

The School Improvement Group: Information Sheet

What is The School Improvement Group?

The School Improvement Group (SIG) is a group of senior officials from School Governance Section and other administrative sections of the Department of Education and the Inspectorate. Its primary function is to engage directly with school leaders in a small number of schools that are experiencing significant difficulties in specific aspects of their work. The SIG's purpose is to support and monitor the process whereby these schools work towards improvement. The SIG does not operate in isolation, it is part of an overall continuum of supports that are available for all schools to help them improve the quality of their work.

The overall context within which the School Improvement Group operates

Schools in Ireland are viewed as dynamic learning organisations, which are ultimately responsible for the quality of the education they provide. The Irish system sees effective schools as places where teachers are enabled to work individually and collectively in order to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. In effective schools, teachers through their individual and collective work, enable high-quality learning experiences and outcomes. Teachers in such schools are continuously developing and refining their teaching approaches to match the learning needs of the children and young adults they teach. The school leadership team in effective schools promotes and facilitates the development of the learner's voice and leadership and their active participation in school life. They also recognise parents as important stakeholders in the school, value their views and facilitate their involvement in the school. Effective schools use the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process to take ownership of their own direction and development, to shape their own improvement agenda and to effect meaningful improvement in teaching and learning in a way that takes account of their own particular context. In these schools, SSE is an inclusive, collaborative process which focuses on improving experiences and outcomes for learners

School principal and leadership team

The **school principal** is the leader of teaching and learning within the school. He/she has a key role in ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality learning experiences and to equitable and inclusive opportunities to develop their wellbeing. The school principal is supported by other members of the **school leadership team** who should all work together to set high expectations for the wellbeing of all members of the school community, for teachers' practice and for learning outcomes in the school. The school leadership team includes those in formal leadership roles such as the principal, deputy principal(s) and assistant principal(s). It also includes those who undertake specific roles related to the school's priorities.

Boards of management and patron

Boards of management¹ have a crucial oversight role of the quality of education provided by the school and for standards of teaching and learning in a school. The board manages the school on behalf of the **school patron** who has a duty to ensure that boards are fulfilling their responsibilities under the

¹ Particular governance and management arrangements pertain to schools under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

Education Act 1998. These duties include ensuring that an appropriate education is provided to all children and young people.

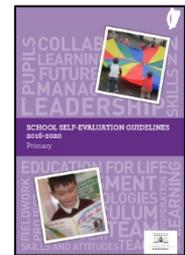
Department of Education

The **Department of Education** provides a policy, legislative and funding framework for education and skills development in early childhood settings, primary schools and post-primary schools. The Department aims to ensure that all children and young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to understand themselves and to deal confidently with challenges that they encounter. It works to support early childhood settings, primary and post-primary schools in ensuring that all children and young people realise their full potential and are enabled to live full and meaningful lives.

Resources, Supports and Assistance available to all schools

School Self-Evaluation

Since 2012 all schools are required to engage in **School Self-Evaluation (SSE)**. SSE is essentially about schools taking ownership of their own development and engaging in meaningful action-planning for improvement. It involves the school community asking itself what is working well in teaching and learning and identifying where improvement is needed. The SSE process is informed by evidence gathered within each school's unique context. It enables schools to use this evidence to identify meaningful and specific targets and actions for improvement that focus on teaching and learning. SSE enables the school community to create and implement improvement plans, to measure their progress, and to identify their achievements.



Looking at Our School

In 2021, the Department updated **Looking at Our School: A Quality Framework for Schools**. This quality framework provides a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools:

- Teaching and learning
- Leadership and management



It is designed for teachers and for school leaders to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and in enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools. The framework is also intended to help schools identify both their strengths and areas for development and to enable them to take ownership of their own development and improvement. In this way, the quality framework seeks to assist schools to embed self-evaluation, reflective practice and responsiveness to the needs of learners in their classrooms and other learning settings.

Support Services

The Department promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) and supports for teachers and principals. The Department of Education last year commenced a project to integrate the four Teacher Education funded Support Services into one single Integrated Support Service. Work is at an advanced stage for the integration of these four support services and, on 1 September 2023, a new integrated support service named **Oide** will be established. The vision for the new integrated support service, Oide, is to support the professional learning of teachers and school leaders in Ireland through the development of high quality, innovative and responsive professional learning that enables them to meet the educational needs of all learners in a changing world. The new organisation will harness the strengths of the existing support services, providing the same type of high-quality professional learning supports and services as provided by CSL, JCT, NIPT and PDST. Along with bringing together all the valuable resources, expertise, and efficient operating systems currently in place across the existing services, Oide will also be able to deploy other innovative and creative approaches to the provision of school support, and professional learning for teachers and school leaders, to meet the future needs of Ireland's primary, post-primary and special schools, and other centres for education.

The **Inspectorate** also provides a range of support and advisory visits to schools. These include advisory visits to support the school's own SSE process and visits undertaken as part of the Department's School Excellence Fund (SEF). The purpose of these visits is to bring an external perspective to the school's internal processes, to advise schools as to the next steps in the improvement journey and to help build the capacity of the school to take the required actions to bring about improvements.

Psychologists from **The National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS)** work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. NEPS psychologists work in partnership with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. They offer a range of services aimed at meeting these needs, for example, supporting individual students through consultation and assessment, special projects and research. NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service with a focus on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring.

Quality Assurance

The **Inspectorate** works to improve the quality of learning and teaching that children and young people experience in early learning and care settings, schools, centres for education and other settings, and to support the development of the Irish educational system. It fulfils its function through providing high-quality evaluation, support, advice and analysis; in relation to educational provision. The Inspectorate adopts a risk-based approach to planning the inspection programme, and draws on a range of data, including outcomes of previous inspections, to inform its approach. Whilst the programme of inspection includes schools identified through the Inspectorate's risk procedures as likely to benefit from external evaluation, schools at all levels of quality of performance are also included. This allows the Inspectorate to recognise, affirm and disseminate good practice across the system.

Implementing the recommendations arising from Inspection reports

Responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the inspection report rests with the school leadership team, in collaboration with the whole school community. As a first stage in the process of acting on the inspection report, the board of management should discuss the findings and recommendations of the report. The school leadership team should then use the inspection findings, along with other types of evidence gathered by the school, to inform its self-evaluation processes. This will involve the leadership team, in collaboration with the whole school community, planning for and overseeing the implementation of the actions needed to address the report's recommendations and to improve learning experiences and outcomes for all children and young people.

Sections of the Department of Education

Various **sections of the Department**, particularly School Governance, Parents and Learners Unit, Special Education Section, Teachers Terms and Conditions and Social Inclusion engage with schools around specific areas of responsibility. For example, School Governance section provides guidance and direction to schools on governance and policy issues and provides information to parents on school governance policies while Parents and Learners Unit clarify how grievances and complaints about schools can be progressed and liaise with schools and other relevant authorities on all child protection concerns within the school sector. Contact details for each of the sections of the Department are available [here](#)

Resources, Supports and Assistance available to some schools

Actions following an inspection

Following an inspection, the Inspectorate makes a judgement about whether further inspection activity is required. If further inspection is required, the Inspectorate will consider whether a different inspection model or a Follow-through (FT) Inspection based on the initial inspection is more appropriate. This information informs **the Inspectorate's planning process** for the region and the school may then be included in the appropriate inspection plan.

Sections of the Department

If breaches of compliance with regulations, legislation or circular are brought to the attention of the Department the relevant section; Parents and Learners Unit, Special Education Section, Social Inclusion, engages with the school. Typically, in these contexts the sections engage with schools through written correspondence with the chairperson of the board and the principal. This correspondence highlights the issues involved and requests evidence that these issues have been addressed.

Resources, Supports and Assistance available to a small number of schools

School Improvement Monitoring

For some schools, where significant weaknesses are noted during inspection that relate mainly to teaching and learning rather than leadership and management, the **School Improvement Monitoring (SIM)** process may be initiated. The SIM group comprises Assistant Chief Inspectors and the Deputy Chief Inspector with overall responsibility for school inspections, and considers the appropriate actions in respect of each of the schools that it discusses.

School Improvement Group

Another level of intervention for schools is the **School Improvement Group (SIG)**. The SIG provides a co-ordinated approach to supporting schools where significant weaknesses in provision are identified, particularly in regard to school leadership and management, either by administrative sections of the Department or through inspection. It consists of senior officials drawn from the Department's School Governance Section and the Inspectorate, and involves officials from other sections as necessary. The SIG provides a forum where serious issues that affect individual schools are discussed, thereby facilitating in-depth exploration of the issues and careful decision-making about how to support the school to bring about improvement. The SIG engages directly with the representatives of Education and Training Boards, boards of management, trustees or patrons of schools, as appropriate, to activate the process whereby schools work towards improvement. The SIG frequently requests Action Plans for the implementation of specific recommendations and progress reports on their implementation from schools. A carefully planned inspection programme is also devised for schools in the SIG to determine progress and to ensure that the requisite improvements are made. A school leaves the SIG when these improvement are made.