

DEIS and SSE – Advice for Primary Schools

How does the SSE process work in DEIS schools?

- Schools need to be clear that the DEIS action plan is the school's SSE improvement plan. No other plan is needed. This is consistent with the content of the Inspectorate presentations on SSE delivered in schools in 2012-13.
- Primary schools participating in DEIS are required to have action plans for improvement in the following areas or themes:
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Attendance
 - Retention and progression
 - Partnership with parents and others
- The SSE process is a step-by-step approach which focuses on improving teaching and learning in the classroom. The SSE process is relevant to all action planning for improvement, including DEIS action planning. In particular, the SSE process should help DEIS schools to examine the impact of classroom activity on all DEIS themes.

What have DEIS schools always been required to do?

- Under DEIS, schools are required to produce action plans for improvement in all the areas or themes outlined above.
- DEIS schools receive a letter with the DEIS grant informing them that they can be called to financial account by the Department. The letter emphasises that the financial resources obtained under DEIS should be targeted towards at-risk pupils.
- The letter also reminds schools that they are required to retain their DEIS action plan for improvement for examination by the Inspectorate.

What is new for DEIS schools as a result of the SSE circular?

- The SSE circular, 0039/2012, requires each school to *“record its own judgement about its performance and the quality of its work, in the form of a concise **school self-evaluation report**. A summary of this report should be made available to the whole-school community”*. The circular states that judgements should refer to strengths and areas identified for development.
- In practice a DEIS school which has engaged effectively with the DEIS process will have recorded its findings and the areas that it has prioritised for improvement for each of the DEIS themes. However, it may not have formally recorded its strengths.
- Many DEIS initiatives have focused on aspects of school life outside the mainstream classroom: for example, interventions to address specific educational and behavioural difficulties; breakfast and after-school activities; and home-school supports. However, the SSE process requires a focus on improving teaching and learning practices. Therefore, when reviewing their action plan for improvement, DEIS schools should include targets and actions relating to learning and classroom practice in relevant DEIS themes.
- DEIS schools may not have previously included the pupil voice or parent voice in their evidence gathering. Engaging effectively in the SSE process will ensure that schools now include such evidence.

What do DEIS schools now need to do to meet their SSE requirements?

- In order to comply with circular 0039/2012, a DEIS school will need to produce an SSE report each year. This report should reflect where a school is at in its DEIS planning cycle.

- In a year where a school is beginning a three-year DEIS planning cycle, it will examine its last action plan, identify the areas it has made progress in, review its achievement in relation to targets, ascertain if measures and strategies undertaken were effective, and identify areas for improvement. These actions should be established practice within the DEIS planning process. The school will then record its findings in a short SSE report for internal school reference. This will be new to most DEIS schools. A three-year action plan for improvement will be devised as required under DEIS. This will be the DEIS action plan and also the SIP for SSE purposes.
- In years two and three of the DEIS planning cycle, in line with good DEIS planning practice, the school will review plans, and amend them as required (for example, targets will be adjusted or new targets included; measures will be retained if deemed effective, and new ones included where necessary). The school will produce a short SSE report recording progress and adjustments, and the DEIS action plan will be amended wherever necessary.
- All schools need to complete the legislative and regulatory checklist each year. This is new for DEIS schools.
- DEIS schools were not previously required to produce summary reports or summary improvement plans for the whole-school community. The SSE circular now requires schools to provide these summaries to the whole-school community annually, briefly outlining the strengths they have identified, and the areas they have prioritised for improvement. A summary of the legislative and regulatory checklist should also be produced for the school community.
- DEIS schools may have very detailed improvement plans, so they should keep the summary improvement plan short and meaningful, bearing in mind that the audience is the whole-school community. The summary improvement plan should communicate clearly the actions planned to improve teaching and learning. It would also be useful to highlight areas where the school wants parents' support: for example, attendance and punctuality, or encouraging children to read at home.¹
- The summary report and improvement plan may include a number of DEIS themes, or may focus specifically on literacy, numeracy, or other aspects of teaching and learning that the school has selected.

How might DEIS schools approach the third area of focus for SSE?

- Circular 0039/2012 requires schools to produce an SSE Report and a school improvement plan for a third area, in addition to literacy and numeracy, by 2015/16. It acknowledges that DEIS schools already engage in action planning for improvement in literacy and numeracy. It suggests that, while continuing to implement and monitor their action plans, they include over time a focus on teaching and learning in other areas. DEIS schools might look at themes such as attendance or partnership with parents and see how targets for improvement in these areas could provide a third focus for SSE. For example, a school might review its teaching approaches to subjects such as History, Geography and Science to ensure that they respond to the needs of targeted pupils. The review might lead to stronger partnership by inviting parents to assist in practical elements of these subjects or to work on projects with their children in classroom settings. Over time, the SSE process should ensure that DEIS schools are including, in their action planning for improvement, actions and interventions that have a direct impact on teaching and learning practices.

¹ A sample summary improvement plan for the school community is available on www.schoolself-evaluation.ie