



School Development Planning Initiative

School Development Planning

**An Introduction for
Second Level Schools**



AN BÓINN | DEPARTMENT OF
DÍDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE

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Foreword



*Foreword by
the Minister for Education and Science,*

Mr. Mícheál Martin, TD

Planning is part of the work of every school as it strives to meet the educational needs of all its pupils. School Development Planning (SDP) is a systematic approach which involves the whole school community in that ongoing quest. A great many schools already engage in such collaborative planning because it helps them to manage change in the best interests of their pupils. School Development Planning provides schools with a continuous improvement strategy that empowers them to take ownership of their own development.

School Development Planning: An Introduction for Second Level Schools offers a concise outline of school development planning, process and product. It will provide valuable guidance to schools that are just beginning the SDP process. It will also serve as a reference document for schools already engaged in SDP, to assist them in monitoring their progress and in planning for further development.

This document is part of a package of supports that I am putting in place for schools through the School Development Planning Initiative. It will be followed by more detailed guidelines that will offer advice on how to implement the process and prepare the school plan. A Development Project involving 100 schools has been initiated to pilot draft guidelines that have already been prepared and to inform the preparation of further guideline materials. These guidelines will be issued to schools on a phased basis. The outcome of the Development Project will be available to all schools in due course.

I wish to express my gratitude to all who participated in the preparation of this Introduction. I wish to thank especially the members of the Working Party that drafted the document and the representatives of all the partners in education whose work on the Consultative Group contributed greatly to the success of the collaborative process.

I wish all concerned every success with this important initiative.

Mícheál Martin

Mr. Mícheál Martin, TD
Minister for Education and Science

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Members of the Consultative Group

Michael Corley, Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland

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Brian Cannon, Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

Charles McManus, Irish Vocational Education Association

Eilís Humphreys, Joint Managerial Body

Rose Tully, National Parents' Council – Post-Primary

Dermot Morris, Conference of Religious of Ireland

Carl Ó Dálaigh, Deputy Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Science

Members of the Working Party

Lorcan Mac Conaonaigh, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Science

Pádraig Ó Conghaile, Inspector of Schools, Department of Education and Science

Bríd Uí Ríordáin, Inspector of Schools, Department of Education and Science

Ann Mulcahy, Inspector of Schools, Department of Education and Science

Sinéad Breathnach, Principal on secondment from St. Louis Secondary School, Carrickmacross

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1 Introduction

Schools want what is best for their pupils.

They want to provide a quality education that meets the demands of a constantly changing environment.

Change is a major challenge for schools.

Economic, social and technological change creates increased pressures and expectations. Changing pupil needs necessitate ongoing educational innovation. To meet the challenge, schools require a proactive approach to managing change.

Second level schools are highly complex organisations,

the management of which involves a great deal of planning. In the past, school planning was often undertaken in an informal, ad-hoc fashion, in reaction to immediate pressures. Such an approach cannot easily meet the needs of the modern school in its quest for optimum effectiveness.

Schools need a systematic approach to planning

in order to deal with complexity and change. They need a process for integrating all their planning activities into the coherent structure of an overall plan. School Development Planning is that process.

School Development Planning ...

is an ongoing process that helps schools as complex communities to meet the dual challenge of enhancing quality and managing change.

The School Plan ...

is the product of that process. It serves as a reference document that guides the activities of the school and facilitates monitoring and self-evaluation.

The Desired Outcome ...

of process and product is the provision of an enhanced education service, relevant to pupils' needs, through the promotion of high quality teaching and learning, the professional empowerment of teachers, and the effective management of innovation and change.

The purpose of this short document ...

is to provide schools with an introductory outline of what is involved in School Development Planning as a forerunner to the more specific and detailed Guidelines on the process which are in course of preparation.

It offers answers to the following questions:

- ◆ **What** is School Development Planning?
- ◆ **Why** is School Development Planning needed?
- ◆ **How** is School Development Planning accomplished?
- ◆ **Who** should be involved in the School Development Planning process?
- ◆ **What** is the School Plan?
- ◆ **What** should the School Plan contain?

School Development Planning in Ireland: Background and Context

Whole School Planning at Second Level

The second-level education system in Ireland has undergone a proliferation of changes – structural, cultural and curricular – since the introduction of Free Education in 1967.

In recent decades, the pace and extent of change has motivated a number of school trustee bodies, management groups and education institutions as well as individual schools to undertake their own initiatives in relation to whole-school development and school planning.

The Green Paper 1992

The formal requirement for a school plan at second level was first officially mooted in the 1992 Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World*. The proposal envisaged an annual plan, prepared by the principal in consultation with the staff and approved by the Board of Management. The plan would identify the school's goals and state the school's policy on key issues, including curriculum, organisation, staff induction and development, and external relations. It would be complemented by an annual written report on the school's work.

The Report on the National Education Convention 1994

The *Report of the National Education Convention* (1994) advocated a broader concept of school planning with a strong focus on development and improvement. It proposed a two-part school plan, the first part dealing with the relatively permanent features of the school and the second with action plans to address the school's developmental priorities. It noted the value of engaging the various partners in the school community – patron/trustees, management, staff and parents – in the planning process.

The White Paper 1995

The 1995 White Paper, *Charting our Education Future*, reiterated the proposals of the *Report on the National Education Convention*. It envisaged the publication by the Board of Management of the policy section of the school plan and the production of an annual report on the implementation of the school plan.

Education Act 1998

The *Education Act 1998* is the culmination of almost ten years of policy development in relation to the school plan. The Act specifies that it is the responsibility of the Board of Management to arrange for the preparation of the school plan, and to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated. It requires that the school plan address the issue of equality of access and participation, particularly in relation to students with disabilities or other special educational needs. It indicates that the preparation of the school plan should include consultation with the parents, patron (trustees), staff and students of the school.

(See Appendix 1)

Guidelines

It was stated in both the Green Paper (1992) and the White Paper (1995) that official guidelines would be issued to assist schools in the process of preparing their school plans.

This booklet offers an introduction to school development planning, process and product. It will be complemented by more detailed and specific Guidelines on the structure and implementation of the planning process.

These Guidelines will complement the range of publications, support services and education programmes that is already contributing to the development of systematic whole school planning in Irish schools.

Both the booklet and the Guidelines take account of the following facts:

- ◆ Every school is unique
- ◆ While every school engages in planning, schools are at varying stages of development in relation to systematic whole school planning

Accordingly, they allow for flexibility in the operation of the School Development Planning process and they encourage school communities to customise the process to suit their own particular circumstances.

2 School Development Planning

What is School Development Planning?

A Process

School Development Planning is a process undertaken by the school community to give direction to the work of the school in order to ensure that all pupils receive a quality education in terms of both holistic development and academic achievement.

The process is based on a number of presuppositions:

- 1 The quality of a school's education provision is the product of a complex interaction of factors, which must be planned for in a co-ordinated way
- 2 As education is a partnership enterprise, quality planning should involve input from all the partners in the school community
- 3 The quality of a school's education provision is rooted in the expertise and commitment of the principal and teaching staff. Therefore,
 - The key agents in the process are the principal and teachers, whose partnership in planning is the cornerstone of effective school development
 - A key focus of the process is on supporting and empowering the principal and teachers in their work by providing for their professional needs in terms of working environment and professional development

These presuppositions help to determine the characteristics of the school development planning process.

The School Development Planning Process is:

◆ **Systematic**

It involves a systematic approach to the planning work that is already being done in schools: it co-ordinates and integrates piecemeal planning activities into the coherent structure of an overall plan.

◆ **Collaborative**

It is essentially a collaborative process that draws the whole school community together in shaping the school's future. While it depends largely on the collaboration of the principal and the teaching staff, it should also include appropriate consultation with all key stakeholders in the school community: Patron/Trustees*, Board of Management, support staff, parents, pupils, local community, and the Department of Education and Science.

* See Appendix 1

◆ **Ongoing**

It is an ongoing process, rooted in a school culture of systematic self-review, in which policies and plans are continuously developed, implemented, evaluated and revised in the light of the school's fundamental aims and the changing needs of its community.

◆ **Progressive**

It is a cyclical process that yields cumulative and progressive results. Each planning cycle builds on the outcomes of the previous cycle.

◆ **Enhancing**

School Development Planning is a means, not an end – a means of enhancing the quality of educational experience in the school through the successful management of innovation and change. Accordingly, the process is sharply focused on the educational needs and achievements of the pupils and concomitantly on the professional development and empowerment of the teachers.

Finally, as every school is unique, the operation of the planning process will vary considerably from school to school. The School Development Planning process is flexible. It is not a set of rules to be followed blindly but a framework for collaborative creativity. Each school must adapt the framework to suit its own particular circumstances.

The Rationale for School Development Planning

The fundamental purpose of School Development Planning is to enable the school to achieve and maintain the highest possible level of effectiveness in meeting the educational needs of its pupils in a culture that is characterised by change.

School Development Planning promotes:

◆ School Effectiveness

Internationally, there is widespread acceptance among educationalists that collaborative School Development Planning is a powerful means of promoting school effectiveness. It enables the school community to develop a clear vision of what the school is about and where it is going, a shared sense of purpose, a common set of goals, and consensus on the means of attaining them. It constitutes the school as a learning organisation that focuses on meeting the professional needs of teachers in order to meet the educational needs of pupils.

◆ School Improvement

School Development Planning is a continuous improvement strategy. It provides a mechanism for systematic self-evaluation that enables the school community to review its progress, identify priorities, and prepare plans for further improvement.

◆ Quality Enhancement

School Development Planning directs the attention and energy of the school community in a systematic way on the central task of the school: the provision of a quality education that is appropriate to the abilities and needs of all its pupils. It focuses on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning through collaborative action.

◆ Staff Development

School Development Planning enhances the professional role of teachers and promotes their professional development. It helps to ensure that teachers

- Are empowered to contribute decisively to the development of the school
- Are enabled to exercise a greater degree of ownership over the central issues that influence their work, thereby enhancing their sense of being in control of events
- Are offered opportunities to engage in collaborative policy-making, planning and teamwork and to participate in the leadership and management of development work

- Are involved in the identification of their own professional development needs and the specification of provision to meet those needs
- Are enabled to extend their professional skills
- Are encouraged to reflect on and learn from their professional experiences
- Are affirmed and supported in their work through the creation of an ethos of collegiality and co-operation

◆ **Partnership**

School Development Planning promotes partnership in the school's development by engaging the major parties in the school community – principal, teachers, parents, pupils, Board of Management, and trustees—in a collaborative dialogue focused on identifying and responding to emerging educational needs. Participation in this dialogue fosters the partners' commitment to and ownership of school policy.

◆ **Effective Deployment of Available Resources**

Formalised School Development Planning enables the school to specify resource requirements and to target available resources towards meeting priority needs.

◆ **Management of Change**

School Development Planning helps the school community to manage change effectively by enabling it to control the pace and direction of internal change and to build a capacity to respond rapidly to new challenges.

◆ **Furtherance of Aims and Priorities of National Education System**

School Development Planning provides a structure that enables the school community to subscribe to the stated aims of the national education system and to incorporate national education priorities into the work of the school

The Process of School Development Planning

There are many models of the School Development Planning process. Each school community will decide on the model that is best suited to its own particular circumstances.

The following basic framework can assist schools in the development of their own customised models. It outlines the key operations that will form part of every planning model.

FRAMEWORK OF THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESS

The basic framework is a planning cycle that revolves around a central core.

- ◆ **The Core** consists of the school's **mission, vision and fundamental aims**.
- ◆ **The Planning Cycle** comprises four key operations: **review, design, implementation and evaluation**.

The process can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

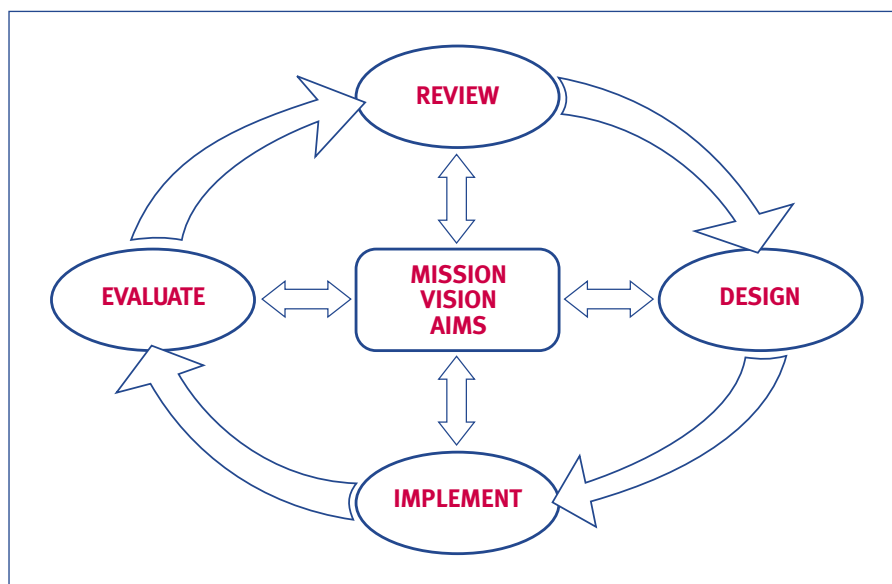


Fig. 1. Basic Framework of School Development Planning Process

The School Development Planning process often begins with the Core: the formulation of Mission, Vision and Aims. Some schools, however, find it more helpful to begin with the Review and to allow their understanding of their mission, vision and aims to become enriched and clarified through participation in the planning process, and in particular through reflection on the local, national and international context factors that will influence the shaping of the school's future.

THE CORE: Mission, Vision, Fundamental Aims

The school's statement of its mission, vision and fundamental aims articulates why the school exists, what it wants to create, and what it considers to be the fundamental purpose of education. The statement is a response to the question, "What are we really about in this school?"

Mission can be defined as a general statement of the overall raison d'être of the school. It should be brief enough to be memorable and challenging enough to make one think.

Vision can be defined as a statement of the desired future of the school, of how it wants and needs to be. It beckons towards betterment.

The terms **Mission** and **Vision** are often used interchangeably in the literature. The school community need not worry unduly about the distinctions. The key considerations are:

- ◆ The mission and vision of a school cannot be simply handed on from one group to another. They must be developed and clarified through a process of shared reflection on the values, beliefs and aspirations of the school community.

- ◆ The formulation of mission and vision should address the following questions:

Whom does the school serve?

What service does the school provide?

How is that service provided?

What are the key ideals, beliefs and values that the school stands for?

Aims can be defined as broad statements of the educational goals that the school seeks to attain. They flow from the mission and vision. In general, they will relate to the promotion by the school of the intellectual, physical, social, personal, spiritual, moral and aesthetic development of all its pupils.

The function of the statement of Mission, Vision and Aims is:

- ◆ To give a clear sense of direction to the work of the school
- ◆ To inspire the school community with a common sense of purpose
- ◆ To provide a framework from which policies and priorities can be derived
- ◆ To establish a reference point against which the school can evaluate the success of its activities

THE PLANNING CYCLE

The Planning Cycle can be structured around a number of key questions, which can be related to the key operations:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Key Planning Operation</u>
Where is the school now?	Review the current situation
Where do we want the school to be at the end of the planning cycle?	Identify priorities for development Specify goals
How will we get there?	Specify targets/objectives Design detailed action plans Implement the action plans
How will we check whether we are getting there?	Monitor the implementation
How will we know if we have got there?	Evaluate the implementation

Fig. 2. School Development Planning Operations

Time-Frame

The time-frame for the completion of the Planning Cycle as a whole – review, design, implementation and evaluation – will vary from school to school. It is envisaged, however, that a time-frame in the range from three to five years would be appropriate for most schools.

1. REVIEW

The purpose of the review is twofold:

- (i) **Description:** to compile a comprehensive account of the school's current situation with a view to
 - ◆ Heightening the awareness of the school community of how and why the school functions and of the context in which it operates
 - ◆ Providing data for analysis as a basis for decision-making
- (ii) **Analysis:** to establish the school's internal strengths and challenges and the opportunities and threats presented by its external environment, with a view to
 - ◆ Identifying needs that must be addressed
 - ◆ Identifying factors that must be taken into account in planning for the development of the school
 - ◆ Prioritising areas for development

Areas for Review

There are many ways of classifying the various aspects of the school for the purposes of review. The following table offers one possible categorisation:

<u>Review Areas</u>	
◆ Mission, Vision, Aims	
◆ Context Factors:	School Local National International
◆ Curriculum:	Provision Planning and Co-ordination Implementation: Teaching and Learning Processes Outcomes: Pupil Progress and Attainment Levels
◆ Care and Management of Pupils:	Pastoral Care and Personal Development Health, Safety and Welfare Discipline
◆ Staff Organisation and Development:	Deployment Empowerment Health, Safety and Welfare Professional Development
◆ School-Home-Community Links:	Relations with Parents Parents' Council Relations with Local Community
◆ School Management and administration:	In-School Management Structure Organisational Climate Monitoring and Evaluation Procedures Management of Finance, Plant and Resources Routine Administration

Fig 3.A Categorisation of Areas for Review

Further detail on these areas for review is provided in Appendix 2. Review procedures will be outlined in the Guidelines.

Scope of the Review

A full-scale in-depth review of all aspects of school life is a major undertaking. **It is not necessary to complete such a review** before commencing on the planning process proper. The school may find it more manageable to conduct an **Initial Review** to identify a **small number** of key areas that would benefit from an immediate **Specific Review**. The school can then plan a **Schedule of Specific Reviews** so that all areas of school life are reviewed over a defined period of time.

The frame of reference for all reviews is constituted by the school's mission, vision and aims and by the context factors that impinge on its development.

Review Instruments

The Review should be designed to establish (a) the facts, and (b) the views of the school community, in relation to the areas of school life that are under review, to ensure that the process results in a realistic assessment of the school's development needs. The choice and design of review instruments will be determined by these considerations.

Review instruments include:

- ◆ **Surveys** of relevant data already in the school: for example, attendance records, drop-out rates, examination results, and existing documentation in relation to policies and practices
- ◆ **Questionnaires**
- ◆ **Interviews**
- ◆ **Checklists**
- ◆ **SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis Forms**
- ◆ **Evaluation Grids**

Detailed information on review instruments will be given in the Guidelines.

Outcome of the Review: Identification of Needs

The outcome of the review is the identification of a number of school needs that should be addressed and a number of possibilities for development.

Prioritisation

The school's resources of personnel, expertise, energy, time and money are limited. Accordingly, the needs and possibilities must then be prioritised in terms of

- ◆ Their importance to the development of the school, in the light of all the context factors
- ◆ The current capacity of the school to address them
- ◆ The current commitment of the school to dealing with them.

In selecting priorities, it is important to be mindful of the need to achieve an appropriate balance between maintenance and development. Continuity with past and present practices must be maintained to provide the stability that is the foundation of new developments. Reforms do not necessarily change everything. Consideration must be given to the amount of development work that the school has the capacity to sustain. Development planning must accommodate the consolidation of past change, the introduction of current change and preparation for future change.

Where a school is undertaking formalised whole school planning for the first time, priorities to be addressed in the first planning cycle may include the development of an appropriate planning infrastructure:

- ◆ Establishing structures for delegation, collaboration, consultation, and communication
- ◆ Designing a customised model of the school development planning process
- ◆ Devising systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluation
- ◆ Clarifying the school's mission, vision and aims
- ◆ Documenting the school's policies in key areas

2. DESIGN

The Design stage encompasses designing the structure of the overall school plan, devising action plans to address the priorities, and drafting and compiling the component sections of the plan so that it can be communicated to the whole staff and presented to the Board of Management for approval.

Action Planning

In the Design stage, the priorities identified in the Review are translated into specific objectives or targets, and Action Plans are designed to achieve those objectives.

Step 1: What do we want to achieve?**Define the Objective**

Objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable/Monitorable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed.

That is, they should be precise enough to indicate the results required. They should be measurable or monitorable so that progress can be gauged. They should be achievable within the limitations of the school's circumstances. They should be based on realistic assumptions about human behaviour, the nature of organisations, and eventualities. They should indicate the time frame within which they are to be achieved.

Step 2: What could we do to achieve it?**Identify possible courses of action**

It is important to explore the available options in order to identify the one that will best achieve the objectives.

Step 3: How will we achieve it?**Choose and specify a course of action**

At this stage, the focus is on identifying exactly what is to be done. A course of action is chosen. Tasks within it are clearly defined and the order in which they are to be addressed is specified.

Step 4: What resources will we need?**Identify resource requirements**

The resource implications of the chosen course of action are identified with a view to specifying precisely the human, organisational and physical resources required to implement the plan.

Step 5: Is our action plan workable?**Review the plan/Revise if necessary**

It can be helpful at this interim point to consider whether the chosen course of action is capable of being implemented in the school, especially in the light of the resource requirements, and whether it is likely to bring about the attainment of the objectives.

Step 6: Who will implement it?**Assign remits and responsibilities**

Each task within the specified course of action is assigned to an individual or group within the school so that it is clear who is responsible for what.

Step 7: When will it be implemented?**Establish a time-scale**

Schedules and deadlines are established to give momentum to the work of implementation, thus facilitating progress.

Step 8: How will we know if it has worked?**Identify criteria for success
Specify monitoring and
evaluation process**

It is important to identify the criteria by which progress will be judged. These criteria will facilitate monitoring during the implementation period and evaluation at the end of it.

This planning sequence can be applied to the design and production of the School Plan document itself.

Outcome of Design Process: The Draft School Plan

The outcome of the Design process is the Draft School Plan, a key component of which is a set of action plans related to the development priorities identified in the review process. These plans specify

- ◆ What targets are to be attained
- ◆ Who will do what, when, and with what resources, to attain them
- ◆ What will be done to ascertain how well they are attained

Further information on the design process will be given in the Guidelines.

The Draft School Plan must be submitted to the staff and approved by the Board of Management prior to implementation.

It is important that the school community be kept informed to ensure the maintenance of a positive, supportive climate for the implementation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

During the implementation process, the tasks specified in the action plan are carried out. It is important to establish structures and procedures whereby teachers involved can be supported in their work. Such support might include:

- ◆ The encouragement, affirmation, or advice of colleagues
- ◆ Secretarial, administrative or practical assistance
- ◆ Advice from an educationalist with relevant expertise—the Support Teams for specific programmes are a valuable source of advice
- ◆ Training in relevant skills
- ◆ Contact with other schools involved in similar projects

Monitoring

Constructive monitoring, or formative evaluation, facilitates effective implementation. It is a way of discovering if the plan is working and of assessing how well it is working, so that corrective action can be taken as soon as it becomes necessary. Thus, it can prevent waste of time and effort. Monitoring procedures can include:

- ◆ Review meetings (full staff or small groups) to discuss progress in the light of the success criteria, highlight difficulties, suggest approaches to problems
- ◆ Informal discussion or more formal interviews with participants or stakeholders to get feedback on the continuing appropriateness of targets, tasks, remits, resource-specifications and time-scales

- ◆ Observation by a mentor or critical friend (an outsider with relevant expertise)
- ◆ Use of formal review instruments at specified stages within the time-scale of the plan

Monitoring can lead to the adjustment of any aspect of the action plan.

4. EVALUATION

Self-evaluation is the key to ongoing improvement. At the end of the planning cycle, it is important that the school community evaluate the success of the implementation in attaining the targets and addressing the school's development needs.

The evaluation process reviews the extent to which it has been possible to achieve the objectives that were specified in each Action Plan or project: fully, partly, or not to any significant extent. The outcome of the evaluation feeds in to the next planning cycle.

- ◆ Projects that were successfully completed may be consolidated and integrated into school life.
- ◆ Projects whose objectives were partly achieved may be continued into the next cycle, perhaps with modifications arising from the identification of difficulties and barriers to success.
- ◆ Projects whose objectives were not achieved to any significant extent may be radically revised, or may be replaced by new projects with a better prospect of addressing the particular development priorities.

The self-evaluation process takes account of the experience of all those involved in the implementation. It is concerned with the collection of evidence in relation to the success criteria with a view to drawing conclusions and making recommendations

Evidence can be gathered from:

- ◆ Questionnaires
- ◆ Documents and records
- ◆ Discussions
- ◆ Interviews
- ◆ Pupils' work
- ◆ Observation
- ◆ Independent evaluation reports

Each Action Plan is evaluated in the light of the evidence, conclusions are drawn about its success, and recommendations are made in relation to future action.

The planning process then proceeds to the next cycle. Drawing on the outcomes of the evaluation that has just been completed, the school community once again **reviews** its operations to identify priority issues, **designs** and **implements** action plans to address these issues, and **evaluates** the implementation to guide the ongoing development of the school.

The Participants in School Development Planning

School Development Planning is essentially a collaborative process that draws the whole school community together in shaping the school's future. Accordingly, it requires the appropriate involvement of all the key stakeholders: Trustees, Board of Management, Principal, teaching staff, support staff, parents, students, and local community.

◆ Trustees*

The Trustees have a particular responsibility for the ethos and status of the school and for matters requiring capital expenditure. Accordingly, they must be consulted on topics that pertain to these issues. It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to seek the approval of the Trustees for these aspects of the school plan. The Trustees may identify issues that they wish the Board of Management to address in the planning process.

The Trustees should be informed of the outcome of the plan's implementation.

* See Appendix I.

◆ Board of Management

Under the terms of the 1998 Education Act, it is the responsibility of the Board of Management to arrange for the preparation of the school plan, and to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated. Accordingly, the Board must ensure that the planning is done. Most of the work involved will be delegated to the Principal and teaching staff, who will keep the Board informed on progress. It is likely that the Board will wish to be closely consulted on matters relating to its statutory and legal responsibilities and on aspects of the plan that have a significant financial dimension, and it may wish to highlight particular issues as planning priorities. The Board may participate directly in the planning process through its establishment of or representation on planning teams.

◆ The Principal

The Principal plays a prominent role in the leadership and management of the planning process. Some of the responsibilities are shared with the Board of Management. Some aspects may be delegated to members of the teaching staff through the in-school management structure or through the establishment of planning teams.

The Principal has a responsibility, under the direction of the Board, with the collaboration of the in-school management team and the teaching staff, for

- the initiation of the planning process,
- the creation of a climate conducive to collaboration,
- the motivation of the staff,
- the establishment of the planning infrastructure,
- the organisation of activities and resources,
- the arrangement of consultation, communication and approval procedures,
- the management of the plan's implementation and evaluation.

◆ The Teaching Staff

The whole-hearted participation of the teaching staff is crucial to the success of the planning process.

- The whole staff should be actively involved in the clarification of the school's mission, vision and aims, in the review of the school's current situation, and in the establishment of development priorities. The process should be designed to enable all members of staff to participate in discussion and decision-making.
- A Steering Group of staff may be established to oversee the process as a whole. A Steering Group could be constituted in a number of ways: for instance, it could be drawn largely from the in-school management team, or it could be established on a broadly representative basis, to include a range of interests and skills.
- Ad hoc staff teams may be established to undertake tasks related to review, design, implementation or evaluation. Such teams represent one possible model of staff participation in development planning. Ideally they should be constituted on the basis of interest and expertise. They provide a professional peer support structure within which teachers can share ideas, work collaboratively, and learn from each other. Accordingly, they can play a major role in the process of staff development for school improvement. Over a period of time, every teacher should have the opportunity to become involved in the work of an ad-hoc team.
- Some schools may wish to integrate ad-hoc teams with the in-school management structure by appointing members of the in-school management team as ad-hoc team convenors.
- It is essential that the full staff be kept informed of the work of all teams and that the draft plan be agreed by the full staff prior to its implementation.

The Guidelines will offer suggestions concerning staff structures for School Development Planning.

◆ The Support Staff

It is advisable that the support staff be consulted during the review process on aspects of school life that are relevant to their work. They should also be kept informed of the school's development plans.

◆ Parents

It is important that parents are involved in the planning process. Through their representation on the Board of Management and through the Parents' Association, where one has been established, parents can readily be consulted in the clarification of the school's mission, vision and aims, the review of the school's current reality, the establishment of priorities, and the development of policies on issues such as discipline or homework. All parents should be kept informed of relevant outcomes of the planning process.

◆ Students

The Education Act 1998 provides for consultation with students in the preparation of the school plan. The review procedure may include a Students' Questionnaire to ascertain the views of a representative sample of students on aspects of school life. Where a Students' Council has been established, it can be consulted in the preparation of aspects of the school plan and can be invited to participate in the dissemination of relevant sections of the school plan to the student body. Students should be kept informed of relevant outcomes of the planning process.

◆ Local Community

The local community can be involved in the planning process in a number of ways. The review process includes a consideration of local context factors that impinge on the school, and this might necessitate a survey of the local community to establish views, requirements, or opportunities. Representatives of the local community could be asked to participate in planning joint school-community projects. The school could draw on the expertise of relevant members of the local community in planning to address particular issues. In many places, the local community is already involved in a range of specific programmes.

The Role of the Department of Education and Science

The core functions of the Department of Education and Science include strategic planning and policy formulation for the system as a whole, the determination of national curricula, and the allocation of resources. Thus, the Department plays a major role in establishing the context within which individual school development planning takes place, in terms of national aims and priorities, curriculum development, and the availability of resources for implementation. (See Appendix 2).

Through the Inspectorate, the Department offers support and advice to schools in relation to best practice and thereby influences planning for quality enhancement. This advice and support may be sought from the named inspector for each school or from inspectors with responsibility for the various subject areas. The Department also promotes quality enhancement through the provision it makes for curriculum and other support services and for the in-career development of teachers.

School Development Planning: Implementation Issues

The implementation of the School Development Planning process raises a number of organisational and resource issues which must be addressed by the Department of Education and Science in conjunction with the partners in education.

- 1 The implementation of School Development Planning is greatly assisted by the establishment of appropriate structures for collaboration and consultation. Structures within the staff may include a Steering Group, chaired perhaps by a School Plan Co-ordinator, to oversee the process as a whole, and Ad-hoc Teams or Task Groups to address particular needs. It is important to establish procedures for communication between the Teams or Groups and the full staff, in order to maintain staff commitment to the process. Procedures for consulting with stakeholders should also be established. The Guidelines will offer suggestions on these matters.
- 2 Effective School Development Planning involves the full teaching staff, both collectively and in teams or groups. So, the implementation of the process necessitates planning meetings both of the full staff and of small groups. It is important that meeting time be made available to the school, so that planning can become an integral part of the life of the school. The primary consideration is that School Development Planning should not interfere with the delivery of school programmes.
- 3 The participants need information and training in relation to School Development Planning, both before the process commences and during the first planning cycle, to enable them to develop the requisite expertise. Such information and training should address the professional development needs of the principal and the teaching staff, and should also focus on the needs of other participating stakeholders. The ongoing development of the Guidelines will play a role in addressing the need for information.
- 4 The implementation of the process is facilitated by the provision of secretarial/clerical support services to assist with tasks such as the preparation and duplication of documents, the filing and retrieval of data, and the production of reports.

- 5 Good facilitation is the key to the successful introduction of School Development Planning. There are many facilitation options that can be considered, but the fundamental choice for the school is between internal and external facilitation. Many schools may wish to avail of the services of an external facilitator in the initial stages, especially if no member of staff has the requisite experience or expertise. The subject of facilitation will be addressed in the Guidelines.

- 6 Schools can support each other in the implementation of School Development Planning by sharing information, experience and expertise. The sharing of good practice can be fostered by the establishment of school networks or clusters – support groups of schools, facilitated, perhaps, by the local Education Centre. Such school clusters could inform the organisation of in-career development courses tailored to meet the specific needs of the group.

3 The School Plan

What is the School Plan?

Nature of the School Plan

The school plan is the **product of an ongoing process** whereby the principal and teaching staff, in **consultation** with other parties in the school community,

- ◆ review and evaluate, in the light of the school's vision and aims, the effectiveness of the range of educational experience provided for the school's pupils,
- ◆ identify targets for development, and
- ◆ plan courses of action for the attainment of the targets,

all in the context of the school's **unique** circumstances, and taking cognisance of professional support and development needs, current educational research, best practice, and national priorities.

Function of the School Plan

The school plan serves as a reference document for the whole school community. Thereby, it

- ◆ Provides a shared long-term vision for the school
- ◆ Facilitates co-ordinated development within the school community
- ◆ Clarifies policies and procedures for all
- ◆ Raises levels of consciousness of what is being achieved and what is not being achieved
- ◆ Establishes a clear yardstick against which the school can monitor and evaluate its activities
- ◆ Provides a structure for reporting on the work of the school

The school plan serves as a means of generating an ongoing process to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the school. It

- ◆ Establishes priorities for action
- ◆ Provides mechanisms for reviewing progress
- ◆ Integrates issues concerning staff welfare and professional development into an overall strategy for school improvement

Scope of the School Plan

The school plan is a statement of the educational philosophy of the school, its aims and how it proposes to achieve them. It deals with:

- ◆ The total curriculum
- ◆ The organisation of all the school's resources, including staff, space, facilities, equipment, time and finance
- ◆ The school's policies on a diverse range of administrative and organisational issues
- ◆ The school's provision for the professional support and development of teachers and in-school management personnel
- ◆ The school's strategies for implementing official guidelines, circulars and regulations
- ◆ The school's mechanisms for reviewing progress and taking corrective action where necessary

Structure of the School Plan

The school plan can be conceived of as having two major components:

- ◆ An overview of the **relatively permanent features of the school**, including its mission, vision and aims, context factors, curriculum, and organisational policies
- ◆ A **development section** specifying the school's current development targets and outlining action plans for their attainment

Format of the School Plan

The school plan can be formulated as:

- ◆ A single cohesive document, or
- ◆ A series of related documents, or
- ◆ A central comprehensive document and a range of booklets for various constituent groups
- ◆ A central document dealing with the relatively permanent features of the school and a separate document on the developmental aspects of the plan

Characteristics of the School Plan

The School Plan serves as a reference document for the whole school community. Accordingly, it should be written in a style that is readily meaningful to specialists and non-specialists alike.

The content should be well organised and clearly presented, so that information is easily locatable. The Development Section should be distinct from the outline of Relatively Permanent Features of the School for ease of reference.

The treatment of each topic within the Plan should be concise, coherent, and sharply focused, so that all essential details are included but irrelevance and vagueness are avoided.

The Plan should be designed as a working document that can readily accommodate any amendments that arise from monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Content of the School Plan

The content of the School Plan will be determined by:

- ◆ The character of the individual school
- ◆ The particular needs of the individual school, arising from its unique set of context factors
- ◆ The aims and priorities of the national education system

The content of the School Plan may be organised as follows:

Part 1: Relatively Permanent Features of the School

- 1 Statement of the School's Mission, Vision, Aims
- 2 Brief Profile of the School: Its History and Socio-Cultural Context
- 3 Brief Outline of School Structures and Resources
- 4 Curriculum: Provision and Policies
- 5 Key School Policies on Non-Curricular Issues
- 6 Brief Outline of Review and Evaluation Practices

Part 2: Development Section

- 1 Summary of Factors governing the School's Development Needs
- 2 List of School's Development Priorities
- 3 Set of Action Plans specifying Targets, Tasks, Time-Frames, Resources and Remits, including arrangements for Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommended Content

- 1 Schools are currently advised to have policies and to develop plans on the following issues:
 - ◆ Discipline
 - ◆ Countering Bullying Behaviour
 - ◆ Dealing with Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse
 - ◆ Health and Safety
 - ◆ Professional development of teachers and in-school management personnel
 - ◆ Relationships and Sexuality Education
 - ◆ Information and Communications Technology
 - ◆ Environmental Awareness

- 2 The Education Act 1998 specifies that the School Plan should include policy objectives and measures concerning equality of access to and participation in the school, particularly in relation to students with disabilities or other special educational needs. It also states that the school should publish its admissions policy, including its policy on the expulsion and suspension of students. See Appendix 1 for relevant sections of the Education Act.

- 3 School policies might also include the following:
 - ◆ Pastoral care
 - ◆ Guidance/remedial provision
 - ◆ Homework
 - ◆ Home-school-community links
 - ◆ Pupil assessment
 - ◆ Record-keeping
 - ◆ Time-tabling/formation of classes
 - ◆ Subject-choice and examination levels
 - ◆ Textbooks

Phased Policy Formulation

Schools that have no tradition of producing systematic documentation may find the above lists somewhat daunting. The following considerations may offer some reassurance, however:

- 1 In deciding on the policy content of its School Plan, the school community should focus first and foremost on its own policy needs. A policy serves essentially as a guideline for dealing with a recurring issue. Therefore, in the process of formulating policy, the school should prioritise those issues with which it has to deal most frequently. A clear policy statement promotes consistency and reduces uncertainty. It is a resource and a support for the school in dealing with difficult situations.

- 2 Every established school already has an extensive range of policies and procedures, although some may be implicit rather than explicit. If the school is undertaking systematic planning for the first time, it may be helpful to conduct an inventory to identify:
 - ◆ Policies and procedures which are clearly documented
 - ◆ Policies and procedures which are unwritten but which are well understood and consistently followed
 - ◆ Policies and procedures which are implicit and so habitual that they remain unnoticed and unquestioned
 - ◆ Areas where no clear policy or procedure exists

The school can then make arrangements for assembling policies in the first category and documenting those in the second, and can plan for the formulation of policies in categories three and four over a period of time, in accordance with its schedule of priorities.

- 3 While established school policies belong in Part 1 of the School Plan, the formulation of new policy can be the objective of an Action Plan in Part 2, the Development Section. Thus, the school need not delay the production of a School Plan until it has formulated a comprehensive range of policies. Rather, it can incorporate the task of policy formulation into its plan of developmental work. Information on the process of policy formulation will be given in the Guidelines.

Current Priorities of National Education System

The current priorities of the national education system include

- ◆ Achieving a 90% retention rate to Leaving Certificate level
- ◆ Improving standards of literacy and numeracy
- ◆ Enhancing the performance of Ordinary Level candidates in the Leaving Certificate examination
- ◆ Correcting educational disadvantage

These priorities should be taken into account in the selection of content for the School Plan.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Education Act 1998

This Appendix comprises sections of the **Education (No. 2) Bill, 1997**, enacted in December 1998, that are relevant to school development planning. Emphasis has been added to highlight key points.

In relation to the School Plan, the key sections of the Education Act are sections 20 and 21:

Report and information

20. – A board [of management] shall establish procedures for informing the parents of students in the school of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school and such procedures may include the publication and circulation to parents, teachers and other staff and a student council where one has been established of a **report on the operation and performance of the school** in any school year, with particular reference to **the achievement of objectives as set out in the school plan** provided for under *section 21*.

The school plan

21. – (1) A **board** shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, **make arrangements for the preparation of a plan** (in this section referred to as the “school plan”) and shall ensure that the plan is **regularly reviewed and updated**.

(2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to **equality of access to and participation in the school** and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives **including** equality of access to and participation in the school **by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs**.

(3) The school plan shall be prepared **in accordance with such directions**, including directions relating to **consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students** of the school, as may be **given from time to time by the Minister** in relation to school plans.

(4) A board shall make arrangements for the **circulation of copies of the school plan** to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

The provisions of a number of other sections are also relevant to the clarification of aims and the identification of priorities in the planning process:

Functions of a school

9. – A recognised school shall provide **education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs** and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to –

- (a) ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for,
- (b) ensure that the education provided by it **meets the requirements of education policy** as determined from time to time by the Minister including requirements as to the provision of a **curriculum as prescribed** by the Minister in accordance with *section 30*,
- (c) ensure that students have **access to appropriate guidance** to assist them in their educational and career choices,
- (d) promote the **moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students** and provide **health education** for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school,
- (e) promote **equality of opportunity** for both male and female students and staff of the school,
- (f) promote the **development of the Irish language and traditions**, Irish literature, the arts and other cultural matters,
- (g) ensure that parents of a student, or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student, have **access in the prescribed manner to records** kept by that school relating to the progress of that student in his or her education,
- (h) in the case of schools located in a **Gaeltacht area**, contribute to the **maintenance of Irish** as the primary community language,
- (i) conduct its activities in compliance with any regulations made from time to time by the Minister under *section 33*,
- (j) ensure that the **needs of personnel involved in management functions and staff development needs** generally in the school are identified and provided for,
- (k) establish and maintain **systems** whereby the **efficiency and effectiveness** of its operations can be **assessed**, including the **quality and effectiveness of teaching** in the school and the **attainment levels and academic standards of students**,
- (l) establish or maintain **contacts** with other **schools** and at appropriate levels throughout the **community** served by the school, and
- (m) subject to this Act and in particular *section 15 (2) (d)*, establish and maintain an **admissions policy** which provides for **maximum accessibility** to the school.

Functions of a board

15. – (1) It shall be the duty of a board to manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an **appropriate education for each student** at the school for which that board has responsibility.

(2) A board shall perform the functions conferred on it and on the school by this Act and in carrying out its functions the board shall –

- (a) do so **in accordance with the policies** determined by the Minister from time to time,
- (b) **uphold**, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, **the characteristic spirit of the school** as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school,
- (c) **consult with and keep the patron informed** of decisions and proposals of the board,
- (d) **publish**, in such manner as the board with the agreement of the patron considers appropriate, the **policy of the school concerning admission to and participation** in the school, including the policy relating to the **expulsion and suspension of students and admission to and participation by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs**, and ensure that as regards that policy principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected and such directions as may be made from time to time by the Minister, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school and the constitutional rights of all persons concerned, are complied with,
- (e) have regard to the **principles and requirements of a democratic society** and have respect and promote **respect for the diversity** of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society,
- (f) have regard to the **efficient use of resources** (and, in particular, the efficient use of grants provided under *section 12*), the **public interest** in the affairs of the school and **accountability** to students, their parents, the patron, staff and the community served by the school, and
- (g) use the resources provided to the school from monies provided by the Oireachtas to make **reasonable provision and accommodation for students with a disability or other special educational needs**, including, where necessary, alteration of buildings and provision of appropriate equipment.

Functions of Principal and teachers

22 – (1) The Principal of a recognised school and the teachers in a recognised school, under the direction of the Principal, shall have a responsibility, in accordance with this Act, for the **instruction provided to students** in the school and shall contribute, generally, to **the education and personal development of students** in that school.

- (2) Without prejudice to *subsection (1)*, the Principal and teachers shall –
- (a) **encourage and foster learning** in students,
 - (b) regularly **evaluate** students and periodically **report** the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents,
 - (c) collectively **promote co-operation between the school and the community** which it serves, and
 - (d) subject to the terms of any applicable collective agreement and their contract of employment, carry out those duties that –
 - (i) in the case of teachers, are assigned to them by or at the direction of the Principal, and
 - (ii) in the case of the Principal, are assigned to him or her by the board.

The Principal

23. – (2) In addition to the functions of a Principal provided for in *section 22*, the Principal shall –

- (a) be responsible for the **day-to-day management** of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and be accountable to the board for that management,
- (b) provide **leadership** to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school,
- (c) be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a **school environment which is supportive of learning** among the students **and** which **promotes the professional development of the teachers**,
- (d) under the direction of the board, and **in consultation** with the teachers, the parents and, to the extent appropriate to their age and experience, the students, **set objectives for the school** and **monitor the achievement** of those objectives, and
- (e) encourage the **involvement of parents** of students in the school in the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school.

Parents' association

26. – (1) The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.

(2) A parents' association shall **promote the interests of the students** in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of a school and for that purpose may –

- (a) **advise the Principal or the board** on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or board, as the case may be, shall have regard to any such advice, and
- (b) adopt a programme of activities which will **promote the involvement of parents**, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school.

(3) The board shall **promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community** and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents' association and to a parents' association when it is established.

Information to students and student council

27. – (1) A board shall establish and maintain procedures for the purposes of **informing students in a school of the activities of the school**.

(2) The procedures established and maintained under *subsection (1)* shall facilitate the **involvement of the students** in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students, in association with their parents and teachers.

(3) Students of a post-primary school may establish a students council and, without prejudice to the generality of *subsection (1)* a **board of a post-primary school shall encourage the establishment by students of a student council** and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to –

- (a) students who wish to establish a student council, and
- (b) student councils when they have been established.

(4) A student council shall **promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students** in the affairs of the school, in co-operation with the board, parents and teachers.

(5) The rules for the establishment of a student council shall be drawn up by the board, in accordance with such guidelines as may be issued by the Minister from time to time, and such rules may provide for the election of members and the dissolution of a student council.

(6) A student council, following consultation with the board, may make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.

Patron of school

8. – (1) (b) The persons who, at the commencement of this section, stand appointed as **trustees** or as **the board of governors** of a post-primary school and, where there are no such trustees or such board, **the owner** of that school, shall be deemed to be the patron for the purposes of this Act and the Minister shall enter his, her or their name, as appropriate, in a register kept for that purpose by the Minister.

(4) In the case of a school established or maintained by a **vocational education committee**, that committee shall be the patron of the school for the purposes of this Act.

Appendix 2: Categorisation of Areas for Review

There are many systems of classification that can be applied to the complex network of interacting aspects that constitutes a school. This Appendix outlines one possible categorisation that can be used for review purposes.

It is **not** envisaged that the preparation of a school plan will necessarily involve an in-depth review of every single aspect of school life listed here. In many circumstances, the review process will comprise an **Initial Review** to identify the key areas on which the school needs to focus during the current planning cycle, followed by an in-depth **Specific Review** of each of those key areas. The number of key areas chosen should be determined by the needs of the school and its capacity to address them. It is better to focus on a **small number** of areas and to make progress in relation to them than to spread effort thinly over a large number and achieve little except frustration.

Approaches to Review will be dealt with in the Guidelines.

◆ **Mission, vision, aims:**

Where the school has already formulated statements of its mission, vision and aims, the Review offers an opportunity to consider their continuing appropriateness in the light of the school's current and emerging situation.

Where the school has not yet clarified and formulated its mission, vision and aims, these tasks must be provided for in the planning process

◆ **Context factors:**

Both internal and external context factors need to be taken into account in school planning. They include:

School Factors:

The range of pupils' needs, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds

Parental expectations, educational aspirations, and readiness to support school

Staffing levels and staff qualifications, skills, aptitudes and interests

The location, condition and maintenance of school building and grounds

The range of facilities, resources, materials and equipment available in school

The support of the Board of Management and the Trustees

Local Factors:

Demographic and development trends in the catchment area

Transport factors

The effect of competition from other schools on pupil numbers

The availability of support from the local community and local business

Patterns of employment in the local area

Opportunities for further and higher education in or near the catchment area

Availability of inservice training for teachers and development support for school

National Factors:

The introduction of new syllabuses, programmes, and modes of assessment

The availability of national programmes of incareer development for teachers

National education aims and priorities

The size and distribution of the national education budget

National standards of pupil achievement

Education research in relation to best practice in Irish schools

National economic, social, technological and employment trends

National trends in further and higher education

International Factors:

Implications of EU membership

Opportunities to participate in international projects

International economic, social, technological and employment trends

International education research findings in relation to best practice

◆ **Curriculum:**

The review of the curriculum can be approached from four perspectives:

Curriculum Provision

What subjects, programmes and courses are provided, and at what levels?

How are they timetabled in relation to time allocation and options-structure?

What provision is made for pupils with special needs?

Does the curriculum provided meet the needs of all pupils? Is it sufficiently broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated?

What provision is made for extra-curricular activities?

Curriculum Planning and Co-ordination

What approach do teachers take to the long-term and short-term planning of their work?

Have procedures been established to enable teachers in each subject area to collaborate in the planning and co-ordination of their work?

What arrangements have been made for programme co-ordination?

How are cross-curricular issues and themes addressed?

Curriculum Implementation: Teaching and Learning Processes

How are pupils grouped for learning – mixed ability grouping, setting, streaming?

What teaching methodologies are used?

Does classroom practice reflect the aims and objectives of the curriculum?

Is the classroom environment generally conducive to learning?

What steps are taken to promote the development of pupils as effective and responsible learners?

Curriculum Outcomes: Pupil Progress and Levels of Attainment

How does the school assess pupils' progress and levels of attainment?

How do pupils' levels of attainment compare with their standards on entry or with national standards?

At the end of any given year or programme in the school, what have the pupils actually learnt, in terms of both holistic development and academic achievement?

◆ Care and Management of Pupils:

The review could examine policies and practices in relation to the care and management of pupils, including pastoral care, personal development, safety and welfare, and discipline. It could consider to what extent the policies, practices, routines and relationships within the school contribute to the promotion of pupil self-esteem, self-discipline and self-motivation.

◆ Staff Organisation and Staff Development:

The review could examine the current reality in relation to:

Staffing levels

Staffing profile (age, gender, qualifications, skills ...)

Policies and practices on the deployment of staff

The involvement and empowerment of staff in major decision-making

The promotion of staff morale and welfare

The promotion of teachers' professional development

◆ **School-Home-Community Links:**

The review could examine the school's procedures for

- Communicating and consulting with parents on general school issues
- Contacting parents of individual pupils in relation to problems or concerns
- Reporting to and meeting with parents in relation to pupils' progress
- Liaising with the Parents' Council
- Establishing links with local parishes, community groups, and businesses

◆ **School Management and Administration:**

Among the aspects which could be considered are:

- The in-school management structure
- Organisational climate
- Communication structures
- Planning structures
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures
- Record keeping procedures
- Organisation of the school calendar
- General administration and day-to-day routines
- Maintenance of the school plant and school resources
- Financial management
- The role of the Board of Management

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Notes