

# SSE UPDATE

PRIMARY EDITION

ISSUE 12 – December 2018

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## Embedding SSE

Welcome to issue twelve of SSE Update, the e-bulletin for primary schools. We've been hearing lots of great stories from schools about the progress that they are making in embedding SSE. Schools have embraced the opportunity to re-engage and have identified meaningful areas of focus, gathered and analysed evidence and planned for improvement. Lots of schools have been telling us about the changes that they are making in learning and teaching as they engage in the most important part of the process: *Putting Improvement into Action*.

In November and early December, we delivered nine regional SSE seminars for primary principals. Participants were very positive about the opportunity these events gave them to consider how *Looking at Our School 2016* can be used to support the SSE process, and to share practice and learn from other school leaders. We hope to be able to offer some more seminars in the spring term – keep an eye on the [SSE website](#) for details. Inspectors have also supported schools through SSE advisory visits. These visits involve an inspector working with the principal and other members of the leadership team to help the school to get the most from the SSE process. We will continue to offer these visits during 2019. To request one, simply e-mail [info@schoolself-evaluation.ie](mailto:info@schoolself-evaluation.ie).

To help us to make sure that the supports provided continue to be useful and relevant, we're conducting an online SSE survey. We're interested in hearing from principals and other school leaders, teachers, parents and members of boards of management about how things are progressing in schools. It's a short survey and it'll remain open until Friday January 18 – you can access it [here](#) or on the front page of the SSE website.

One of the fundamental principles of SSE is that it allows schools to focus on areas that are a priority for them. Every school is different, so will have different priorities at different points in time. A priority may be a particular subject area, or at other times it may be an aspect of teaching and learning. A school's priority may be informed by a national initiative or strategy. We've included an article on Digital learning which is the focus of much national attention, due to the Digital Strategy. It examines how you might reflect this national priority through your work in SSE.

We're very grateful to Áine Lynch of the National Parents' Council (Primary) and Anna-Mai Rooney from the Centre for School Leadership and IPPN for providing our second article – this is about partnership schools. This is a timely focus on another fundamental principle of SSE, that of whole-school partnership and review. It examines the active role that parents can play in supporting the SSE process.

The Inspectorate Evaluation Support and Research Unit

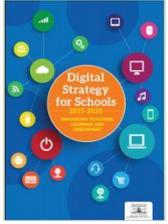
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## Digital Learning and the SSE process

We have all come to recognise the important role that digital technologies can play in the learning and teaching process. Pupils use technology as an integrated part of their everyday lives and technologies will form part of the lives of today's learners in ways that we probably can't even imagine. There is considerable research evidence too that digital technologies can provide a deeper, richer and provide more challenging experience for learners. The effective embedding of digital learning as part of everyday classroom experiences poses questions about learning and teaching and requires changes in our practice. Effective digital learning in primary schools involves pupils in actively and collaboratively using technologies as an integral part of the learning and assessment processes.



### Digital Strategy and Digital Learning Plan

There has been a lot of focus on digital learning at system level in Ireland, including the development of the [Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 – 2020](#). The subsequent circulars ([0001/2017](#) and [0011/2018](#)) have allocated annual funding to schools up to 2020 to support investment. Schools have been asked to plan for the use of this funding in the form of a digital learning plan. Your school's digital learning plan will support you in embedding digital learning and help you to provide meaningful learning experiences for your pupils.

Planning for digital learning has been deliberately aligned to the SSE process. SSE is the established process for schools to reflect and review and to manage change. SSE helps you to consider how well you are doing, what your strengths and areas for improvement are and how you can make the improvement happen. You can use the identical six-step process as you examine digital learning and as you prepare a digital learning plan.

One of the commitments of the Digital Strategy for Schools was to develop a framework to guide quality and progress in digital learning in the Irish System. The resulting framework, the [Digital Learning Framework for Primary Schools](#) (DFL) is directly aligned to the domains and standards of *Looking at Our School 2016*. The DFL is a useful tool when reflecting on your strengths, areas for development and the actions you can take to bring about improvement specifically in the area of digital learning. It has the added advantage of drawing on the same structure and language as *Looking at Our School 2016*.

### Making the links between SSE and digital learning

Many schools have identified an area of focus other than digital learning for SSE. You may have identified, for example, oral language to support your implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum or you may have decided to focus on an aspect of SPHE or indeed on an aspect of teaching and learning such as assessment for learning. While it is true to say that in these cases schools are required to have a digital learning plan as well as an SSE action, schools can ensure that there is much overlap between the two processes.

For example, if you are focusing on oral language for SSE, you could consider how digital learning could help you achieve the improvements in learners' experiences and outcomes in oral language that they also need. Similarly if you have identified assessment for learning as an area of focus, you might identify specific actions that involve learners in using digital technologies to check on and reflect on their learning. Essentially you can 'box clever' with regard to your SSE area of focus and the requirement to have a digital learning plan, by stitching in specific actions that serve both your SSE priorities and your digital learning priorities.

### Digital Learning as an SSE area of focus

Perhaps your school has identified digital learning as an aspect of teaching that you want to prioritise across the curriculum and you may have decided that it is one of the areas of focus for the SSE process. There will be obvious overlap between the digital learning plan and the SSE improvement plan in your school, and essentially both plans can become one to guide implementation and review at steps 5 and 6 in the process (*Put Improvement Plan into Action and Monitor Actions and Evaluate Impact*).

When planning for improvement in the use of digital learning in this case, it will be important to plan for actions that are linked to particular curriculum areas and specific kinds of learning. You will be basing actions on aspects of learning and the curriculum that need to be improved and that will be enhanced by providing focused digital learning experiences to engage and challenge learners, and help them to achieve better outcomes.

## Partnership Schools

**Aíne Lynch, Director of the National Parents' Council (Primary)**

**Anna Mai Rooney, Board Member of IPPN and Deputy Director (P)  
Centre for School Leadership**



Partnership Schools, a joint initiative of the National Parents' Council Primary (NPC), and the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), aligns itself very well with the SSE Process, ensuring a more effective way of meeting the needs of students in the modern educational landscape.

School self-evaluation empowers a school community to identify and affirm good practice, and to identify and take action on areas that merit improvement. School self-evaluation is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement.

This first statement in the SSE Guidelines (2016) serves to confirm the underlying principles of the SSE Process. From a period of reflection and shared dialogue, the school staff is expected to identify what is going well, what could be improved, and how this improvement should be planned, actioned and evaluated. Significantly, the whole school community is collectively responsible, rather than teachers or the leadership team in isolation. A similar emphasis is placed on the school community in *Looking at Our School 2016*:

The common language provided by the framework will facilitate meaningful dialogue between teachers, educational professionals, parents, pupils, school communities and the wider community about quality in our schools.

While there are many fine examples of collaboration in Irish schools, it is fair to say that as a system it is an area that has the potential to be developed. *Looking at our School 2016*, together with the SSE guidelines and the Leadership and Management Circular (0070/2018), support schools to embrace a different way of working in the interest of improved outcomes for pupil, where collaborative reflection, dialogue, goal setting and review are an integral part of daily work.

Similarly, better outcomes for pupils is the main objective of a *Partnership School*, achieved by the whole school community, planning and working together on agreed activities. The concept of Partnership Schools is based on research by Dr. Joyce Epstein, from John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. In addition to encouraging parental involvement, Dr. Epstein suggests that equal partnership with parents, teachers and the wider school community is *the* key to providing the best learning outcomes and experiences for learners.

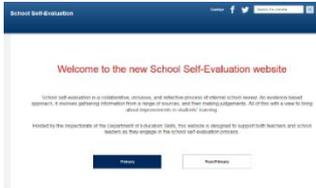
So, what is a Partnership School and how does it work? A Partnership school firstly recruits an Action Team Partnership (ATP). An ATP consists of teachers, parents, support staff, children and members of the school community, and this team works together to enhance the work of the school plan. Practically, the team with the principal, develop two academic goals, one behavioural goal, and one goal aimed at making the school a more welcoming place. The academic goals are based on the school's teaching and learning priorities. The members of the ATP collectively reflect and develop practical supports that align closely to the work of the school's teaching staff. This enhances and extends the work of the teachers, and helps to communicate with and involve the wider schools community in the achievement of the goals. It also offers an objective perspective of people from the local community, which brings a different dimension to the work of the school.

Most particularly, it enables the voice of the child to be heard. The children on the ATP, representing a variety of classes, ensure that the adults involved understand the child's perspective, which in turn enriches the efforts of the group to support the learning of the school. The Partnership Schools model is set to align with upcoming system initiatives and legislation including the Parent and Student Charter. If you are interested in finding out more about how the Partnership Schools could work in your school, please contact the Partnership Schools Co-Ordinator Liam McPherson on 018874478 or email him at [psi@npc.ie](mailto:psi@npc.ie) for more information.

## Reminders of Supports for SSE

Keep in touch with developments about SSE through our website and our social media presence.

Click on the Icons below to access the relevant link or to sign up to our social media feeds.



## Survey on SSE

We are currently conducting an online survey to learn more about how the school self-evaluation process is progressing in schools. We're interested in hearing from principals and other school leaders, teachers, parents and members of boards of management. It's a short survey and your response will assist in ensuring that further supports provided for SSE are relevant and useful. It's available on the front page of the SSE website or click on the link below.

