1: INTRODUCING SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Contents

The Three Phases of Innovation:

School Development Planning is essentially an ongoing process, not a "once-off" activity. If it is to be effective in enabling the school to meet the dual challenge of enhancing quality and managing change, it must become part of the school's normal modus operandi.

For many schools, systematic development planning will entail a change from current practice. Its introduction will in itself represent a challenging innovation that must be carefully planned to secure its successful integration into school life.

Drawing on international research into educational change in general, it may be helpful to regard the introduction of school development planning as consisting of three overlapping phases:

I.   **Initiation:** This phase involves deciding to embark on school development planning, fostering commitment to the process, and preparing for participation.

II. **Familiarisation:** This phase includes the first cycle(s) of development planning, when the school community is learning how to carry out the process

III. **Embedding:** This phase occurs when school development planning becomes part of the school's normal pattern of doing things.

I.   Initiation

It is formally the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that the decision to embark on school development planning is made and implemented. In practice, however, the initiative is generally taken by the Principal or by the Trustees.

If the innovation is to be successful, it is essential that the teaching staff of the school develop a commitment to it. Accordingly, they should be fully briefed at the outset about what school development planning is, why it is desirable, and how it is to be organised. They should be made aware of the role they can play in the process and the benefits they can expect to derive from it. The focus of the briefing should be on linking the process to issues that are important to the majority, so that the relevance of the process to school needs is clearly illustrated.

Similarly, appropriate briefings for all other partners in the school community should be arranged, to ensure their support for the process.

Preparing for School Development Planning

The following activities are suggested as ways of helping the school community to prepare for participation in the process:

♦ Reading guidelines, handbooks and research literature on school development planning

♦ Seeking advice and support from the local Education Centre

♦ Attending information seminars or training courses relevant to school development planning

- ♦ Contacting other schools where progress in planning has already been made, in order to learn from their experiences

- ♦ Inviting an external speaker to make a presentation to the staff, Board of Management and Parents' Council (either separately or together) on school development planning

- ♦ Inviting a key person or persons within the school to present the case for school development planning and to encourage participation

- ♦ Engaging an external facilitator to assist with the initiation and implementation of school development planning

Facilitation

Good facilitation is the key to the successful introduction of school development planning. The question to be addressed during the initiation phase is, *What is the most suitable form of facilitation for this school, given its particular character and circumstances?*

There are several options that can be considered. These include facilitation by

- ♦ An external facilitator from the education world who has no formal links with the school

- ♦ An external facilitator who has a formal relationship with the school—the Education Development Officer appointed by the school's Trustees, for example

- ♦ An external facilitator whose experience of facilitation extends beyond the education world

- ♦ An internal facilitator who has a formal role in the in-school management structure—the Principal, the Deputy-Principal or a post-holder with responsibility for school planning

- ♦ An internal facilitator who has particular expertise in school development planning but no in-school management post

- ♦ An internal facilitator with the advice and support of an external consultant

- ♦ A team (internal, external or a combination)

The choice of option will be influenced by many factors. **Much will depend on the personality and skills of the individual facilitator.** Other considerations include:

♦ **School Culture**

If relationships within the school are characterised by a reasonably high level of mutual trust and affirmation, effective communication, and collegiality, internal facilitation may be a viable option. If the Principal or Deputy Principal acts as facilitator, however, it is possible that some members of staff may feel inhibited about expressing views, whereas any other internal facilitator may be perceived by colleagues as lacking in sufficient status for the role. In such cases, external facilitation may be preferable.

Where the staff climate is characterised by suspicion, division, or low morale, internal facilitation may prove unacceptably difficult. In extreme cases, specialist external facilitation may be required to address the issue of relationship-building within the staff before any attempt can be made to initiate collaborative whole-school development planning.

♦ **Credibility**

The facilitator, whether internal or external, must have credibility in the eyes of staff members if he or she is to enjoy their confidence and work successfully with them. Accordingly, it must be clear to the staff that the facilitator has a deep understanding of how a school operates and a thorough familiarity with both the reality of school life and the process of school planning.

Some school staffs tend spontaneously to accord greater credibility to an external facilitator. Others tend to regard any outsider as insufficiently knowledgeable about their particular circumstances to be able to offer practical help.

Outcomes of Initiation Phase

The outcomes of the Initiation Phase are as follows:

- ♦ The decision to introduce school development planning has been taken.

- ♦ All members of the teaching staff have an appropriate understanding of and commitment to the process.

- ♦ All partners in the school community have been briefed on the introduction of the process

- ♦ A facilitator for the process has been chosen

II. Familiarisation

In the course of the familiarisation phase—normally the first full cycle of school development planning--the school community is learning from experience how to carry out the process. The requisite knowledge and skills are developing experientially and collaborative structures are evolving. The achievement of progress consolidates and strengthens commitment.

During this phase, skilful facilitation, careful co-ordination, and adequate and sustained support, including any necessary inservice training, will help greatly to advance the process. Particular care should be taken to provide positive reinforcement for staff.

Pre-facilitation Briefing

Before facilitation commences, it is important that the facilitator meet with key members of the school community for a mutual briefing session (or sessions). The following points apply particularly to external facilitation, but they have some relevance also for internal facilitation.

It is generally recommended that the facilitator should have a preliminary discussion with the Principal, during which sensitive issues relating to staff dynamics or relevant confidential matters can be broached. The facilitator should then meet with the Principal, Deputy Principal, representatives of the staff (including any members who have a particular responsibility for planning) and, possibly, representatives of the Board of Management.

The Facilitator outlines:

- The general structure of the school development planning process

- The role the various stakeholders can play

- The central role of the teaching staff in research, analysis, action planning, and drafting

- A provisional timeframe for the process

The School Representatives outline:

- The school's history and traditions

- The school's organisational and curriculum structures

- Factors governing the school's development needs

- Problem areas

- Options for development

The Purposes of the Briefing Sessions are:

1. To ensure the compatibility of facilitator and staff

2. To establish clearly, for both parties, the brief of the facilitator, in relation to:

   ⇒ **Level of involvement**

   ⇒ **Time commitment**

   ⇒ **Role**

   and to clarify the outcomes to be expected at the end of the facilitator's contract

1. To ensure that the facilitator has sufficient awareness of the school's particular circumstances to earn credibility, to operate effectively, and to steer the process in a sensitive manner

2. To enable preliminary decisions to be made about the most appropriate planning model for the school's needs, the timetable for the process and the communication and consultation procedures to be adopted—decisions that will be reviewed when the school's planning priorities have been identified

The Brief of the Facilitator

⇒ **Level of Involvement**

The level and extent of the facilitator's involvement can vary considerably, depending on circumstances. Both the facilitator and the school community should agree from the outset how many of the following tasks are included in the facilitator's brief:

i) Introducing the process to the whole staff

ii) Conducting follow-up sessions with the whole staff (the number to be specified)

iii) Working with staff teams or task groups

iv) Providing training for teams or groups in aspects of the process

v) Working with the Board of Management, parents or students

vi) Assisting with research, analysis, and the collation of information

vii) Advising on or assisting with the writing of the plan

It should also be clarified as to whether it will be the responsibility of the school or of the facilitator to arrange for clerical services such as the photocopying/duplicating of handouts.

⇒ **Time Commitment**

The time commitment of the facilitator depends largely on the level and extent of the brief. It can entail:

i) One day's work with the whole staff, or

ii) A number of sessions with the whole staff, or

iii) Sessions with the whole staff and also with task groups, or

iv) Sessions with staff and also with Board of Management, parents, and/or students

v) Ongoing consultancy until the first draft plan has been completed

When the time-commitment of the facilitator is being considered, an allowance of preparation time for every session should be included.

⇒ **Role**

It is important that facilitator and school community share an understanding of the nature and boundaries of the facilitator's role. The role of the facilitator is:

i) **Not** to solve problems for the school, **but** to enable the school to make progress towards solving its own problems

ii) **Not** to know everything about every topic of relevance to the school, **but** to enable the school to learn how to find the information it needs

iii) **Not** to do the planning for the school, **but** to help the school to undertake its own planning

iv) **Not** to make decisions for the school**, but** to help the school to follow an effective decision-making process

It must be recognised that the **primary role of the facilitator** is

(a) to help the school community, and especially the staff, to organise an efficient collaborative planning process and to work effectively together on planning, and

(b) to keep the process moving forward.

In some circumstances, the school and facilitator may prefer to enter into an initial contract for one Staff Day on school development planning, with an option to extend the contract by mutual agreement.

First Whole-Staff Working Session(s) with the Facilitator

The first working session(s) might cover the following activities:

- ♦ A brief résumé of the what, why and how of school development planning in general

- ♦ A brief exploration of the role of staff in the process and of the benefits for staff in participation

- ♦ An outline of the provisional planning model and timetable for the process

- ♦ Confirmation of the staff's formal commitment to work within the process as outlined

- ♦ An initial review to establish staff views on the areas of school life that should be prioritised for specific review and development

- ♦ The establishment or confirmation of staff structures and procedures to advance the planning:

  - ⇒ **Structures:** steering committee, task groups, curriculum planning teams, co-ordinator(s), as appropriate to the particular school (see Unit V)

  - ⇒ **Procedures:** for consultation and communication, both within the staff and with key stakeholders (see Unit V)

- ♦ The identification of specific tasks to be accomplished before the next whole-staff session, and the assignment of those tasks to specific persons or groups

From Review to Evaluation

Following the first whole-staff working sessions, the school community proceeds through its first full cycle of development planning, using the agreed structures and procedures. (See guidelines and sample resource materials in Units II-V) The process is likely to involve many small group meetings on specific topics, with regular feedback to the whole staff and relevant stakeholders to ensure shared ownership of the outcomes.

The monitoring and evaluation of the first full cycle should focus not only on whether the planning targets were met and on whether the targets continue to be appropriate, but also on whether the planning process model itself was appropriate and effectively implemented. Such an evaluation will promote the evolution and embedding of development planning within the school culture.

III. Embedding

The embedding phase occurs when development planning becomes part of the school's usual way of doing things. Management arrangements have evolved to support both development and maintenance, and are part of the accepted pattern of behaviour. There is widespread use of action plans by staff, the whole school plan serves as a frame of reference for co-ordinated planning by individual teachers, subject departments and cross-curricular teams, and the impact is seen on classroom practice. The whole process is now regarded as "the way we do things around here."

IV. Notes

On the three overlapping phases of the innovation process, see David Hargreaves and David Hopkins, "School Effectiveness, School Improvement and Development Planning", in *Managing the Effective School",* ed. Margaret Preedy at the Open University, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1993.