



# Moving forward with SSE

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Supporting all schools to engage effectively with School Self-evaluation (SSE) will be an important priority for the education system in the period 2018 to 2020. Many school leaders have welcomed the fact that SSE is back up and running and are working with their school communities on re-engaging with SSE following the guidance issued earlier this year in Circular 0016/2018.

The SSE process helps us to review how effectively our schools are meeting the needs of learners in the context of implementing curriculum programmes that are appropriate and challenging. SSE provides us with the tools, resources and best-practice approaches to facilitate a real focus on effective learning and teaching in classrooms and throughout the school. Circular 0016/2018 provides specific guidance to schools on re-engaging with the SSE process. SSE is still, of course, essentially concerned with four critical questions:

- How well are we doing?
- What are our strengths?
- What are our areas for improvement?
- How can we improve?

Circular 0016/2018 amended the expectations for the second cycle of SSE (2016-2020) and this article focuses on some key points that school leaders may find useful.

## AREA OF FOCUS

The area of focus that you choose will really depend on your school's context; SSE will look different in every school. Between now and the end of 2020, schools are asked to engage with either one or two areas of focus. An area of focus is something that is a priority for the school; it can be a curriculum area or a generic aspect of teaching and learning. For many schools, the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) is a significant priority and, understandably, many schools will use the SSE process for that purpose.

## LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOL 2016

School leaders, teachers and SSE partners within school communities are becoming very familiar with the quality framework *Looking at Our School 2016 (LAOS)*. One of its key intended purposes is to guide the thinking of schools, teachers, and boards as they engage in SSE. There is no single way of using LAOS; many school leaders are already finding creative ways for it to inform their SSE processes. We encourage a school not to focus on too many of the standards in LAOS but rather on one or two that are particularly relevant to its priority area of focus. Many school leaders are reporting that they find the statements of effective and highly effective practice in LAOS helpful in identifying strengths and areas for development.

## BRINGING ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

The ultimate purpose of SSE is to improve the experiences and outcomes of pupils in your school. Gathering evidence, analysing and making judgements, and creating and sharing the improvement plan are all important parts of the process. However, it is really at step 5 of the SSE process, '*Put improvement plan into action*,' that things begin to change. That is *the* critical step in the process and probably the one that needs most energy and commitment at classroom, staff and whole-school level.

## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

SSE also supports a school's board of management in thinking about teaching and learning. There is value, for example, in keeping SSE as a standing agenda item at board meetings. In addition, the annual checklist for boards of management (available in the Resources section of the SSE website) is a useful way for the board to begin to reflect on its own oversight role.

## TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

We know schools are at different stages in their re-engagement with SSE. If your school has not yet recommenced its engagement with SSE, it will be important to establish a

first area of focus to get the process moving again. You probably have some evidence already available to you to get you started. By reflecting on this collaboratively with your staff and the board, and by gathering additional information as needed, you can begin to identify strengths and areas for development and plan for the improvements needed. We are encouraging schools to be ready to commence the implementation phase as early as is feasible in the 2018/19 school year.

## SUPPORTS FOR SSE

The SSE website, [www.schoolself-evaluation.ie](http://www.schoolself-evaluation.ie) has some great resources to support schools as they re-engage with SSE. Keep an eye out for the *SSE Update*, an E-zine that issues twice yearly. There is also a Twitter and Facebook feed. The Inspectorate organised regional SSE seminars in Spring 2018 and we plan to organise some more during the 2018/19 school year. Inspectors are also available to provide SSE advisory visits. You can request an SSE visit by emailing [info@schoolself-evaluation.ie](mailto:info@schoolself-evaluation.ie).

## Final thoughts

SSE is really about promoting and embedding a culture of professional reflection about learning and teaching in all schools and taking targeted actions to ensure that school development and improvement happens. SSE supports school leaders, teachers, school management and the wider school community to take ownership of quality in their own school and to make incremental improvements in teaching and learning. Every school is different and will be at a different point on the SSE journey. Together, we have discovered that schools that identified a small number of discrete but significant actions have had greater success. SSE is about regular, sustainable changes in practice that become part of a school's shared practice. As one school put it, for SSE to really work it must be about 'Every classroom, every teacher, every day!'