

School Self-Evaluation and the Primary Language Curriculum

The Inspectorate has offered these answers to the following questions to aid schools in their use of School Self Evaluation (SSE) to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).

Overall position:

- The most important thing to remember is that SSE is a *process of continuous review and improvement* which makes a difference to teaching and learning in the classroom.
- The Department has published circular 0039/2016 recently and this sets out the requirements for the second cycle of SSE from 2016 to 2020. Schools are required to continue to focus their SSE on teaching and learning. Schools can choose to focus on 2, 3 or 4 aspects of teaching and learning over the four year-period, depending on their own needs and on the breadth and depth of the areas of focus. The inspectorate has published Revised SSE Guidelines to accompany the circular as a support to schools in the SSE process.
- SSE is a useful way of supporting the implementation of any priority change in a school and it can be used flexibly. Circulars 0016/2015 (Primary Language Curriculum) and Circular 00XX/2016 suggest that schools will typically use the SSE process to review their current practice when introducing any new initiative, including the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).
- School self-evaluation and external evaluation are complementary processes, both focused on improvement. External evaluations, in particular whole school evaluations, will take account of schools' engagement with and outcomes of self-evaluation.

1. How can schools use the SSE process when planning for and implementing the PLC?

Circular 0061/2015 (The Primary Language Curriculum) and circular 0039/2016 (SSE) both encourage schools to use the SSE process to implement the PLC. The SSE process is a tried and tested way of ensuring:

- (i) that the review of current practice is collaborative and inclusive
- (ii) that the school identifies aspects of current practice that are effective and aspects that need to change and develop
- (iii) that a school is enabled to determine the targets and actions needed in the change process.

Therefore, it is an ideal process to introduce any new initiative that relates to classroom practice.

2. Will separate guidance for the use of SSE in planning for the PLC be provided and when will this be available?

Circular 0039/2016 sets out the context and requirements for the second cycle of SSE from 2016 to 2020. A suggested timeframe for implementing the PLC using the SSE process is set out on page 3 of the circular. An article explaining how the SSE process can be used by schools to plan for the introduction of the PLC in English and Irish is included in issue 7 of SSE Update (May 2016), which is available at www.schoolself-evaluation.ie. The Inspectorate looks forward to adding materials to the SSE website over time and hopes to include videos of school principals talking about how to use the SSE process to introduce the PLC.

The Interagency Planning Group (which includes representatives of NIPT, PDST, SESS, the Inspectorate and the Colleges of Education), is at an advanced stage in the preparation of guidance for individual teachers' long-term and short-term planning for the PLC. Draft templates will be available from September 2016.

3. In the first cycle of SSE, schools have worked on three school improvement plans. Do schools continue to implement these plans, while at the same time planning to implement the PLC in the second cycle of SSE?

Yes. The SSE process is a process of continuous improvement allowing time for new practices to embed and become a part of 'the way we do things in our school'. Each school should continue to implement actions for improvement from the first cycle of SSE and to monitor their impact. Schools will develop improvement plan(s)

that incorporate the implementation of the PLC in English and Gaeilge as part of the second cycle of SSE. Schools might like to look at the diagram on page 3 of Circular 0039/2016 which suggests a way to think about the movement from cycle one to cycle two of SSE, whilst implementing the PLC.

4. Are the PLC and SSE really compatible? Schools are *required* to begin implementation of oral language in 2016/17 and reading and writing in 2017/2018, and SSE is supposed to be about schools working on improvement plans in their own context.

Yes, the use of the school self-evaluation process is highly compatible with the introduction of the PLC. Circular 0039/2016 recognises that every school is different and has different priorities. For example, schools can choose to prioritise 2, 3 or 4 areas between 2016 and 2020 for SSE, depending on their own context. However, part of *every* primary school's context is the delivery of the curriculum. All schools are required to introduce the PLC in a phased way, and it makes sense for schools to use the SSE process to examine current practice regarding pupils' language and literacy development to support the implementation of the PLC.

5. A school is already implementing a literacy improvement plan from the first cycle of SSE. How can the school integrate the implementation of the PLC into its existing school improvement plan for literacy?

SSE is a continuous and cyclical process in which schools are constantly reflecting on their progress and reviewing how the SSE actions for improvement are being implemented in classrooms. Schools should review the progression of their targets and actions annually in light of new evidence that emerges from the ongoing review. In the light of such an annual review and the evidence that emerges, schools could choose either to incorporate new or revised targets and actions into their literacy plan, or could develop a new improvement plan to support the implementation of the PLC in classrooms.

6. In light of the implementation of the PLC, do schools just focus on literacy (English and Gaeilge) in the next cycle of SSE?

No. Circular 0039/2016 gives flexibility to schools to focus on 2, 3 or 4 areas of teaching and learning relevant to their own context and needs in the second 4-year cycle of SSE. However, it is expected that all schools will continue to seek improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy and other aspects of teaching and learning that the school has prioritised. In the second cycle of SSE, all schools should continue to embed the practices they have introduced to support literacy and numeracy development. Language learning takes place across all areas of the primary curriculum and this is a core message of the PLC. To support the implementing of the PLC, schools might choose to examine how language learning could be extended and improved in the context of the development of numeracy skills, or other curricular areas. Schools should also become familiar with the domains and standards for teaching and learning outlined in *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Schools* and may decide to focus on an aspect of teaching and learning across a range of curriculum areas.

7. Will vertical schools need to have two improvement plans for literacy, one based on the PLC from junior infants to 2nd class and one based on the 1999 curriculum from 3rd to 6th class?

Schools will decide how best to introduce the PLC in their own context. In its improvement plan, a school might have specific target(s) and actions for Junior Infants to Second Class that relate to the PLC, and different improvement target(s) and actions for 3rd to 6th class. The SSE process will assist in determining what is effective and what needs to change in relation to language teaching and learning in English and / or Gaeilge across all classes.

In summary, the focus of SSE is not on paperwork or plans but on changes in how teaching and learning happens in the school. When talking about SSE in action, many teachers have remarked that small changes in classroom practice can have very significant impacts on pupils' learning experiences and outcomes. SSE provides a process for schools to bring about change and improvement and is therefore the ideal process to support curriculum change.