environmental review

Is the school being managed in a manner, which minimises the deleterious effects on the environment? This can be answered only in the context of a complete environmental review of the school.

The following criteria may be useful in carrying out a complete eco-review of the school environment :

Energy use and conservation

- How is the school heated?
- Does the school burn fossil fuels?
- What fuel(s) are burnt to heat the school?
- Is the school insulated?
- To what extent is it insulated?
- Are there thermostatically controlled heaters and radiators in the classrooms?
- If boilers are in use, are they energy efficient?
- How efficient are the boilers?
- Are energy-efficient light bulbs being used?

Transport

- Does the school timetable afford maximum use of public transport by pupils?
- Does the school promote car-sharing by parents bringing pupils to school?
- Are there facilities available for parking of bicycles?

Waste generation and recycling

- What waste is being generated in the school? Qualify type and estimate quantity and rate of generation.
- How is this waste disposed of?
- Is there any waste separation?
- Does recycling take place? If so, what materials are re-cycled?
- Is there a school compost heap?
- Some schools use a septic tank. Is this tank functioning efficiently? How often is it emptied? Are products, which effect the efficient functioning of the tank being flushed into it?

Toxic and allergenic substances

- Are toxic cleaning agents and/or substances that are damaging to the environment being used in the school?
- How are chemicals, if any, disposed of?
- Are there substances being used which could trigger allergic responses among the children?
- Are chemicals stored in an area that can be ventilated?

Health and safety

- Does the school comply with the requirements of the *Health and Safety Act*?

Purchasing policy

- Does the school use, provide or sell recycled paper (in office administration, copybooks for pupils, etc.)?

Water use and conservation

- Is water conserved?
- Are push-taps installed in the toilets?

School grounds

- What is the condition of the school grounds? Are they clean, neat and tidy?
- Is there any degree of biodiversity? Are there any attempts to construct or maintain biodiversity?

Litter

- Is the school litter free?
- Are there bins available for disposal of paper, packaging, etc.?

3. Action plan

After completing the eco-review, the school partners, especially school management should draw up a plan for action. This could be based on the information obtained in the review. A range of issues could be addressed as follows:

- Can another fuel, less damaging to the environment, be used?
- Is the level of insulation sufficient?
- Can the school buildings be improved in order to conserve heat?
- Can the efficiency be improved by servicing or other modifications?
- Is there any possibility for the use of renewable energy (to complement or substitute for non-renewable energy)?
- Are the cleaning/bleaching/germicidal agents being used in school really needed? Can they be substituted?
- Can some of the waste be recycled (bottles, cans, toner cartridges, plastics, etc.)?
- Are there any initiatives being taken to create or conserve ecologically diverse school grounds?

Schools could also consider

- making contact with the local *Agenda 21* officers or local authority environmental education officers
- the benefits of participating in a project under the National Environmental Partnership Fund
- entering the school for the *Green Schools' Programme* (co-ordinated by An Taisce)
- joining the ECO club (an Ireland-based UNESCO affiliated club)
- contacting various other agencies, which would support and advise the school in implementing its action plan. (e.g. Irish Energy Centre, The Building Unit of the Department of Education and Science, Tullamore).

4. Monitoring and evaluating the action plan

In monitoring and evaluating the action plan the following could be considered:

- allocating a post of responsibility to one of the teachers
- organising a small monitoring committee which would represent all the partners
- raising the matter at meetings of the board of management
- conducting termly reviews
- discussing the issue at staff meetings
- establishing contact and seeking advice from the providers of energy
- holding class discussions
- organising school based competitions
- checking and tracking costings
- qualifying for the *Green Schools* award.



Appendix 8

Section 21 Education Act 1998

The important role that school planning can play in promoting effective schools has been recognised in section 21 of the *Education Act, 1998*:

- (1) A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the "school plan") and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- (2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.
- (3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.
- (4) A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

Notes

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