



**European Commission**  
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*The Standing International Conference of  
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## **Effective School Self-Evaluation (ESSE) project**

***SELF-EVALUATION IN IRELAND***

## **1. Statutory position and prevalence of self-evaluation**

### ***1.1 Statutory position***

<p><b>Compulsory basis</b> Self-evaluation is compulsory as part of the compulsory school development planning process. Since the Education Act (1998) the Board of Management of a school is required to make arrangements for the preparation of a school development plan and to ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated. Inherent in the review process is an evaluation by the school itself of its own performance.</p>	<p><b>Voluntary basis</b> /</p>
<p><b>Scope and associated time-cycles</b> The school development plan serves as a basis for the work of the school as a whole and for evaluating and reporting on whole school progress and development. It is a dynamic process which provides for constant review, design, implementation and evaluation. The scope and cycle of self-evaluation is related to decisions on the elements of the school development plan that have to be reviewed at any point in time.</p>	<p><b>Prevalence of self-evaluation</b> /</p>

### ***1.2 Prevalence of good practice***

Due to the fact that formal School Development Planning is a new development in Irish education and a very recent statutory requirement, relatively little evaluation of self-evaluation practice in schools has been undertaken. Therefore the extent and prevalence of good practice has not as yet been measured. So, it is not possible to make an estimation at this point in time.

## **2. External support for self-evaluation at school level**

## 2.1 Benchmarking data

### Provision of benchmarking data

At *primary level*, national benchmarking data is confined to the results of regular national surveys of pupil attainment in English Reading and Mathematics commissioned by the Department of Education and Science. The extent to which schools use this data to compare their performance with national outcomes would be negligible. However, most schools use a range of largely norm-referenced tests (almost exclusively for English Reading and Mathematics), available from reputable educational institutions, against which to measure individual pupil performance. There is no mechanism for comparing schools.

At *second level*, the Department of Education and Science (DES) analyses and publishes aggregate public examination results annually. This enables schools to compare results achieved by their students to the national norms. DES-examination reports, prepared by Chief Examiners, provide schools and teachers with detailed information on how students have performed in each part of the examination in a subject. In this way examination reports together with national result statistics give schools an effective instrument for monitoring quality.

Reports of National Evaluations carried out by the Inspectorate are published by the DES on particular aspects of the curriculum provision in schools. These reports provide useful information and data to schools regarding the achievement of curriculum objectives at national level. This applies for second-level and for primary level.

The extent to which schools use this data for comparative purposes is difficult to estimate. It should be noted that it is not official policy in Ireland to use any test/evaluation/examination outcomes to compare schools.

### Benchmarking data: essential for self-evaluation or not

The use of benchmarking data is *not* seen as an essential part of schools' self-evaluation.

## 2.2 Indicators, standards and criteria

<p><b>Nationally agreed or stimulated set</b></p> <p>Evaluation Criteria have been developed for external evaluation of schools by the Inspectorate as part of the development of Whole School Evaluation (WSE), on which a pilot project has been completed. Although planning for the introduction of the WSE model throughout the school system is as yet incomplete, it is intended to publish and issue these criteria to schools in the near future as a resource for school self-evaluation. The evaluation criteria, as standards of quality, will provide schools with a basis for evaluating themselves and for identifying strengths and areas for further development.</p> <p>Evaluation Criteria which have been developed and used by the Inspectorate for external evaluation of curricular programmes/initiatives have been published and issued to schools as part of the evaluation report. Schools are encouraged to use these criteria for the purpose of self-evaluation.</p>	<p><b>Areas</b></p> <p>The Whole School Evaluation criteria incorporate five areas of quality of the operation in a school:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. quality of school management and the characteristic spirit of the school</li> <li>2. quality of school planning</li> <li>3. quality of curriculum provision</li> <li>4. quality of learning and teaching in subject/curriculum area</li> <li>5. quality of pastoral care and support for students</li> </ol> <p>Each of these areas is divided into a number of aspects, which represent the different activities collectively constituting the area of the school's operation which is to be evaluated. The aspects are further broken down into components.</p>	<p><b>Compulsory or not</b></p> <p>The use of the WSE-evaluation criteria as a basis for self-evaluation is optional. It is not possible to estimate the extent of present practice.</p>
<p><b>Alternative frameworks</b></p> <p>/</p>	<p><b>Areas</b></p> <p>/</p>	<p><b>Compulsory or not</b></p> <p>/</p>

### 2.3 The process of gathering and analysing evidence for self-evaluation

<p><b>Guidance</b></p> <p>The School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) established in 1999 is a Department of Education and Science response to support schools in preparing to meet their statutory obligations under the Education Act. The SDPI provides schools with guidelines and draft materials for School Development Planning including school self-evaluation.</p> <p>School Management and Trustee Bodies have undertaken, and continue to undertake, local initiatives to support schools in the school development planning and self-evaluation processes.</p> <p>The Department of Education and Science disseminated the report on the EU-project on School Self-evaluation 1997-1998 to all schools. This report includes instruments of self-evaluation such as questionnaires, interview templates, etc.</p> <p>Curriculum Support Services provide self-evaluation instruments specific to curricular areas (e.g. regarding the Transition Year Programme).</p>	<p><b>Compulsory or not</b></p> <p>At present approximately 50% of schools at primary and at second level are formally engaged in different stages of the school development planning process. It is intended to initiate all schools into the school planning process as part of the School Development Planning Initiative.</p>		
<p><b>Methods</b></p> <p>The School Development Planning Initiative advises schools to use a wide range of methods, including review instruments such as SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, Diagnostic Window, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and analysis of existing data. Schools are also encouraged to refer to external evaluation reports.</p>	<p><b>Stakeholders</b></p> <p>Depending on the focus of the review, the following stakeholders are consulted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Board of Management</li> <li>- In-school Management</li> <li>- teachers</li> <li>- parents</li> <li>- students</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reports</b></p> <p>Self-evaluation outcomes are reported to the relevant stakeholders at meetings and in planning documentation.</p>	<p><b>Link to planning</b></p> <p>As self-evaluation is an essential part of school planning, the outcomes of self-evaluation are directly linked to planning for improvement through strategic planning and action planning.</p>

<b>Compulsory or not</b> There are no compulsory methods	<b>Compulsory or not</b> Schools are free in their choice of consulted stakeholders	<b>Compulsory or not</b> There are no regulations regarding reporting outcomes of the self-evaluation process	<b>Compulsory or not</b> The self-evaluation is an inherent element of the school planning process (Education Act, 1998).
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## ***2.4 Other initiatives to improve school self-evaluation***

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## **3. Inspectorate evaluation of school self-evaluation**

### ***3.1 Role of the inspectorate and other organisations in promoting school self-evaluation***

#### **Role of the inspectorate**

It is intended that the Inspectorate will evaluate school self-evaluation at primary and second level when the Whole School Evaluation is implemented. For the moment, assigned/district inspectors as "critical friends" encourage and assist schools in self-evaluation at both primary and second levels. Subject inspectors at second level promote self-evaluation at subject level.

#### **Role of other organisations**

The following organisations also have an advisory and supporting role regarding self-evaluation:

- School Development Planning Initiative co-ordinators and facilitators
- Curriculum Support Services
- School Management and Trustee Bodies
- National network of Education Centres

### ***3.2 External inspections of schools including self-evaluation***

<p><b>Regular external inspections</b></p> <p><i>At primary level</i>, a school inspection model has been in place for many years. In this context of established external school evaluation inspectors may invite primary schools to contribute their own perspective on issues raised by the evaluation, though rarely on a formalised and structured basis. Evaluation of schools' development plans is now an automatic element of such school inspections.</p> <p><i>At second level</i> external evaluations do not include the evaluation of effectiveness of self-evaluation at present. However this is planned for the future, when the Whole School Evaluation (a kind of full inspection) will be implemented in primary and at second level.</p>	<p><b>Written standards/criteria</b></p> <p>When the Whole School Evaluation is implemented, inspectors will use the Evaluation criteria which are divided into a number of aspects and are further broken down in components. The key area's are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of School Management and the Characteristic Spirit of the School</li> <li>- Quality of School Planning</li> <li>- Quality of Curriculum Provision</li> <li>- Quality of Learning and Teaching in Subject/Curriculum Area</li> <li>- Quality of Pastoral Care and Support for Students</li> </ul> <p>For example: the first Area consists e.g. of an aspect "In-school Management" which has a component "Self-review/self-evaluation".</p>
<p><b>Use of self-evaluation outcomes in external evaluations</b></p> <p>In the context of WSE the inspectorate will evaluate the quality of school planning- the effectiveness of school planning processes, an integral part of which is school self-evaluation processes and outcomes. One aspect of the evaluation of the quality of school management is a component "self-review-self-evaluation". In this way the school's own self-evaluation processes and outcomes will form part of the evidence gathered by the inspectorate in evaluating this area.</p> <p>Questionnaires will not form part of the WSE evaluation process. Questionnaires have been used and will continue to be used by the inspectorate in evaluations, other than WSE, of specific curricular programmes or initiatives, where, for example, there is need to establishment compliance of schools with specific requirements for subjects and/or programmes (e.g. minimum number of hours) .</p>	<p><b>Written standards/criteria</b></p> <p>If the inspectorate uses self-evaluation outcomes to prepare/as an integral part of the WSE/School Inspection this will be based on the same WSE-evaluation criteria.</p>

### 3.3 Reports

<b>Inspectorate's report on the quality of school's self-evaluation</b> Schools in which major issues are identified as needing attention should expect a more searching follow-up inspection than those in which the concerns which were identified were less significant. A report of the follow-up inspection is made to the Department. The findings of follow-up inspections are not normally published, but are always discussed with the Principal and a representative of the Board of Governors	<b>Published or not – target group</b> The School Inspection reports at primary level are lodged with the Department of Education and Science which then issues copies to the relevant school authority and to the principal/staff of the school. These reports are confidential.  In the future the Whole School Evaluation reports will be issued to the same stakeholders and will also be confidential*. Moreover, data gathered during these inspections will not be used to compare schools or to construct any form of national league table. *The current policy on the confidentiality and non-publication of WSE reports has been challenged under the Freedom of Information Act and a decision by the Information Commissioner is pending.
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### 4. Other information

<b>Other relevant information about schools' self-evaluation</b>
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## Whole School Evaluation: Draft Evaluation Criteria

### Summary

Area 1	Aspects	Components
QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND THE CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL	<b>Aspect A</b> <b>Characteristic Spirit of the School</b>	<i>i. Statement of the characteristic spirit of the school</i> <i>ii. Relationships and communication within the school community</i>
	<b>Aspect B</b> <b>School Ownership and Management</b>	<i>iii. Role of patrons / trustees / owners</i> <i>iv. Composition, role and functioning of Board of Management</i> <i>v. Range and nature of Board of Management's involvement in school</i>
	<b>Aspect C</b> <b>In-school Management</b>	<i>vi. Management of staff</i> <i>vii. Management of students</i> <i>viii. Management of relationships with parents and the wider community</i> <i>ix. Management of resources</i> <i>x. Self-review / self-evaluation</i>

Area 2	Aspects	Components
QUALITY OF SCHOOL PLANNING	<b>Aspect A</b> <b>The School Plan</b>	<i>i. Planning process</i> <i>ii. Content of the School Plan</i>
	<b>Aspect B</b> <b>Implementation of the School Plan</b>	<i>i. Implementation and impact of the School Plan</i> <i>ii. Monitoring and evaluation of the School Plan leading to review</i>

Area 3	Aspects	Components

QUALITY OF CURRICULUM PROVISION	<b>Aspect A</b> <b>Curriculum Planning and Organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Curriculum provision</i></li> <li><i>ii. Breadth and balance across curriculum areas, programmes and subjects</i></li> <li><i>iii. Deployment of staff and timetabling</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect B</b> <b>Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Activities which support and enhance learning (co-curricular activities)</i></li> <li><i>ii. Extra-curricular opportunities</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect C</b> <b>Arrangements for Students' Choice (Second level)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Subject / curriculum options</i></li> <li><i>ii. Student choice of subject / level</i></li> <li><i>iii. Provision of information, support and advice</i></li> <li><i>iv. Parental involvement</i></li> </ul>

<b>Area 4</b>	<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Components</b>
QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SUBJECT / CURRICULUM AREA	<b>Aspect A</b> <b>Planning and Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Planning of work</i></li> <li><i>ii. Planning for resources</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect B</b> <b>Teaching and Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Methodology</i></li> <li><i>ii. Classroom management</i></li> <li><i>iii. Classroom atmosphere</i></li> <li><i>iv. Learning</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect C</b> <b>Assessment and Achievement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Assessment modes and outcomes</i></li> <li><i>ii. Record-keeping and reporting</i></li> <li><i>iii. Student engagement in subject / curriculum area</i></li> <li><i>iv. Overall student achievement in subject / curriculum area</i></li> </ul>

<b>Area 5</b>	<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Components</b>
QUALITY OF PASTORAL	<b>Aspect A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Policy and organisation of pastoral care provision</i></li> </ul>

CARE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS	<b>Pastoral Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>ii. Implementation of pastoral care policy</i></li> <li><i>iii. Social, personal and health education</i></li> <li><i>iv. Guidance</i></li> <li><i>v. Home-school-community liaison</i></li> <li><i>vi. Involvement of students in the operation of the school</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect B Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Principles underlying provision for students with special educational needs</i></li> <li><i>ii. Provision for students who present with general and specific learning disabilities</i></li> <li><i>iii. Provision for exceptionally able and talented students</i></li> <li><i>iv. Provision for students who present with physical and sensory disabilities</i></li> <li><i>v. Provision for students who present with behaviour problems / emotional disturbance (including ADHD)</i></li> <li><i>vi. Provision for students who present with specific speech and language disorder</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Aspect C Provision for Students with Disadvantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>i. Principles underlying provision and support for students with disadvantage (including students from minority groups e.g. of Traveller families, refugees and immigrants)</i></li> <li><i>ii. School's provision and support for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds</i></li> </ul>