

## Meeting of the SSE Advisory Group

G13/14 DES Marlborough St, Dublin

21 October 2015 at 14.00

### In attendance:

|  |                                 |                              |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Harold Hislop, Inspectorate              | Deirdre Mathews, Inspectorate   | Kate O'Carroll, Inspectorate |
| Brendan Doody, Inspectorate              | John Irwin, ACCS                | Breda Corr, NABMSE           |
| Noreen Lawlor, CPSMA                     | Don Myers, NPC Post-primary     | Michael Redmond JMB          |
| Áine Lynch, NPC Primary                  | Joanna Siewierska, ISSU         | Moira Leydon ASTI            |
| Maria Doyle, IPPN                        | Eilís Humphreys, ATCS           | Peter Mullan, INTO           |
| David Duffy, TUI                         | Paul Byrne, NAPD                | Pat O'Mahony, ETBI           |
| Caoimhín Ó hEaghra, An Foras Pátrúnachta | Carmel Kearns, Teaching Council |                              |

### 1. Opening

The Chief Inspector, Harold Hislop opened the meeting by welcoming members of the Advisory Group (AG). He outlined the role of the AG and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to assist the Inspectorate in preparing schools for the next phase of SSE. The meeting would review progress in the first phase of SSE (in which the focus was on teaching and learning), seek initial views on priorities within SSE in the next phase of implementation, and introduce members of the group to draft criteria for the evaluation of leadership and management.

### 2. Reviewing progress to date

Deirdre Mathews, assistant chief inspector, presented the results of a survey conducted by the Inspectorate on schools' self-reported engagement with SSE. She also presented an overview of the preliminary views of inspectors relating to schools' engagement with SSE as gathered during SSE advisory visits.

Comments and views on the implementation of SSE were invited from members of the AG. Speakers referred to the following:

#### ***Comments on survey***

- The limitations of the SSE survey conducted by the Inspectorate
- SSE survey outcomes were as to be expected
- Some surprise at the high level of self-reported engagement by schools
- Concern though no surprise at the outcomes of the SSE survey as they related to the involvement of parents.
- Teachers aren't complaining about SSE because they're not engaging with SSE.

#### ***SSE in schools - Positive comments***

- Feedback regarding schools' engagement with SSE is becoming increasingly positive
- SSE is acknowledged as being a valuable process
- Principals are very positively disposed towards SSE. It involves a cultural change and therefore is difficult to quantify in statistics
- Initial fears relating to SSE are easing as schools engage with the process

- Having got the process right, some schools are now in a position to apply the SSE process to other areas
- There are significant changes apparent in second level schools as a result of SSE – for example, subject department planning
- Initial complaints from special schools regarding training for SSE have now been assuaged. School visits by inspectors have been very helpful
- The fact that the urgency that was apparent in the introduction of SSE had been pulled back was welcomed
- Sometimes things work much better in practice than in theory
- The focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes has perhaps hidden the impact of SSE in schools – schools are engaging in SSE without necessarily calling it SSE
- As a result of SSE, one school had monitored literacy levels at the beginning of first year and second year and had discovered that students' literacy levels had regressed; this vital information had helped to shape the school's literacy policy

### ***SSE in schools - Concerns/Challenges***

- The cumulative effect of an increased workload in schools
- The potential for confusion in schools regarding SSE
- The narrowness of the focus / themes associated with SSE
- SSE currently viewed as a chore – something that has to be done
- The power of SSE to improve outcomes along with the professionalisation of teaching and management is still not understood
- How deeply is SSE embedded in practice?
- There is confusion relating to target setting and reporting to school community, what should go into an SSE report and a SIP
- The need to look at the 'ask' of schools regarding SSE and the tools that are being provided to them to address this
- There is a necessity to affirm schools' work thus far
- Need to consider how schools engage students in the SSE process particularly where there is no student council in place
- Parents aren't aware of SSE and the requirements relating to SSE; parents are unaware of SSE as the outcomes are not being communicated by schools. Parents need to know how the results of questionnaires make a difference to what teachers do
- An initial reluctance on the part of schools to inform parents as to the outcomes of SSE may be caused by the fact that schools don't want to be seen to be failing in any aspect of provision
- Low percentage of schools reporting to their boards of management
- The fact that boards of management are dependent on volunteers needs to be considered
- The removal of the middle management layer in schools seen as being a significant impediment to effective SSE

### ***Future developments***

- There is a need to reinforce the message regarding the authenticity and validity of internal self-evaluation
- Reflection is central not just to SSE but to other key TC initiatives. Connections need to be made to the full range of these initiatives

- Future focus of SSE on senior management in schools in the context of the removal of the middle management layer in schools and the fact that the majority of primary principals are in teaching positions
- In planning for the next phase of SSE cognisance must be taken of the fact that the last few years have not been good for teachers
- The resources required to engage with SSE must be provided – otherwise there is a danger that it becomes a box ticking exercise

It was noted that all of the comments would be considered carefully in formulating the requirements and documentation for the next phase of SSE. It was also noted that drafts of these documents would be circulated to all of the partners for comment and would be discussed at future meetings of the AG in advance of their finalisation.

### **3. Priorities in the next phase of SSE**

Presentations were made on aspects of SSE that needed to be considered in planning the next phases of SSE. These included:

- the extent of the supports provided to schools in SSE since 2012
- target setting practices and possible time-scales for the next phase of SSE of teaching and learning
- the current reporting requirements for schools in SSE and possible alternatives for consideration

Views expressed by members of the AG concerning the range of SSE, target setting and reporting in the second phase of SSE included:

#### *Range*

- A consensus that schools should always be concerned with seeking improvements in literacy and numeracy and that therefore every school should continue to focus on these areas.
- A general consensus that model 2 of the three models presented would be best suited to schools. Although a suggestion that flexibility to use either model 2 or 3 was also made.
- Post-primary members of the group stated that as JC reform was the major issue on their agenda for the next ten years, they would be using the SSE process to address the development of the key skills.

#### *Targets*

- A general consensus that qualitative as well as quantitative targets should be accepted.
- The notion of goal setting rather than target setting should form part of the discussion regarding the advice which should be given to schools.
- A great deal more 'worked examples' are required to assist schools in this area.

#### *Reporting*

- There needs to be more consideration given to why schools are not reporting to their communities.
- Concern was expressed regarding the use of the information provided by schools and the potential to compile league tables.

- Schools should know that reporting to their communities is purposeful; therefore in looking at the next phase of SSE we should start with why schools should report and work backwards from that point.

#### **4. Evaluating leadership and management**

A brief presentation was made on draft guidelines for the evaluation of leadership and management in schools.

Copies of draft guidelines for SSE of leadership and management were then distributed. It was intended that once completed, these guidelines, set out in domains and standards, would have application not only in SSE but also in inspection, in the professional development of school leaders and in the recruitment of principals/deputy principals. It was planned that the use of the guidelines in a SSE context would be trialled in a number of schools in the 2016/17 school year.

Members of the group were asked to read and reflect on the guidelines.

Members of the group were thanked for their contributions and were invited to provide written feedback by 18 December 2015. They were also informed that oral feedback could be given, by arrangement, in advance of the 18 December deadline.

#### **5. Close**

The meeting closed at 16.00.