

SSE UPDATE

PRIMARY EDITION

ISSUE 3 – APRIL 2014

SSE – THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

This is the third issue of SSE Update, an e-bulletin for primary schools, which we hope will support your continuing engagement with the school self-evaluation process. Issues 1 and 2 are available on the SSE website: <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/index.php/sse-archive-documents>. If you haven't seen them yet, you might like to take a look at them. They cover many of the topics that schools find themselves getting to grips with as they engage with the SSE process. If you're dealing with literacy and numeracy improvement plans, or target-setting, nó litearthacht sa Ghaeilge, you might find the articles they contain on these and other topics helpful.

In this issue, we're going to concentrate on aspects of the SSE process that are especially relevant to the 2013/14 school year.

Department circular 39/2012 gives information on the SSE process, and sets out what schools are required to do. One requirement is that, by June of this year, all schools will have shared their SSE report and their school improvement plan with their own school community. On page 2 of this issue, you'll find an article with some advice on how to ensure that your SSE report and school improvement plan are 'good to go' to your school community. If you're unsure about what they should contain – and what shouldn't be included – we hope this article will clarify these points.

And we'd be delighted if you would consider sharing your reports and plans with other schools through the SSE website. Please contact info@schoolself-evaluation.ie for details of how to do so.

Ar leathanach 3, tá cur síos ar an gcaoi ina raibh dea-thionchar ag FMS ar ghnóthachtáil sa Mhata i scoil faoi leith.

An article that looks further at some aspects of target-setting is on page 4. Here you'll find an account of what makes a target good, with some examples of effective targets, and a few words of warning about targets that are unlikely to work!

Wishing you and your pupils success as you head towards the final term.

The Inspectorate School Improvement and Quality Unit

PREPARING AN SSE REPORT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

“Schools should provide a summary report to the whole school community. Such a report will be very short and will provide details of the findings with regard to the strengths identified and the areas the school intends to prioritise for improvement.” (*SSE Guidelines*, p.60)

The above statement contains, in a nutshell, what schools need to do by June 2014 with regard to the summary report. There are two key points to note, and schools should try to strike the right balance between them. The first is that the summary report should be very short, and the *Guidelines* recommend that the school report and the summary report should be written in clear, specific, accessible language. The second point is that the summary report has to contain enough detail to give the school community a clear picture of what the school has discovered in going through the first three steps of the SSE process. So, your school has to keep the summary report short and jargon-free, while also ensuring that it answers these four key questions:

- What evidence did you gather and why?
- What did the analysis of all the data tell you?
- What conclusions about strengths and areas for improvement did you draw from it?
- What priorities for improvement did you identify?

Put simply, the summary report should tell the story of your school’s journey through the process so far, clearly and straightforwardly.

Your summary report should also include a completed checklist indicating the school’s compliance with statutory requirements regarding legislation and policies. On the SSE website, <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/index.php/resources/>, you’ll find a report and checklist template, which you might like to use. You’ll notice that the checklist attached to the SSE report template for the school community doesn’t go into the same level of detail as the checklist for internal use in the school. This is to ensure that the school communicates openly with parents and others while also recognising that certain information is sensitive and ensuring that personal data is protected.

“A summary of the school improvement plan should be provided to the whole school community.” (*SSE Guidelines*, p.61)

On page 61 of the *Guidelines*, you’ll find a clear account of what a school improvement plan should contain and how it should be written. It needs to state in clear and practical terms

- the SMART¹ targets your school has set
- the actions your school has selected to achieve the targets
- who is responsible for the actions
- what the timeframe for the actions is
- how you’ll know whether the targets have been achieved

The school improvement plan that you’ll share with your whole school community should contain this information, but with one important difference in the case of the third bullet. While the plan that will be used for internal reference should be as detailed as possible about the personnel responsible, the plan to be shared with the whole school community should avoid referring to named individuals in the context of specific responsibilities.

Putting the summary report and improvement plan on a single page will help to show that the plan is your school’s response to the priorities identified in the report. Then circulate it with the relevant checklist to the school community in whatever way you feel is most reliable and effective.

¹ Specific – Measurable – Attainable – Realistic – Time-bound – see SSE Update, Issue 2, page 3.

FMS AGUS MACHNAMH AR AN MATA: CÁS SCOILE AMHÁIN

Mar chuid den phróiseas FMS tagann múinteoirí le chéile agus déanann siad anailís ar an bhfianaise a fhaightear ó fhoinsí difriúla chun teacht ar chinntí agus chun plean feabhsúcháin a dhréachtadh agus a chur i bhfeidhm. Rinne múinteoirí ó scoil lán-Ghaeilge amháin géar-mhachnamh ar chúrsaí Matamaitice agus seo thíos cuid de thorthaí an mhachnaimh sin.

“Ó thaobh láidreachtaí scoile de maidir le teagasc na scileanna fadhbréitigh sa Mhata, táimid os cionn an mheáin. Tá tuiscint mhaith ag na páistí ar choincheapa difriúla. Táid láidir ó thaobh uimhris de. Tá ag éirí go maith linn maidir le modhanna agus scileanna a bhaineann le foghlaim chomhpháirteach / foghlaim chomhoibríoch a fhorbairt agus a úsáid. Ó thaobh foghlaim bunaithe ar an timpeallacht táimid láidir go leor: tá na cluichí sa chlós ag nascadh le hábhair eile. Bhí an tseachtain Mhata an-ráthúil. Creideann an fhoireann go bhfuil múineadh na huimhearthachta sásúil.

Ó thaobh deacrachtaí atá ann, caithimid bheith airdeallach is aireach faoi fhoclóir; tuigimid go bhfuil foclóir éagsúil in úsáid ag múinteoirí agus iad ag múineadh na Matamaitice. Creideann na múinteoirí gur réiteach fadhbanna an réimse ina bhfuil fadhbanna ann. Is féidir linn feabhas a chur ar theagasc agus ar fhoghlaim an fhadhbréitigh tré níos mó plé agus míniú a dhéanamh, tré fadhbanna seachtaine a réiteach, is iad ceangailte le hábhair eile. Tá orainn aird níos mó a thabhairt ar na céimeanna cearta a mhíniú do na páistí is breis ama a thabhairt don pháiste chun an réasúnú a dhéanamh. Tá níos mó oibre ag teastáil ó thaobh obair ó bhéal de, ceistiú an mhúinteora, bealaí éagsúla a thriail chun teacht ar réiteach. Chomh maith leis sin caithfidimid bheith airdeallach go bhfuil ár gceisteanna soiléir agus go ngríosann siad freagraí oiriúnacha ó na daltaí.”

Chun díriú ar dhúshlán sa Mhata, i ndiaidh an mhachnaimh seo agus i ndiaidh na hainlíse ar fhianaise ó fhoinsí eile, shocraigh na múinteoirí ar ghnéithe dá gcuid teagaisc a athrú agus ar ghníomhaíochtaí difriúla a chur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn an ranga aonair: d’aithin siad go raibh riachtanais faoi leith ag ranganna difriúla agus narbh ionann na spriocanna agus na gníomhaíochtaí feabhsúcháin a bheadh ann i ngach rang.

“SPRIOC: Is é an sprioc atá ag Rang a Sé ná go dtiocfaidh méadú 10% ar ghnóthachtáil na ndaltaí san fhadhbreiteach i dtaca le fadhbanna faoi: féilirí, imlíne an chiorcail, achair agus graif, dílse is seans agus scálaí, céatadáin, deachúlacha is codáin.

GNÍOMHAÍOCHTAÍ: Bainfear an sprioc seo amach tré:

- níos mó plé a dhéanamh agus fadhbanna á réiteach, níos mó obair ó bhéal, níos mó obair phraiticiúil a dhéanamh,
- fearas ceart a bheith ar fáil, níos mó léarscáileanna a bheith ann,
- tuilleadh oibre ar imlínte cruthanna rialta / neamhrialta a mheas agus a thomhas, achar seomra srl a ríomh ó phlean de réir scála, sonraí a bhailiú, a eagrú is a léiriú-píchairteacha, graif, treograif.
- níos mó cluichí ar ríomhairí a imirt, níos mó deiseanna fadhbanna ar an bhféilire a oibriú amach, cluichí a imirt agus úsáid a bhaint as cartaí, dílse chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar sheans, nasc sa bhreis a dhéanamh le Tíreolaíocht, Eolaíocht is OSPS.”

Is léir go ndearna múinteoirí na scoile seo mion-scrúdú ar ghné amháin dá gcleachtas agus gur chabhraigh an próiseas FMS leo spriocanna in-sroichte a dhearadh agus gníomhaíochtaí feabhsúcháin a chur i gcrích.

SMART² TARGET SETTING

In the second SSE Update, we outlined some suggestions regarding effective target setting and writing a school improvement plan. Target-setting is widely recognised as being difficult to get right, so it's worth looking again at the basis for good target-setting, along with some examples of good targets, and why they are good – and some targets that won't work, and why they are not good.

So what is a target? **A target is a quantifiable change in performance level to be attained within a specified time.**

Targets:

- are inextricably linked to baseline data, appropriate success criteria and actions.
- should be expressed in terms of improved outcomes and attainment for learners.
- should be quantifiable or measurable. (It's very difficult to determine whether a target has been met if it is not explicit!)

Verbs such as “to understand, to know, to learn” are not useful when setting targets as they are hard to measure. Verbs such as “to increase, to raise, to decrease” are more useful when setting targets as they are quantifiable. Quantifiable targets are straightforward: you'll find some clear examples on the next page. And remember that targets always need success criteria. Success criteria are the measurable outcomes of the targets: how you will know that the targets have been achieved.

Once you have set measurable targets, you can decide on the actions your school needs to take to achieve them. As mentioned in the last SSE Update, actions generally relate to changes in pupils' learning experiences and teachers' practice. **The golden rule is that actions identified should be clearly related to meeting a specific target.**

What are the common pitfalls when you are trying to set SMART targets? Not surprisingly, there has been a lot of research in this area. A look at some of this research points to four potential problems to watch out for.

1. The problem of setting too many targets. Better two or three that you can really work on than ten that it will be impossible to manage.
2. The problem of setting inappropriate targets. This is very likely to happen if you haven't gathered baseline data or if you haven't analysed it carefully.
3. The problem of setting targets but not ensuring that they really are SMART. Putting in percentages isn't enough to make a target SMART. A target is achievable and realistic only when you can say HOW it's going to be achieved in your school, for your pupils.
4. The problem of confusing actions or processes with targets. This is the other side of the coin from the last point. There, the problem is targets without actions; here, it's identifying an action without identifying in SMART terms what you hope to achieve by the action. Because this happens so often, it's worth giving some examples that might be recognisable. A school might set as a target 'to develop a school library' or 'to display posters illustrating applications of numeracy'. These are actions with a purpose; they are not targets. In these cases the school needs to ask: “Why are we doing this? What do we want to achieve?” If the school can answer these questions in measurable terms, they will then have relevant targets and will be able to state appropriate success criteria.

On the following page are six sets of targets, with a short commentary under each set. (Some of the effective targets come from actual school improvement plans.) We'd be interested to hear if you find these examples useful when working on your own targets. Please let us know at info@schoolself-evaluation.ie.

² A SMART target is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound.

Sample Targets 1

- Increase the percentage of pupils who check their work for mistakes from 25% in 2013 to 35% in 2014
- Increase the proportion of pupils who say they like maths from a quarter to a half over 3 years
- Decrease the number of pupils who think reading is boring from 35% to 25% over 3 years
- Increase the number of pupils in the senior section of the school using digital technology to express, share and present opinions from 43% to 75% over 3 years

These are effective targets. They are specific, measurable and timebound. As the school gets used to setting targets and reviews progress at the end of year one of implementation, it can check the targets and adjust them if necessary.

Sample Targets 2

- A 10% improvement in pupil attainment in reading when retested using standardised test
- A 50% improvement in interest in reading [from baseline data previously gathered]

If the timeframe for achieving these targets is outlined in the improvement plan, then these are good targets. They are specific and measurable. Review of progress at the end of year one of implementation will help to ascertain if they are attainable and realistic.

Sample Targets 3

- 80% of all pupils will demonstrate competency in using fractions and decimals at the end of sixth class
- 80% of all pupils in fourth class will demonstrate competency in measuring capacity using standard units of measurement.
- 70% of all pupils will demonstrate ability to use whole-school problem solving techniques when answering problem-based questions in Mathematics.

Assuming these targets represent an improvement in pupils' knowledge and skills from current baseline data as outlined in the SSE report, then these would be good targets.

Sample Targets 4

- To increase the number of pupils who use higher order questions in pair work and class
- To develop and improve school wide literacy

Why are these not good targets? They are not time bound or measurable. They could become SMART target if written as follows: "To increase/improve by X% within Y years" and if the increase was related to evidence-based data.

Sample Targets 5

- To ensure that teachers' individual planning makes reference to using good group work practice and that teachers increase the time spent at group work.
- To ensure that teachers use Station teaching in Mathematics on a daily basis.

Why are these not good targets? The main reason is that they do not relate to enhancing learner outcomes.

Sample Targets 6

- By the end of 2016 all pupils will have good reading skills
- By the end of 2015 all pupils will have developed effective comprehension practices.

Do you think these are good targets? Two questions could be asked in relation to these targets.

1. *Is it realistic to expect "all pupils" to attain the target?*
2. *In the case of the first target, what is meant by "good"?*