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SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES 2016-2020
Post-Primary

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SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES 2016-2020

Post-Primary

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Chapter 1
Introduction

CHAPTER 1

1.1   Overview

School self-evaluation empowers a school community to identify and affirm good practice, and to identify and take action on areas that merit improvement. School self-evaluation is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement.

School self-evaluation was formally introduced into the Irish school system in 2012 as a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review, focused on school improvement. School self-evaluation further develops the school development planning process, and focuses it firmly on teaching and learning. Circular 0040/2012 required all schools to engage in the school self-evaluation process, and set out its purpose and rationale. Circular 0040/2016 sets out how schools should continue to implement school self-evaluation.

School self-evaluation involves reflective enquiry leading to action planning for improvement that is informed by evidence gathered within each school's unique context. The process enables schools to use this evidence to identify meaningful and specific targets and actions for improvement that focus on teaching and learning practices. It enables them to create and implement improvement plans, to measure their progress, and to identify their achievements.

In their ongoing engagement with school self-evaluation, schools should continue to focus on teaching and learning. They should continue to use the process to implement national initiatives and to identify and work on aspects of their own teaching and learning practices which require development and improvement. It is expected that most post-primary schools will use the school self-evaluation process in the 2016-2020 period to maintain a meaningful focus on literacy and numeracy and to assist them in introducing and embedding the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.*

1.2   The purpose of these *Guidelines*

These revised *Guidelines* have been prepared by the Inspectorate to provide practical support to schools in continuing school self-evaluation. They reflect feedback from schools and the education partners on the original *Guidelines* and more broadly on their experience of the school self-evaluation process to date.

The *Guidelines* include an extract from *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, devised by the Department of Education and Skills in consultation with the education partners, which schools can use when evaluating and seeking to develop and improve their practice. The Quality Framework has two dimensions:

- Teaching and learning
- Leadership and management

These *Guidelines* focus on the dimension of **Teaching and learning**, which is the core work of every school. The Quality Framework views learning as holistic and as intrinsic to the development of students' well-being (see 3.2 below).

By reflecting on what teachers teach and how they teach it, and on what students learn and how they learn, school management and teachers will become aware that certain aspects of the education they provide are effective and that improvement is needed in others.

The *Guidelines* provide practical suggestions as to how schools might make judgements about practice and about how well their students are doing. They include statements of practice to guide schools in making quality judgements about their work, and refer to the sample school self-evaluation tools to assist in the gathering of evidence that are available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

1.3   Who are the *Guidelines* for?

The *Guidelines* are for:

- **all those who have responsibility** for ensuring that our schools provide quality education for students
- **trustees and patron bodies** who may wish to ensure that the school self-evaluation process reflects the school's ethos and includes suitable consultation with the entire school community
- **boards of management, principals, deputy principals and teacher**s to enable them to use appropriate information to affirm good practice and to have a clear focus on the specific areas that need to be targeted for improvement or development
- **school communities including students and parent**s, to enable their fullest participation in school self-evaluation processes

1.4   Using the *Guidelines*

The *Guidelines* are intended to help schools in the school self-evaluation process. They can be used to provide direction for reflection on teaching and learning practices; to inform professional dialogue; to affirm what is working well; and to decide on priorities for action. Each school will decide where best to start. The content and structure of the *Guidelines* are outlined in section 1.5.

1.5   The content and structure of the *Guidelines*

Chapter 2, The school self-evaluation process, highlights school self-evaluation as a process and illustrates a step-by-step approach to getting school self-evaluation started.

Chapter 3, A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools, presents a framework outlining domains and standards to enable schools to evaluate teaching and learning in a systematic and coherent way.

Chapter 4, Statements of Practice, outlines a set of standards and statements of practice to assist schools in making judgements about the quality of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5, Evaluation approaches, describes a range of evaluation approaches and methods that schools can use to gather the evidence necessary for school self-evaluation.

Chapter 6, Reporting on School Self-Evaluation, provides guidance to schools about recording their self-evaluation processes and school improvement plan, and sharing them with parents and the wider school community.

Chapter 2
The School Self-Evaluation Process

CHAPTER 2

This chapter presents school self-evaluation as a process, and sets out a step-by-step approach.

2.1 What is school self-evaluation?

School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review. During school self-evaluation the principal, deputy principal and teachers, under the direction of the board of management and the patron and in consultation with parents and students, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school. It is an evidence-based approach which involves gathering information from a range of sources and making judgements with a view to bringing about improvements in students' learning. Self-evaluation requires a school to address the following key questions with regard to an aspect or aspects of its work:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- How can we find out more?
- What are our strengths?
- What are our areas for improvement?
- How can we improve?

2.2 School self-evaluation and inspection

School self-evaluation and external evaluation are complementary processes, both focused on improvement. The school self-evaluation process gives schools a means of identifying and addressing priorities, and of ensuring a whole-school focus on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning. External evaluations, in particular whole-school evaluations, take note of schools' identified priorities and assess their teaching and learning practices. Given this common focus on improvement, the Inspectorate in the course of its evaluations will take account of schools' engagement with self-evaluation and the outcomes of that engagement.

2.3 School self-evaluation and school development planning

School self-evaluation builds on and develops the process of school development planning. It is a way of working that contributes to both the permanent and developmental sections of the school plan. Through school self-evaluation, schools reflect on and review their day-to-day practices and their policies, with a particular focus on teaching and learning. It provides all schools, including DEIS schools, with an internal process for developing and progressing action planning for improvement.

School self-evaluation involves reflective enquiry leading to action planning for improvement that is informed by evidence gathered within each school's unique context. The process enables schools to use this evidence to identify meaningful and specific targets and actions for improvement that focus on teaching and learning practices and outcomes. It enables them to create and implement improvement plans, to measure their progress, and to identify their achievements.

School self-evaluation provides a meaningful context in which boards of management can further develop and review the policies and practices contained in the permanent section of the school plan to ensure they support continuing developments and improvements in teaching and learning.

2.4   School self-evaluation and curriculum change

School self-evaluation is an evidence-based process which enables teachers and schools to identify, analyse and make judgements about their students' learning. It supports planning and taking action with a view to making that learning better. It is well-suited to support the ongoing process of curriculum change.

In the period 2016-2020 significant curriculum change will be underway in post-primary schools through the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*. The school self-evaluation process will enable schools to engage with the *Framework* in a variety of ways. Most importantly, it will help schools to focus on classroom practice and to reflect on and introduce the changes in teaching, learning and assessment at subject or whole-school level that are necessary to meet the requirements of the *Framework*.

2.5   The school self-evaluation process

The process is iterative in that it facilitates repeated cycles of analysis or a return to a previous stage of the cycle as required. The framework below (Figure 2.1) highlights a six-step school self-evaluation process. This supports the building of teachers' expertise over time in looking at the evidence of students' learning, analysing it, interpreting it, and acting on it to improve outcomes.

Figure 2.1:   THE SIX-STEP SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

The first three steps of the framework outline the investigation phase of the process. This investigation phase can take place over the first year in a four-year cycle and can be used for scoping out and developing the improvement plan, and preparing for its implementation.

The school self-evaluation process begins with the identification of an area for focus and inquiry through teachers' own understanding and knowledge of their school context. This is followed by the gathering of evidence with regard to the area chosen. The evidence is then analysed and judgments are made regarding the school's current strengths and areas for improvement.

The next step ensures that schools retain a record of the evaluation and describe the actions for improvement. This takes place during, or at the end of, the investigation phase. The resulting school self-evaluation report and improvement plan is shared with the school community.

The improvement plan is then put into action and is monitored and evaluated over the course of its three-year implementation until practice becomes embedded. The cycle can then begin again, focusing on either a new area which has been identified, or returning to the same area to seek further, deeper improvement.

Table 2.1   APPLYING THE SIX-STEP SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

	TEACHING AND LEARNING			
Step 1: **Identify Focus** Relevant section of Guidelines: Chapter 3	Consider the Quality Framework overview Identify the domain most relevant to your school			
Step 2: **Gather Evidence** Relevant section of Guidelines: Chapters 4 and 5	Learner outcomes	Learner experiences	Teachers' individual practice	Teachers' collective / collaborative practice
	Investigate your area of focus			
Step 3: Analyse and make judgements Relevant section of Guidelines: Chapter 4	Not effective Highly effective			
	Evaluate the effectiveness of your current practice using statements of practice			
Step 4: Write and share report and improvement plan Relevant section of Guidelines: Chapter 6	Record your findings and develop your school improvement plan			
	Share a summary of this record with the parents and school community			
Step 5: Put improvement plan into action	Actions at class level Actions at subject department level and at year level Actions at school level			
Step 6 **Monitor actions and evaluate impact**	Changes in practice Teacher experiences Students' experiences Impact on learning	ADJUST AS NECESSARY		

STEP 1: IDENTIFY FOCUS

Step 1 involves identifying the focus for inquiry. Members of the school community will need to identify a particular aspect of teaching and learning that they wish to investigate. This will be based on their sense of their own context and where they feel their school might profitably explore the potential for improvement.

STEP 2: GATHER EVIDENCE

Once a focus for the school self-evaluation process has been identified, the school can move to gather evidence about what is working well and what can be improved. Typically, information should be gathered from a number of sources. The type of information or evidence that needs to be gathered will depend on the focus of the school's evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered from a number of sources including teachers, students, parents, management, classrooms and other learning settings.

It is important to ensure that evidence gathered is manageable, useful and focused.
Gathering too much information can undermine each of these important considerations.

Schools may decide to analyse assessment data and records of student progress as a starting point. Teachers' views and their records (assessment, uptake at foundation, ordinary and higher level in specific subjects and attainment in state examinations) are useful examples of evidence. It is also important to ensure that the views of others form part of the evidence base. Schools should gather information from students and parents to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge to make accurate judgements.

Professional reflection and dialogue between teachers, focusing on specific aspects of teaching and learning, are very important when gathering evidence. As collaborative practices are further developed among the teaching staff, team teaching and professional collaborative review will become an effective means of gathering evidence.

Sample tools to support the effective gathering of evidence may be accessed at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie and should be adapted to suit the particular context of each school.

STEP 3: ANALYSE AND MAKE JUDGEMENTS

Step 3 is about analysing the data and drawing conclusions based on the analysed data. Schools should determine, affirm and celebrate the strengths they identify in the aspects of practice being evaluated. They should also acknowledge the areas that should be prioritised for improvement. In order to be as objective as possible they should judge the quality using the statements of practice in chapter 4 of the Guidelines, taking due cognisance of the school context. The **statements of practice** are given at two levels. Statements of effective practice describe practices operating at a competent and effective level. The statements of highly effective practice describe very effective and successful practices.

Using the statements in this self-evaluative way, a typical school is likely to find that its practice corresponds in many areas to the statements of effective practice, and that some areas of its work are highly effective. It may identify areas that require development and improvement to bring them to the level of effective practice. The statements will also assist a school to develop areas of practice from 'effective' to 'highly effective', where relevant.

STEP 4: WRITE, AND SHARE, A SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Step 4 ensures that schools keep a record of their self-evaluation; plan for how they will improve the curriculum area or aspect of teaching and learning being evaluated; and share the findings of the evaluation and the improvement plans with the school community.

Typically, the school self-evaluation report and improvement plan should be a single document of no more than three pages in length. Normally, it should be completed once annually. A template for this document is available on www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. The first section is the report and should outline:

- An account of progress that has been made on implementing improvement in areas that were the subject of evaluation and improvement plans in the previous year
- The new aspect of teaching and learning chosen for self-evaluation, where relevant
- The areas that the school has prioritised for improvement

The second section of the document is the improvement plan. It should outline the improvement that the school wants to achieve and the actions that will be taken to bring about the improvements.

The setting of specific targets is the starting point. Having formed a judgement based on the relevant information or evidence, a school will be in a position to decide on specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets to bring about improvement. This is an important step in determining the actions that need to be taken.

This section of the document should contain:

- Targets for improvement with a focus on learner outcomes
- The actions that are required to achieve the targets over three years
- Reference to who will undertake the actions outlined
- Reference to who will monitor and review the implementation and progress
- Reference to how parents can help
- A timeframe for the achievement of the targets

The final part of this step asks schools to share a **summary** of the self-evaluation report and improvement plan with the whole school community.

STEP 5: PUT IMPROVEMENT PLANS INTO ACTION

This is the key step in the process. It is only when the actions in the improvement plan are implemented that the work of the school can improve. All relevant school personnel should share ownership of the actions to be implemented at individual teacher, subject department, or whole-school level. These actions should become part of the normal teaching and learning process.

STEP 6: MONITOR ACTIONS AND EVALUATE IMPACT

In order to evaluate the impact of the actions, they must be monitored. A number of questions are useful when considering this:

- Has practice changed in classrooms?
- What are teachers' experiences of the agreed changes?
- What are students' experiences of the agreed changes?
- What is the impact on student learning?

Schools will need to decide:

- How monitoring will occur
- Who will be responsible for monitoring
- How progress will be determined and reported
- When and to whom progress will be reported (for example, at staff meetings, planning meetings, board meetings)
- If targets and actions are realistic or need to be changed.

The role of those leading the process, and the role of all teachers, in the ongoing and systematic monitoring of the implementation of the plan is important. In this regard, the gathering and use of information at specified intervals to check if the required improvements are being made is necessary. The implementation of the school improvement plan ultimately leads to a new cycle of school self-evaluation.

Chapter 3
A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools

CHAPTER 3

This chapter presents a school self-evaluation quality framework for teaching and learning. The framework outlines domains and standards to enable schools to evaluate teaching and learning in a systematic and coherent way.

3.1   *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*

The Department has developed a quality framework for schools, which is available in its publication *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*. The framework consists of two dimensions: teaching and learning, and leadership and management. This quality framework is intended to inform both school self-evaluation and external evaluation. For clarity and completeness, the entire framework is presented on page 17. **It is important to note, however, that the required focus for school self-evaluation from 2016 to 2020 is the dimension of teaching and learning only.**

This teaching and learning section of the framework is an updated and simplified version of the framework published in the 2012 Guidelines. Feedback from schools and the education partners has informed the re-shaping of the themes and sub-themes into the domains and standards of this quality framework.

The teaching and learning section of the framework is designed to help schools identify their strengths and areas for development and enable them to take ownership of their own development and improvement. In this way, it seeks to embed self-evaluation, reflective practice and responsiveness to the needs of learners in classrooms, schools and other settings.

3.2   The principles of the teaching and learning section of the framework

The framework takes a holistic view of learning. It emphasises the need for students to develop a broad range of skills and competences that enable personal well-being, active citizenship and lifelong learning. Learning experiences for all students should therefore be broad, balanced, challenging and responsive to individual needs.

The framework sees students' well-being as intrinsic to this holistic view of learning, both as an outcome of learning and as an enabler of learning. It recognises the crucial role of schools in promoting and nurturing students' well-being through their practices in the key areas of school environment, curriculum, policies, and partnerships.

The framework recognises the importance of quality teaching and draws on a wide body of research that suggests that excellence in teaching is the most powerful influence on student achievement. It acknowledges the pedagogical skills required to enable high-quality learner experiences and outcomes. It views career-long professional development as central to the teacher's work and firmly situates reflection and collaboration at its heart. The framework holds that improving the quality of students' learning should be the main driver of teacher learning.

The framework views schools as dynamic learning organisations, where teachers are enabled to work individually and collectively to build their professional capacity in order to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. It holds that schools should assume responsibility for the quality of the education they provide and should be explicitly learner-centred. It views students as active agents in their learning who engage purposefully in a wide range of learning activities and who respond in a variety of ways to different learning opportunities.

Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools – Overview

	DOMAINS	STANDARDS
TEACHING AND LEARNING	Learner outcomes	Students: enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn, and expect to achieve as learners have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand themselves and their relationships demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum attain the stated learning outcomes for each subject, course and programme
	Learner experiences	Students: engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning
	Teachers' individual practice	The teacher: has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning intention and the students' learning needs responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary
	Teachers' collective / collaborative practice	Teachers: value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration work together to devise learning opportunities for students across and beyond the curriculum collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	Leading learning and teaching	School leaders: promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and students' learning
	Managing the organisation	School leaders: establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication manage the school's human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability
	Leading school development	School leaders: communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education
	Developing leadership capacity	School leaders: critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership build professional networks with other school leaders

3.3   The teaching and learning domains and standards

School self-evaluation is about maintaining high standards and improving learning experiences and educational outcomes for the students in our schools. In developing their school self-evaluation processes, schools should continuously focus on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings in the school.

It is also important for a school to adopt a planned approach to self-evaluation in order to obtain relevant and reliable information on an ongoing basis that can be used to inform school improvement targets. Clarity about what is to be evaluated, how it is to be evaluated, and when and by whom it is to be evaluated is required. Schools should also be aware of how the aspect of practice they are evaluating fits within a broad teaching and learning framework.

The quality framework for evaluating teaching and learning is provided to assist schools in this endeavour. Within this framework, teaching and learning are viewed through the following four distinct, although interrelated and sometimes overlapping, **domains**:

- Learner outcomes
- Learner experiences
- Teachers' individual practice
- Teachers' collective/collaborative practice

For each of these domains, four **standards** have been articulated. These standards are stated as the behaviours and attributes that characterise teaching and learning practices in an effective well-functioning school.

LEARNER OUTCOMES
This domain and its related standards encompass students' attitude to learning; their understanding of themselves and others; their acquisition of curriculum knowledge and skills; and their levels of attainment.

LEARNER EXPERIENCES
This domain and its related standards encompass pupils' learning experiences as demonstrated in levels of engagement as learners; growth as learners; self-reflection and ownership as learners; and development as lifelong learners.

TEACHERS' INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE
This domain and its related standards encompass teachers' knowledge and skills; their use of practices that progress students' learning; their use of appropriate teaching approaches; and their responsiveness to individual learning needs.

TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE/COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE
This domain and its related standards encompass teachers' professional development and collaboration; their co-operation to extend students' learning opportunities; their collective use of dependable assessment practices; and their sharing of expertise to build capacity.

3.4   Using the teaching and learning section of the framework

While schools have different contexts and will be at different stages of development, there are some aspects of practice that each school should consider as it engages with the school self-evaluation process. By reflecting on the teaching and learning domains and standards, schools will be able to quickly gauge the aspects of practice that are working well and those they might prioritise for improvement.

As school self-evaluation is a collaborative process, the focus of self-evaluation should be identified through a process of consultation. The question "how well are we doing?" remains a good starting point. When considering the most meaningful area of focus for them, teachers and management should **consider the domains and standards** as they are reflected in the practices in their school, using professional knowledge and evidence already available in the school, such as teachers' records of assessment, subject uptake levels and state examination results. This will enable them to highlight the aspects of their practice that are working well and to identify aspects which require more detailed investigation.

Having identified and agreed on the aspects of practice they need to evaluate, schools should **look more closely at the relevant domains and standards** for the areas of their practice that require more investigation. The statements of practice in Chapter 4 will serve as a useful and more detailed benchmark in assisting schools to **decide on the effectiveness of their practice**. This will lead teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and of the learning experiences they provide for students. It will affirm good practice and inform the development of relevant and focused **targets for improvement** which will be a **key part of a school's improvement plan.**

Schools should ensure a continuing focus on literacy and numeracy when developing improvement plans for any aspect of teaching and learning. In this regard, schools are encouraged to use the school self-evaluation process to assist them in introducing and embedding other relevant aspects of the *Framework for Junior Cycle.*

Chapter 4
Statements of Practice

CHAPTER 4

When schools have gathered evidence and analysed the relevant information, they will wish to draw conclusions about their practice. To ensure that the judgements they are making are sound, this chapter presents statements of practice which can be used as benchmarks.

4.1   Statements of practice

Chapter 3 has introduced the domains and standards that comprise the teaching and learning section of the framework. These will help schools to identify aspects of teaching and learning to focus on in their self-evaluation process. This chapter provides further detail for each standard in the framework in the form of **statements of practice**.

The statements of practice are intended to help schools in a number of ways.

They will help to guide schools in evaluating their own teaching and learning practices and in making sound judgements on their quality. An important requirement for arriving at sound and realistic evaluative judgements is the consistent use of valid benchmarks against which to judge quality.

The statements of practice also provide management, teachers and other education partners with real clarity about what is important, and a language for discussing what is working well and what needs to be improved.

The statements of practice are provided at two quality levels: effective practice and highly effective practice.

The statements of effective practice for each standard describe specific actions, attitudes, ways of working, and outcomes that characterise practice at a competent and effective level. The statements of highly effective practice incorporate these effective practices, and extend them in a way that delineates what highly effective and successful teaching and learning practices look like.

4.2   Using the statements of practice

Taken as a whole, the quality framework provides a comprehensive picture of what happens in an effective or very effective school. It is designed to provide teachers and schools with the widest possible scope to identify strengths and areas for development in their practice, and to identify what improved practice would look like. However, it needs to be used selectively and judiciously, so that schools and teachers focus on the standard(s) and related statements that are of most relevance to them, to create a manageable and meaningful focus for self-evaluation each year.

Using the statements as a benchmark, schools can evaluate their own practice and make sound judgements based on the evidence they have gathered. Schools will naturally aspire to very effective practice, but should in the first instance compare their findings to the statements of effective practice. In this way, they can identify existing strengths as well as possible gaps or weaknesses. Then, by considering the statements of highly effective practice, schools can build on existing strengths and work towards excellence.

4.3 The statements of practice – teaching and learning

DOMAIN 1: LEARNER OUTCOMES

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Students enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn and expect to achieve as learners	Students' enjoyment in learning is evident and is often linked to a sense of making progress and of achievement. Their engagement with learning contributes to their sense of well-being. Students are motivated to learn, and this is often linked to having a clear sense of attainable learning outcomes. Students see themselves as learners and demonstrate this in their positive approach to classwork and homework.	Students' enjoyment in learning is evident and **arises from** a sense of making progress and of achievement. Their engagement with learning contributes to their sense of well-being. Students are motivated to learn **through having** a clear sense of attainable **and challenging** learning outcomes. Students see themselves as learners and demonstrate this in their positive **and reflective** approach to classwork and homework.
Students have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to understand themselves and their relationships	Students demonstrate a knowledge, appropriate to their stage of development, of their own behaviour as individuals and as members of a group. They can apply this knowledge to manage situations, and to support their well-being. Students have the skills to modify and adapt their behaviour when required. Students demonstrate an enquiring attitude towards themselves and those around them.	Students demonstrate a knowledge, appropriate to their stage of development, of their own behaviour as individuals and as members of a group. **They apply this knowledge thoughtfully** to manage situations and support their well-being. Students have the skills to modify and adapt their behaviour when required, **and recognise the need to do so themselves**. Students demonstrate an enquiring **and open-minded** attitude towards themselves and those around them.
Students demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum	Students' subject-specific skills are developed in accordance with the relevant learning outcomes for the syllabus, specification or course. Students demonstrate good subject knowledge and subject skill at an appropriate level, and demonstrate this at the relevant assessment points in the year or cycle. Junior cycle students have generally attained proficiency in the prescribed key skills appropriate to their stage in the cycle. Senior cycle students have generally attained proficiency in the skills required for successful learning in the programmes they are following.	Students' subject-specific skills are developed in accordance with the relevant learning outcomes for the syllabus, specification or course. Students demonstrate **very good** subject knowledge and subject skill at an appropriate level, and demonstrate this at the relevant assessment points in the year or cycle. Junior cycle students **have attained** proficiency in the prescribed key skills appropriate to their stage in the cycle. Senior cycle students **have attained** proficiency in the skills required for successful learning in the programmes they are following.

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Students attain the stated learning outcomes for each subject, course and programme	Students achieve the intended learning of the lesson or sequence of lessons, which has been appropriately differentiated where necessary.	Students achieve, and **at times surpass**, the intended learning of the lesson or sequence of lessons, which has been appropriately differentiated where necessary.
	Students achieve the intended learning outcomes for the term and year, which has been appropriately differentiated where necessary.	Students achieve, and **at times surpass**, the intended learning for the term and year, which has been appropriately differentiated where necessary.
	Students' achievement in summative assessments, including certificate examinations, is in line with or above expectations.	Students' achievement in summative assessments, including certificate examinations, is in line with or above expectations.

DOMAIN 2: LEARNER EXPERIENCES

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Students engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities	Students demonstrate high levels of interest and participation in learning.	Students demonstrate **very high** levels of interest and participation in learning.
	They are able to work both independently and collaboratively in a purposeful manner.	They are able to work both independently and collaboratively in a **very purposeful and productive** manner.
	They understand and can explain the purpose of the learning tasks they are engaged in.	They understand and can explain the purpose of the learning tasks they are engaged in, **and can extend and develop the activity meaningfully**.
	They are able to report on, present, and explain the process and outcome of learning activities to a competent level.	They are able to report on, present, and explain the process and outcome of learning activities to a **highly competent** level.
Students grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive	Interactions among students and between students and teachers are respectful and positive, and conducive to well-being.	Interactions among students and between students and teachers are **very respectful and positive**, and conducive to well-being.
	Relationships and interactions in classrooms and learning areas support a co-operative and productive learning environment.	Relationships and interactions in classrooms and learning areas **create and sustain** a co-operative, affirming and productive learning environment.
	Students' experiences as learners generally reflect well on how the code of behaviour is understood and implemented.	Students' experiences as learners reflect **consistently well** on how the code of behaviour is understood and implemented.
	Students feel able to contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion. They listen respectfully to the opinions and experiences of their classmates.	Students contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion **with confidence. They are respectful of and interested in** the opinions and experiences of their classmates.
	They ask questions and suggest possible solutions confidently. They are willing to risk incorrect responses, and accept that mistakes are part of the learning process.	They ask questions and suggest possible solutions **very confidently**. They are willing to risk incorrect responses, and **understand the value of making mistakes, using them as learning opportunities**.
	They demonstrate a sufficient level of motivation to engage and persist with increasingly challenging work.	They demonstrate a **high level** of motivation, and **enjoy engaging and persisting with** increasingly challenging work.

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Students reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning	Students assess their progress and are aware of their strengths and areas for development as learners. They take pride in their work and follow the guidance they receive to improve it. They reflect on their behaviour and attitude to learning, and are able to contribute to setting meaningful goals for themselves. Where the school curriculum provides opportunities to do so, students are able to negotiate their learning thereby increasing their autonomy as learners. Students take responsibility for their own learning, and use the learning resources provided to them to develop their skills and extend their knowledge.	Students assess their progress **realistically** and **can describe** their strengths and areas for development as learners. They have **a sense of ownership of their work**, take pride in it, and **take responsibility for improving it**. They reflect on their behaviour and attitude to learning, and **are able to set meaningful personal goals as a result of their reflection**. Where the school curriculum provides opportunities to do so, students **negotiate their learning** thereby increasing their autonomy and **effectiveness** as learners. Students take responsibility for their own learning, and use both the learning resources provided to them, **and those that they source themselves**, to develop their skills and extend their knowledge.
Students experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning	Students make meaningful connections between learning in different subjects and areas of the curriculum. Students make meaningful connections between school-based learning and learning that takes place in other contexts. Students can, with some guidance, transfer and apply skills learned in one context to another context. Students are aware of the key skills underpinning the curriculum and of their relevance to present and future learning. They take the opportunities provided by curricular and other learning experiences to apply and develop these key skills. Students have an age-appropriate understanding of the concept of lifelong learning, and are well disposed to continuing education and training.	Students make meaningful **and authentic** connections between learning in different subjects and areas of the curriculum. Students make meaningful **and authentic** connections between school-based learning and learning that takes place in other contexts. Students can, **of their own initiative**, transfer and apply skills learned in one context to another context. Students **can explain** the key skills underpinning the curriculum and **understand** their relevance to present and future learning. They take the opportunities provided by curricular and other learning experiences to apply and develop these key skills **consciously and deliberately**. Students have an age-appropriate understanding of the concept of lifelong learning, and **see themselves engaging in** continuing education and training.

DOMAIN 3: TEACHERS' INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
The teacher has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills	Teachers have the required professional qualifications and have engaged in a range of continuing professional development (CPD).	Teachers have the required professional qualifications and have engaged in a range of continuing professional development (CPD) **relevant to students' learning**.
	Teachers create an inclusive, orderly, student-centred learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust.	Teachers create an inclusive, orderly, student-centred learning environment based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust, **in which students regulate and monitor their own behaviour**.
	Teachers have high expectations of students' work and behaviour, and communicate these expectations effectively to students.	Teachers have high expectations of students' work and behaviour, communicate these expectations effectively to students, and **facilitate students in internalising them**.
	Teachers demonstrate competence and proficiency in the skills and knowledge of their subject areas.	Teachers demonstrate competence and proficiency in the skills and knowledge of their subject areas, **and can link these to other areas across and beyond the curriculum**.
	Teachers demonstrate competence and proficiency in the pedagogical skills required in their subject area.	Teachers demonstrate competence and proficiency in the pedagogical skills required in their subject area, and for **developing students' learning across and beyond the curriculum**.
	Teachers, through their own enthusiasm for and enjoyment of their subject area, motivate students to engage in and enjoy their learning	Teachers **model** enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning, and **thereby create a learning environment where students are self-motivated** to engage in, **extend** and enjoy their learning.

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
The teacher selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning	Teachers' plans identify clear, relevant learning intentions that are contextualised to students' learning needs.	Teachers' plans identify clear, relevant learning intentions that are contextualised to students' learning needs. **Learning intentions reflect a developmental and incremental approach to progressing students' learning**.
	Teachers design and prepare in advance a sequence of learning tasks and activities suitable for the specific learning intentions of the lesson or series of lessons.	Teachers design and prepare in advance a sequence of learning tasks and activities suitable for the specific learning intentions of the lesson or series of lessons. **Lesson design is flexible to allow for emerging learning opportunities**.
	Teachers identify and prepare in advance resources suitable for the specific learning intentions of each lesson, or series of lessons, and the learning needs of the class.	Teachers identify and **thoroughly** prepare in advance resources **tailored to match** the specific learning intentions of each lesson, or series of lessons, and **individual students' learning need**s.
	Teachers' preparation includes preparation for the differentiation of learning intentions and learning activities, and is informed by meaningful use of data.	Teachers' preparation includes preparation for the differentiation of learning intentions and learning activities, **including personalised learning opportunities**, and is informed by meaningful use of data.
	Teachers plan for assessing students' attainment of the learning intentions of the lesson, or series of lessons, using both assessment of learning and assessment for learning.	Teachers plan for assessing **all relevant aspects of students' learning** using both assessment of learning and assessment for learning.
	Teachers' assessment practices include not only assessment of knowledge but also assessment of skills and dispositions.	Teachers' assessment practices include not only assessment of knowledge but also assessment of skills and dispositions. **Teachers tailor assessment strategies to meet individual learning needs**.
	Teachers regularly provide students with constructive, developmental oral and written feedback on their work.	Teachers regularly provide students with constructive, developmental oral and written feedback. **Teachers use feedback to work with students on clear strategies for improvement**.
	Teachers share success criteria with students so that they can assess their own learning through self-assessment and peer assessment.	Teachers share and **co-create** success criteria with students so that they can assess their own learning through self-assessment and peer assessment, and **identify areas for improvement and strategies to achieve improvement**.
	Teachers maintain assessment records that are clear, useful and easy to interpret and share.	Teachers maintain assessment records that are clear, useful, easy to interpret and share, **and tailored to students' individual learning needs**.

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
The teacher selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning intentions and to students' learning needs	Teachers strategically select and use approaches to match the learning intentions of the lesson and meet the learning needs of students.	Teachers strategically select and use approaches to match the learning intentions of the lesson, meet the learning needs of students, and **open up further learning opportunities**.
	Teachers deliver good-quality instruction which is directed at eliciting student engagement. Teachers maintain a balance between their own input and productive student participation and response.	Teachers deliver **highly effective** instruction which is directed at eliciting **deep** student engagement. Teachers **skilfully manage their own input to optimise** student participation and response.
	Teachers use a range of questioning techniques effectively for a variety of purposes including stimulating substantial student responses and facilitating deeper engagement with lesson content.	Teachers use a range of questioning techniques effectively for a variety of purposes including stimulating substantial student responses, facilitating deeper engagement with lesson content **and extending learning beyond the lesson**.
	Teachers meaningfully differentiate content and activities in order to cater for the varying needs and abilities of students.	Teachers meaningfully differentiate content and activities in order **to ensure that all students are challenged by the learning activities and experience success as learners**.
	Teachers purposefully develop relevant literacy and numeracy skills during lessons.	Teachers **integrate** relevant literacy and numeracy skills **into the fabric of the lesson**.
	Teachers enable students to make meaningful links between lesson material and their learning in other subjects and elsewhere.	Teachers enable students to make meaningful links between lesson material and their learning in other subjects, **and to transfer their learning to unfamiliar experiences**.
The teacher responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary	Teachers are aware of students' individual learning needs, and adapt teaching and learning practices to help students overcome challenges.	Teachers are aware of students' individual learning needs, **and design and implement personalised interventions** to help students overcome challenges.
	Teachers engage with students' opinions, dispositions, and contexts, and modify their teaching practice to build on opportunities and address any limitations that they present.	Teachers engage with students' opinions, dispositions, and contexts, and modify their teaching practice to build on opportunities and address any limitations that they present. **Teachers empower students to exploit these opportunities and overcome their limitations.**

DOMAIN 4: TEACHERS' COLLECTIVE/COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Teachers value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration	Teachers recognise that continuing professional development (CPD) and collaboration are intrinsic to their work. Teachers use formal meeting and planning time to reflect together on their work. Teachers engage actively and productively with a variety of CPD providers including organised school-based CPD. Teachers identify and engage in CPD that develops their own practice and meets the needs of students and the school. Teachers view collaboration as a means to improve student learning and to enhance their own professional development. They engage in constructive collaborative practice. Teachers implement whole-school approaches to teaching and learning to improve students' experiences and outcomes.	Teachers recognise **and affirm** continuing professional development (CPD) and collaboration as intrinsic to their work. Teachers use formal meeting and planning time to reflect together on their work. **The school is the primary locus for teachers' CPD** and teachers engage actively and productively with CPD programmes. Teachers identify and engage in CPD that develops their own practice, meets the needs of students and the school, and **enhances collective practice**. Teachers view collaboration as a means to improve student learning and to enhance their own professional development. They engage in constructive collaborative practice, **and in collaborative review of practice**. Teachers **collectively agree** and implement whole-school approaches to teaching and learning to improve students' experiences and outcomes.
Teachers work together to devise learning opportunities for students across and beyond the curriculum	Teachers plan collaboratively for learning activities that enable students to make meaningful connections between learning in different subjects. Teachers collaboratively plan learning experiences that help students to see learning as a holistic and lifelong endeavour. Teachers work effectively with each other and with parents to support students with identified learning needs. Teachers use parent-teacher meetings and other communication with parents constructively to support parents' meaningful involvement in their children's education. Teachers collaborate with relevant and appropriate outside personnel to provide meaningful learning experiences for students.	Teachers plan collaboratively for learning activities that enable students to make meaningful and **progressively more challenging** connections between learning in different subjects. Teachers collaboratively plan learning experiences that **enable and empower** students to see learning as a holistic and lifelong endeavour. Teachers work **very effectively** with each other and with parents to support students with identified learning needs. Teachers use parent-teacher meetings and other communication with parents **very constructively** to support parents' meaningful involvement in their children's education and **development as learners**. Teachers collaborate with relevant and appropriate outside personnel to provide meaningful learning experiences for students, and **work together to ensure that the learning is integrated**.

STANDARDS	STATEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	STATEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICE
Teachers collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices	Teachers approach assessment as a collaborative endeavour to support students' learning and to measure their attainment. Teachers have collectively developed a whole-school policy on assessment that is appropriate to the curriculum and to their students. The policy includes formative and summative assessment practices. It is implemented consistently. Teachers have collectively developed a whole-school approach to providing developmental oral and written feedback to students. This approach is implemented consistently, and includes the collective review of students' work. Teachers have collectively developed assessment records that are clear, useful and easy to interpret and share. These records provide a comprehensive picture of each student's learning attainments and needs.	Teachers approach assessment as a collaborative endeavour to support students' learning and to measure their attainment. Teachers have collectively developed a whole-school policy on assessment that is appropriate to the curriculum and to their students. The policy includes formative and summative assessment practices. It is implemented consistently **and is reviewed collectively**. Teachers have collectively developed a whole-school approach to providing developmental oral and written feedback to students. This approach is implemented consistently, and **is underpinned by** the collective review of students' work. Teachers have collectively developed assessment records that are clear, useful and easy to interpret and share. These records provide a comprehensive picture of each student's learning attainments and needs and **are built on progressively as the student moves through the school**.
Teachers contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise	Teachers recognise the value of building whole-staff capacity and are willing to share their expertise with other teachers in the school. Teachers are willing to share their expertise with teachers from other schools, for example through education centres, online forums, and school visits. Teachers engage regularly in professional collaborative review of teaching and learning practices. Teachers are open to building collective expertise in the skills and approaches necessary to facilitate student learning for the future.	Teachers **value their role within a professional learning organisation**, and **as a matter of course** share their expertise with other teachers in the school. Teachers **share** their expertise with teachers from other schools, for example through education centres, online forums, and school visits. Teachers engage regularly in professional collaborative review of teaching and learning practices, and **use it to identify and build on effective approaches**. Teachers are **proactive** in building collective expertise in the skills and approaches necessary to facilitate student learning for the future.

Chapter 5
Evaluation Approaches

CHAPTER 5

This chapter highlights a range of evaluation approaches and methods that schools can use to gather the evidence necessary for making judgements during the school self-evaluation process.

5.1   Introduction

School self-evaluation requires systematic and focused collection of information or evidence. Good information or evidence from one or more sources enables sound judgements about quality to be made.

Limiting the scope of the evidence-gathering stage of self-evaluation to the collection of essential information only is important; too much information can lead to an unmanageable, unsustainable and unproductive school self-evaluation process. Some practical considerations at the *Gather evidence* stage, along with a range of possible approaches, methods and useful tools are discussed in this chapter.

5.2   Some practical considerations

A school's development and use of agreed approaches and tools to gather information or evidence can help to promote consistency, objectivity and rigour in its information-collection process. This can contribute to sound, reliable and valid evaluative conclusions about aspects of the work of the school. However, in order for evaluation tools to be effective, their design and use should be guided by a number of practical considerations:

- **Relevance**: The tools should gather information or evidence relevant to the aspect of teaching and learning that is being evaluated. They should not be designed or used to gather information extraneous to the evaluation
- **Simplicity and clarity**: Long or complex tools should be avoided
- **Efficiency**: The tools should be relatively easy and straightforward to use
- **Protocol:** The tools should be used in accordance with the school's agreed protocol for their use
- **Validity**: Consideration should be given to how the tools can assist in bringing together and comparing evidence of different kinds from a range of sources. This will contribute to establishing the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn

The approaches, methods and tools discussed in this chapter are presented with the aim of providing practical guidance to schools on how they can gather information or evidence during school self-evaluation. It is envisaged that schools will use a selection of tools such as those discussed in this chapter in a flexible way.

5.3   Evaluation approaches and tools

EVALUATION APPROACHES

Schools will use a range of approaches to gather evidence, depending on the area of practice being evaluated. It is important that schools build on the evidence that is already available. It is also necessary to ensure that evidence is gathered from a range of sources and that the views of all those involved in the school community are sought when relevant. A list of possible evaluation approaches is outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1   List of possible evaluation approaches

Individual and collective professional review of teaching and learning
- Teacher discussion and reflection
- Teacher self-reflection
- Team teaching and review
- Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning
- Individual and collective review of student work

School community perspectives on teaching and learning
- Eliciting views of students
- Eliciting views of teachers
- Eliciting views of parents

Data review of student outcomes arising from teaching and learning
- Analysis of student performance in state examinations
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative information and data on the literacy achievement and progress of students
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative information and data on the numeracy achievement and progress of students
- Comparison of the outcomes of state examination attainments with school trends and national norms
- Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on student dispositions towards teaching and learning
- Review of current assessment records
- Review of student progress records

School environment and policy review for teaching and learning
- Audit of school's code of behaviour with reference to the NEWB Guidelines
- Analysis of attendance rates
- Analysis of suspension and detention rates
- Audit of the school assessment policy
- Audit of school safety statement
- Health and safety audit
- Health and safety inspection of classrooms and other learning settings
- Consultation with the board and teachers regarding Child Protection needs
- Review of use of ICT
- Review of written plans

EVALUATION TOOLS

When deciding on the evidence to be gathered, schools will need to consider the most appropriate tools for this purpose. The list below (Table 5.2) may be useful in determining the most suitable tool(s) for gathering the necessary evidence. It is important that schools gather only information that is appropriate to judge the quality of practice in the area being evaluated.

Samples of a range of evaluation tools that schools can use to gather the information or evidence necessary for school self- evaluation are provided on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. The website also includes audio-visual materials which provide examples and case studies incorporating the use of some of these tools. Schools may decide to use some of the tools provided or they may choose to develop their own tools to meet their self evaluation data-gathering requirements. Brief descriptions and discussion regarding some of the key tools listed follow Table 5.2.

Table 5.2   List of possible evaluation tools

- Reflection/review/observation template
- Teacher reflection sheet
- NCCA *Focus on Learning* Toolkit
- School protocol for professional collaborative review of teaching and learning
- School protocol for collaborative review of student work
- Checklists
- Focus group template
- Interview template
- Questionnaires (student, parents, teachers)
- Analysis tool developed by PDST for analysis of results in the certificate examinations
- NCCA ICT framework
- Prompt questions to facilitate data analysis

5.4   Reflection sheets

Reflection sheets are a useful means for capturing the perspectives of a number of different parties on teaching and learning outcomes, experiences or practice. Reflection sheets could be completed by the principal, deputy principal, teachers, students, board members or members of the parents' association in order to capture a range of perspectives on the work of the school. The information so gathered can be used to guide self-evaluation of particular areas in more depth through other evaluation methods and tools. A sample reflection sheet can be accessed at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

5.5   Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning is a practical and powerful method of obtaining direct, first-hand information or evidence about teaching and learning in classrooms and in other learning settings. It gives direct access to what students and teachers are doing and can be used to gather information on a wide range of areas that impact on student learning.

In the context of school self-evaluation, professional collaborative review of teaching and learning can take a number of forms. For example, it can take place in a team-teaching context where two teachers engage in collaborative planning for and teaching of a number of lessons. They subsequently reflect collaboratively on those lessons and specifically on the teaching and learning that took place. Alternatively, a teacher may invite a colleague to engage in professional review of a lesson or lessons. This may involve observing a lesson and subsequently discussing it in a reflective way. Another possibility might involve a group of colleagues gathering to discuss samples of student work and how the next steps in learning might be taken for the students involved.

To succeed as a method of gathering information during school self-evaluation, professional collaborative review of teaching and learning needs to be conducted in a collegial, respectful way within the terms of an agreed school protocol, using specific, planned criteria. It requires careful planning in relation to time allocation and student supervision arrangements.

A sample teaching and learning reflection/review/observation schedule and a sample protocol are available on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. The schedule can be used as a tool to facilitate review in a collaborative teaching context. The website also includes some other advice when planning for the use of professional collaborative review by a school or subject department.

5.6 Focus groups

Focus groups can be used to explore, in greater depth, questions emerging from other information-collection tools such as questionnaires or individual interviews.

A focus group is an information-gathering tool where a selected set of participants, for example, a group of teachers, students, parents or members of the board, gather to discuss a particular area which has been identified as the focus for a school's evaluation. It involves the collection of information through group interaction on predetermined topics. For example, a group of teachers may gather to explore in depth a number of issues related to the teaching of literacy in the school emerging from a review of lessons and questionnaires administered to parents. Much of the information yielded in a focus group discussion will be qualitative in nature.

Further advice with regard to the planning and use of focus groups can be accessed through the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

5.7 Interviews

Interviews are another practical way of gathering information on the work of the school from members of the school community. They can facilitate professional conversations about teaching and learning. Because interviews tend to be relatively open-ended in their format, they can yield wide-ranging, rich information.

Further advice about the planning and use of interviews, and sample interview schedules, are available on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

5.8 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a versatile school self-evaluation tool. They allow information on the work of the school to be collected from a range of people including teachers, students, parents and the board of management. They can be used for the purpose of obtaining:

- Factual information (for example, frequency of use of ICT in lessons, type of assessment information communicated to parents)
- Information on the experiences and perspectives of parties on the work of the school
- Information regarding parties' levels of satisfaction with the work of the school

Sample questionnaires, along with some considerations when using questionnaires, can be found on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie .

5.9 Checklists

Checklists provide a simple format for recording basic factual information across a range of criteria. Instances in which they are particularly useful in the context of school self-evaluation include the analysis of documents (for example, the school's assessment policy, teachers' planning documents or students' written work) and the auditing of resources (for example an audit of the availability and use of ICT resources in classrooms).

In devising checklists in the context of school self-evaluation, the inclusion of an open-ended comment section in addition to the basic tick boxes is advised in order to facilitate the recording of additional relevant and necessary information.

Sample checklists may be found at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. These include checklists in relation to compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements as part of the school self-evaluation report and improvement plan.

Chapter 6
Reporting on School Self-Evaluation

CHAPTER 6

This section offers advice to schools on reporting on their self-evaluation, on devising a self-evaluation report and school improvement plan and on how to communicate what they are doing to the school community.

6.1   The school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan

The primary focus of self-evaluation should not be on the written work. Nonetheless, schools should complete a concise school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan annually. This should be a single document of no more than three pages.

The school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan serves a number of functions:

- It sets out the school's judgements about its strengths and about the areas that need improvement
- It provides a basis for discussion and reflection among teachers, management, patron/ trustees and others in relation to the work of the school
- It can be used by boards of management in reporting to parents and the patron on the work of the school, as required under the Education Act 1998
- It provides the basis on which specific improvement targets are set
- It can inform external evaluations undertaken by the Inspectorate

The self-evaluation report and school improvement plan sets out clearly what needs to be done to further improve the work of the school. It should be user-friendly in layout and length: typically no more than three pages. The language used should be clear, specific and accessible. The first section is the report and should outline:

- The progress made in previously-identified areas for improvement and, where relevant, how actions for improvement will continue in the current year
- The new aspect of teaching and learning chosen for self-evaluation, where relevant
- The areas that the school has identified for improvement

The second section of the document is the improvement plan. It should outline the improvement that the school wants to achieve and the actions that will be taken to bring about the improvements. This section sets targets for further improvement based on the self-evaluation findings. It specifies the actions required to reach those targets. The relevant section of the quality framework should be used to assist in setting targets, and in subsequently judging whether the targets have been met.

The setting of specific targets is the starting point. Having formed a judgement based on the relevant information or evidence, a school will be in a position to decide on specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets to bring about improvement. This is an important step in determining the actions that need to be taken.

Targets may relate to any aspect of students' achievement, including their knowledge, their skills and their attitudes. Targets should be linked to relevant baseline data generated from the self-evaluation process engaged in by the school, so that progress can be measured in an effective manner. A baseline is important. School self-evaluation is all about improving learning experiences and outcomes for students. To know whether any progress has taken place for students as a result of the implementation of the actions for improvement, baseline data will be necessary.

Targets may not be measurable in a quantitative or numeric way, but they should be capable of being measured in a way which can show whether the desired improvements have been achieved. This will almost certainly be necessary, for example, when considering curricular areas other than English and Mathematics. Even with oral language skills, however, targets not based on percentage improvements may be more suitable:

- Our students will demonstrate measurable improvement in their ability to talk clearly and audibly to a variety of audiences in the school environment (individuals, groups, own class) by June 2020.

A clear timeframe is set out, but such a target poses a question: how will students demonstrate this learning so that it can be judged to have happened? A range of options could be considered: a focus group; the use of simple reflection templates; oral presentations in a range of subjects.

The actions needed to achieve the targets set should be based on practical changes that lead to improvement. This will nearly always involve changes to teachers' practice or the implementation of a particular approach or strategy throughout the school.

The self-evaluation report and school improvement plan should identify:

- The persons responsible for implementing the actions and the time frame involved
- The success criteria or measurable outcomes by which achievement of the targets will be judged.

Sample self-evaluation report and school improvement plan templates are available on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. Checklists to assist the school in reviewing whether it is meeting the requirements of relevant legislation and regulation, and whether it has all necessary policies in place, can be provided as appendices to the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan. Sample regulatory checklists are also available on the website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie.

6.2 Communicating the school self-evaluation process to the school community

Schools should provide a summary of their self-evaluation report and the school improvement plan to the whole school community. This single document should be brief, clear and meaningful.

The summary document should include the following headings:

- This is what is working well in our school
- This is how we know
- This is what we are going to focus on to make our practice even better
- This is how parents can help

A sample summary report and school improvement plan template is available on the school self-evaluation website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie .

Appendix
Circular 0040/2016

Circular 0040/2016

To Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff of Post-Primary Schools

CONTINUING IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION 2016-2020

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

Introduction

This circular

- o follows on from, and supersedes, Circular 0040/2012, *Implementation of School Self-Evaluation*
- o provides an overview of the first cycle of school self-evaluation, 2012-2016
- o sets out the requirements for schools in their continuing engagement with school self-evaluation of teaching and learning
- o outlines appropriate timeframes and stages for the school self-evaluation process, 2016-2020
- o indicates the support available to schools for school self-evaluation
- o includes a summary at section 10, listing the actions that schools need to take

1.   School self-evaluation and school development planning

The Education Act, 1998 required schools to develop a **school plan** which would state the school's objectives regarding access and participation, and the measures proposed by the school to achieve these objectives. The Act obliges boards of management to regularly review and update the school plan. School development planning as a formal activity resulted from these provisions. Through formal school planning, schools developed and reviewed mandatory policies and legislative requirements, creating what can be regarded as the **permanent section** of their school plan. School planning also enabled schools to identify and work on priority areas for development, thus creating the **developmental section** of their school plan.

School self-evaluation is a further development of school development planning. It is a way of working that contributes to both the permanent and developmental sections of the school plan. Through school self-evaluation, schools reflect on and review their day-to-day practices and their policies, with a particular focus on teaching and learning. It provides all schools, including DEIS schools, with an internal process for developing and progressing action planning for improvement.

School self-evaluation involves reflective enquiry leading to action planning for improvement that is informed by evidence gathered within each school's unique context. The process enables schools to use this evidence to identify meaningful and specific targets and actions for improvement that focus on teaching and learning practices and outcomes. It enables them to create and implement improvement plans, to measure their progress, and to identify their achievements.

School self-evaluation provides a meaningful context in which boards of management can further develop and review the policies and practices contained in the permanent section of the school plan to ensure they support continuing developments and improvements in teaching and learning.

2. The first cycle of school self-evaluation, 2012-2016

Systematic school self-evaluation was introduced in 2012/13 as a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review, focused on school improvement. Circular 0040/2012 required all schools to engage in the process, and set out its purpose and rationale. The circular made explicit reference to the application of the process to schools' implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, and to the introduction of a reformed junior cycle programme.

In the first four-year cycle of school self-evaluation, schools were required to develop and implement improvement plans for literacy, numeracy, and an aspect of teaching and learning that they selected themselves. Irish-medium schools were specifically required to focus on literacy in Irish, literacy in English, and numeracy. In this way school self-evaluation provided schools with a process for implementing a national initiative, and also for identifying and working on an aspect of teaching and learning that would be meaningful for them.

Many schools have gained very useful knowledge of their own strengths and areas for development and improvement through their initial engagement with school self-evaluation. They have not only reflected on and evaluated aspects of their teaching practices and students' learning but have also gained valuable insights into the process of evidence-based action planning for improvement.

As the first cycle of school self-evaluation concludes, schools have begun to embed the teaching and learning practices that are leading to improved outcomes in literacy, numeracy and other areas. They should continue this process of embedding successful practices as they embark on the next cycle.

3. The second cycle of school self-evaluation, 2016-2020

In the next cycle of school self-evaluation, **teaching and learning continues to be the focus**. Schools should continue to use the process to implement national initiatives and to identify and work on aspects of their own teaching and learning practices which require development and improvement. These aspects of teaching and learning will vary according to the needs of schools.

Typically, most schools will use the process to assist them in introducing and embedding relevant aspects of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. It is expected that schools will also use the process to maintain a meaningful focus on literacy and numeracy.

Schools should use the knowledge they have acquired from the first cycle to enhance their continuing engagement with school self-evaluation. Of particular relevance is the experience gained in areas such as gathering baseline data, establishing meaningful targets, and whole-school implementation of actions.

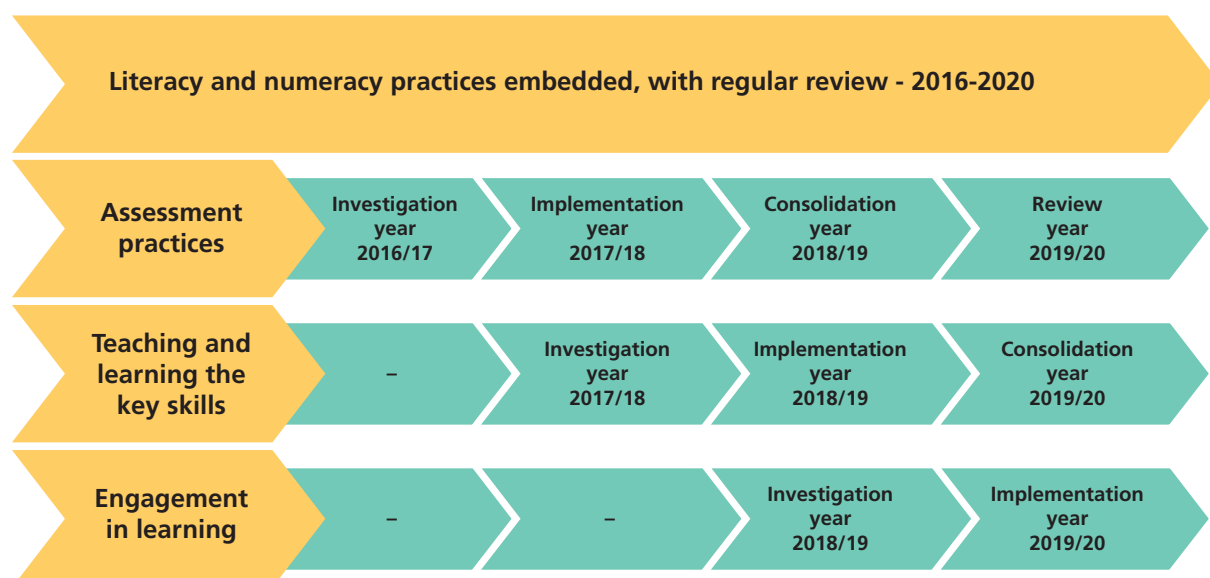## 4.   Planning and implementing the second cycle of school self-evaluation

Schools should select a minimum of two and a maximum of four aspects of teaching and learning as the focus for their self-evaluation process from 2016 to 2020.

Within this four-year period, schools should maintain self-evaluation as a continuous process and should develop and implement school improvement plans in aspects of teaching and learning that are of relevance to them. They should use the teaching and learning section of *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-primary Schools* in the revised School *Self-Evaluation Guidelines* as a benchmark when reflecting on and evaluating their current practice.

Schools now know the importance of the initial steps in the process – evidence-gathering and analysis – to ensure that judgements based on them are sound and that plans for improvement have the required focus and clarity. The four-year period allows for an investigation year for scoping out and developing the improvement plan, and preparing for its implementation. A sequence of implementation, consolidation, and review then follows over the next three years until practice becomes embedded.

The graphic below sets out how the process would work over a four-year period in which a school selects three aspects of teaching and learning. **For illustrative purposes only,** it provides examples of how aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle can be implemented through the self-evaluation process. Schools should refer to Circular 0024/2016, *Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle*, for specific requirements.

SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION, 2016-2020

Literacy and numeracy practices embedded, with regular review - 2016-2020				
Assessment practices	Investigation year 2016/17	Implementation year 2017/18	Consolidation year 2018/19	Review year 2019/20
Teaching and learning the key skills	–	Investigation year 2017/18	Implementation year 2018/19	Consolidation year 2019/20
Engagement in learning	–	–	Investigation year 2018/19	Implementation year 2019/20

Within the four-year timeframe indicated above, schools have a degree of flexibility in the number of aspects of teaching and learning that they focus on. Some schools may feel confident that they can implement an improvement plan without a preliminary investigation year, for example where baseline data is already available and the actions required are clear. In other cases, schools may select an aspect of teaching and learning which necessitates considerable changes in practice to bring about improved outcomes for students. In such cases, schools may begin implementing these changes and defer the investigation of a new aspect of teaching and learning until the following year, where they consider it wise to do so.

5.   Recording and reporting on the school's self-evaluation process

School self-evaluation is about reflecting on and improving how teachers teach and how students learn. Documentation should not be the focus. Only the documents detailed below are required.

Each year, the school should produce a short *self-evaluation report and school improvement plan*. This single document will record:

- the progress made in the last year in previously-identified areas for improvement and, where relevant, how actions for improvement will continue in the current year
- where relevant, the new aspect of teaching and learning the school has selected for the current year and the basis for the selection
- targets and actions for improvement the school has set; the specific actions to be undertaken in classrooms and learning settings; the timeframes and methods agreed for monitoring and assessing progress; and the personnel responsible at each stage of implementation.

Schools may wish to write a separate *self-evaluation report and school improvement plan* for each area identified for improvement, but this is not required.

Each year, boards of management should complete a **policy and legislative checklist as an internal record** of their ongoing process of policy development and review, and their compliance with requirements.

Schools should ensure that parents and other relevant partners in their community are informed of the school self-evaluation process. They should create a very brief **summary of the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan** and communicate it in a way that makes it accessible and meaningful to parents and the community. Schools should also ensure that parents are aware of the school's policies and of the school's compliance with requirements that support good teaching and learning. Resources to assist schools in recording and reporting on their self-evaluation process are listed in section 9 below.

6.   School self-evaluation in DEIS schools

Schools in the DEIS programme are required to develop and implement school improvement plans as a condition of their participation in DEIS. **The school's DEIS action plan is its school improvement plan for the purposes of school self-evaluation, and no additional or separate improvement plan is required.**

DEIS schools should, however, within their own particular contexts take note of the emphasis that the school self-evaluation process places on the core activity of any school: teaching and learning. They should ensure a focus on teaching and learning wherever relevant when planning for improvement in literacy, numeracy, educational attainment, attendance, retention, progression, and partnership with parents and others.

DEIS schools should use the self-evaluation process to ensure that their action plans for improvement have a robust evidence base, and are clearly targeted at students requiring specific interventions and supports.

DEIS schools should follow the recording and reporting requirements given in section 5 above, always bearing in mind that the DEIS action plans are the school's improvement plan. When communicating a summarised report and improvement plan to parents and the community, DEIS schools may choose to highlight specific actions for improvement where they consider parental awareness and involvement are particularly relevant.

7.   Time for school self-evaluation

Principals should ensure that sufficient time for school planning is made available and that school self-evaluation is a core part of this. Planning time should facilitate the involvement of all teaching staff in the school self-evaluation process.

8.   School self-evaluation and inspection

School self-evaluation and external evaluation are complementary processes, both focused on improvement. External evaluations, in particular whole-school evaluations, take note of schools' identified priorities and assess their teaching and learning practices. The school self-evaluation process gives schools a means of identifying and addressing priorities, and of ensuring a whole-school focus on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning. Given this common focus on improvement, the Inspectorate will take account of schools' engagement with and outcomes of self-evaluation, as set out in this circular, in the course of its evaluations.

9.   Supports for school self-evaluation

A number of supports are in place to assist schools to engage in the school self-evaluation process.

Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-primary Schools
The Department has developed *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* consisting of domains and standards for teaching and learning and leadership and management. The quality framework is intended to inform both school self-evaluation and external evaluation.

The quality framework for teaching and learning, which was published in the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines (2012), has been updated as part of *Looking at Our School 2016*. It has been simplified following feedback from schools and the education partners. The evaluation criteria and quality statements in the 2012 Guidelines have been replaced by domains, standards, and statements of practice for teaching and learning.

Looking at Our School 2016 also contains domains and standards for leadership and management that will help to guide school leaders and others in their work. Schools are not required to engage in self-evaluation of leadership and management in the second phase of school self-evaluation (2016 to 2020).

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School Self-Evaluation Guidelines
The Inspectorate has revised the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools published in 2012 to support the school self-evaluation process. For convenience, the Guidelines include the relevant section from Looking at Our School 2016 that contains the domains, standards and statements of practice for teaching and learning. Sample tools to help schools to gather evidence and make judgements are also included.

School support
The Inspectorate and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) will continue to provide school self-evaluation support to schools. This support is provided to assist schools in embedding school self-evaluation for sustainable school improvement and as a means of implementing national initiatives.

Online support
The dedicated school self-evaluation website at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie provides up-to-date materials to support school self-evaluation. Schools are encouraged to use the website to access the latest information about school self-evaluation. Supports include:

- Electronic versions of the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines*
- Presentations explaining the purpose and process of school self-evaluation, which may be useful to school leaders at staff or group meetings
- Short video clips illustrating schools' engagement with particular aspects of school self-evaluation
- Sample school self-evaluation materials provided by schools from a variety of contexts
- SSE Update, an e-bulletin that is published twice yearly
- A range of templates for schools to use and adapt
- Checklists of policy and legislative requirements for the use of boards of management

10. Summary

o School self-evaluation is a way of working that provides one coherent internal improvement process for schools. It incorporates school development planning and DEIS action planning for improvement

o In the next cycle of school self-evaluation (2016-2020), schools should continue to focus on teaching and learning

o Schools have flexibility to focus their school self-evaluation on aspects of teaching and learning according to the needs of the school

o Schools should select a minimum of two and a maximum of four aspects of teaching and learning as the focus for their self-evaluation process from 2016 to 2020.

o Typically, most schools will use the process to assist them in introducing and embedding relevant aspects of the *Junior Cycle Framework*, as outlined in circular 0024/2016

o Schools should maintain a brief record of their self-evaluation in the form of a short self-evaluation report and school improvement plan

o Once annually, boards of management should complete a policy and legislative checklist of their ongoing process of policy development and review, and their compliance with requirements, as an internal record

o Each year, schools should create a very brief summary of the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan and communicate it in a way that makes it accessible and meaningful to parents and the school community

11. QUERIES REGARDING THIS CIRCULAR

Queries in relation to this circular should be emailed to the Department's Inspectorate at

info@schoolself-evaluation.ie

Paraic Joyce

Principal Officer

School Governance Section