

School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools

Inspectorate Guidelines for Schools



PROMOTING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce these *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*. I know that teachers must be at the heart of any effort to improve learning for students and these Guidelines are designed to support teachers, principals and staff as they collaborate to ensure better outcomes for the young people in their schools.

These Guidelines bring best national and international practice into Irish schools. Experience and research in Ireland and in many countries show us that some of the most beneficial changes in schools occur when the principal and teachers collaborate in a focussed way to improve how they teach and assess students' learning. By asking questions of themselves about how teaching takes place and how well students are learning, teachers can readily identify what needs to change within the school to get better outcomes for their students.

School self-evaluation is simply a structure to enable teachers, principals and the management of schools to have that focussed conversation about teaching and learning. School self-evaluation seeks to build the capacity of teachers and schools to improve – the approaches and tools in these *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines* are simply ways to support that capacity building in schools.

For many teachers and schools, school self-evaluation is not new. Teachers and boards of management have used the school development planning process over a number of years to identify what is working well and what might need to be improved in their schools. School self-evaluation builds on this solid foundation. What's different about school self-evaluation is the emphasis it places on using solid evidence to inform the discussions that teachers have about teaching and learning. As teachers discuss the work of the school in self-evaluation and ask "*How good is teaching in this school?*" they will also ask "*How do we know?*" Collecting the information to answer these questions will be an opportunity to use not only existing information in the school but also to seek the views of parents and students. When the self-evaluation conversation is really successful, school staffs will move on naturally to discuss "*What do we need to do now to improve?*" and they will work collaboratively to change their practice and improve the learning experience for students. This sort of collaboration is invigorating and professionally rewarding as teachers come to see how much it can support them in their work with students.

School self-evaluation also empowers schools to tell their own story. Each school's context and work are unique. School self-evaluation enables schools to affirm and celebrate what they are doing well, to decide on changes *they* would like to make based on the evidence they have gathered, and to report this to their school communities. In this way, school self-evaluation can bring schools and their communities closer together. It enables the school to share information about the standards of learning that students achieve in all aspects of their learning – academic, cultural, social and personal – in a meaningful way.

Introducing school self-evaluation to complement the external inspections that already take place is a major new innovation in the Irish school system. I am conscious that such change will take time to become fully established and that teachers, principals and others involved will need to be supported. These Guidelines are an important element of a range of supports developed by my Department's Inspectorate in collaboration with teachers, principals, parents, members of boards of management, patron and management organisations, teacher unions and other bodies such as the Equality Authority, the Ombudsman for Children and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network. I want to thank all involved in this collaboration and to wish all involved in using these Guidelines in schools every success.

Ruairí Quinn, TD
Minister for Education and Skills
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context

School self-evaluation (SSE) empowers a school community to affirm good practice, to identify areas that merit improvement and to decide on actions that should be taken to bring about improvements in those areas. It gives teachers and schools the opportunity to tell their own story. SSE enriches the learning and the teaching experience for the benefit of all concerned. SSE is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement.

Schools are already familiar with many elements of school self-evaluation through engagement in the school development planning process. The Inspectorate publication of the self-evaluation framework, *Looking at Our School: An aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools*, in 2003 has assisted school communities in reviewing and evaluating the work of their school.

The *Programme for Government, 2011* sets out specific targets in relation to self-evaluation and school improvement. Similarly, the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*, requires “...all schools to engage in robust self-evaluation”.

1.2 The purpose of these guidelines

These *Guidelines* have been prepared by the Inspectorate, with the assistance of schools and the education partners, to provide practical support to schools in undertaking school self-evaluation. This publication is intended to support schools as they evaluate **teaching and learning**. Over time the guidelines will be further developed to support schools as they evaluate other key dimensions of school provision. Guidelines focusing on three key **dimensions** of school provision will be developed as follows:

Dimension A: Teaching and learning

Dimension B: Management and leadership

Dimension C: Support for students

The focus of school self-evaluation in this publication is **Dimension A: Teaching and learning**.

These Guidelines offer a framework and structure for the evaluation of teaching and learning and will assist schools to:

- Gather the information needed to enable them to identify accurately what is working well in teaching and learning and where improvement is needed
- Report on their school self-evaluation processes
- Develop school improvement plans.

By reflecting on what teachers teach and how they teach it, and on what students learn and how they learn, school management and teachers will become aware that certain aspects of the education provided are effective and that improvement is needed in others.

The *Guidelines* provide practical suggestions as to how schools might make judgements about practice and about how well their students are doing. They include evaluation criteria to guide schools in making quality judgements about their work and sample school self-evaluation tools to assist in the gathering of evidence.

1.3 Who are the Guidelines for?

The *Guidelines* are:

- For **all** those who have responsibility for ensuring that our schools provide quality education for students
- For **trustees and patron bodies** who may wish to ensure that the school self-evaluation process reflects the school's ethos and includes suitable consultation with the entire school community
- For **boards of management, principals, deputy principals and teachers** to enable them to use appropriate information to affirm good practice and to have a clear focus on the specific areas that need to be targeted for improvement or development
- Intended to support, in a practical way, the inclusion of the voice of **students and parents** in school self-evaluation processes.

1.4 Using the Guidelines

The *Guidelines* are intended to help schools in the school self-evaluation process. Regardless of the stage a school is at in terms of school development planning and school review, the *Guidelines* can be used: to provide direction for reflection on teaching and learning practices; to inform professional dialogue; to affirm what is working well; and to decide on priorities for action. Each school will decide where best to start. The content and structure of the *Guidelines* are outlined in section 1.5.

1.5 The content and structure of the Guidelines

Chapter 2, *The school self-evaluation process*, highlights school self-evaluation as a process and illustrates a step-by-step approach to getting school self-evaluation started.

Chapter 3, *A school self-evaluation quality framework: teaching and learning*, presents a framework outlining themes and sub-themes to enable schools to evaluate teaching and learning in a systematic and coherent way.

Chapter 4, *Evaluation criteria and quality statements*, outlines a set of standards to assist schools in making judgements about the quality of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5, *Evaluation approaches and methods*, describes a range of evaluation approaches and methods that schools can use to gather the evidence necessary for school self-evaluation.

Chapter 6, *The school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan*, provides guidance to schools about reporting on their self-evaluation and a framework to assist in developing a school improvement plan.

Appendix, *Sample school self-evaluation tools*, offers a range of sample tools that schools may use for the SSE process.

Chapter 2

The school self-evaluation process

This chapter highlights school self-evaluation as a process and illustrates a step-by-step approach to getting the process started.

2.1 What is school self-evaluation?

School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review. During school self-evaluation the principal, deputy principal and teachers, under the direction of the board of management and the patron and in consultation with parents and students, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school. When engaging in school self-evaluation, schools reflect on their aims, consider criteria for success within the school's context and ethos, and determine appropriate methods for judging the quality of educational provision in the school. It is an evidence-based approach which involves gathering information from a range of sources and making judgements with a view to bringing about improvements in students' learning. SSE requires a school to address the following key questions with regard to an aspect or aspects of its work:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know? What evidence do we have?
- How can we find out more?
- What are our strengths?
- What are our areas for improvement? How can we improve?

The key principles of school self-evaluation are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 PRINCIPLES OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Collaborative, inclusive	Effective school self-evaluation involves principals, deputy principals, teachers, boards and patrons working together in a climate of trust and respect, in consultation with parents and students, to bring about school improvement.
Leadership	Effective school self-evaluation requires effective leadership.
Reflective	Effective school self-evaluation involves schools thinking critically about the aims and key priorities of the school and what needs to be done to bring about improvements in their students' learning.
Evidence based	Decisions taken during effective school self-evaluation are based on sound, reliable and specific information or evidence.
Flexible	Flexibility, creativity and a willingness to rethink, revise and redesign ways of doing things on the part of teachers, principals, deputy principals and school management are features of effective school self-evaluation.
Continual, ongoing	Each step of effective school self-evaluation is part of an ongoing cycle focused on improving the work of the school and the learning of the students. Evaluation findings inform school improvement plans and strategies for improvement, the impact and effect of which are in turn evaluated.
Improves teaching	Effective school self-evaluation is focused on making a positive, measurable and significant difference to the quality of teaching in the school.
Improves students' learning	Effective school self-evaluation is focused on making a positive, measurable and significant difference to the learning of the students and the work of the school.
Communication	Effective school self-evaluation provides the school with a mechanism to engage in open and transparent communication with the entire school community.

2.2 Whole-school evaluation and school self-evaluation

There is a clear link between external evaluation and school self evaluation. During whole-school evaluation (WSE), inspectors evaluate and report on the effectiveness of each school's self-evaluation processes. As schools engage in robust school self-evaluation processes that are informed by evidence-based judgements, the approach to external evaluation will change. External evaluation processes such as WSE will take increased account of the self-evaluation engaged in by schools.

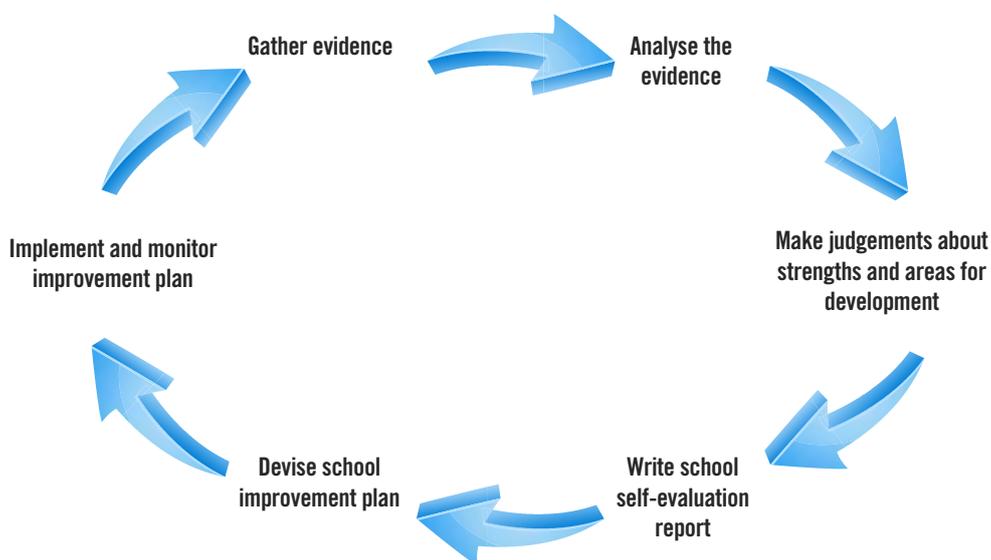
2.3 School self-evaluation and school development planning

School self-evaluation is grounded in the school development planning process. The school development planning process entails a cycle consisting of review, planning, implementation and evaluation. School self-evaluation reframes the school development planning cycle. It gives greater focus to gathering evidence, analysing evidence and judging quality. What distinguishes school self-evaluation from school development planning is the emphasis that school self-evaluation places on making **evidence-based** evaluative judgements and on the link between those evaluative judgements and the school's action plans for improvement. The actions for improvement are outlined in a school improvement plan which becomes part of the developmental section of the overall school plan.

2.4 The school self-evaluation process

School self-evaluation builds on the school development planning process. The framework below (Figure 2.1) highlights a six-step school self-evaluation process. The process is iterative in that it facilitates repeated cycles of analysis or a return to a previous stage of the cycle as required.

Figure 2.1: THE SIX-STEP SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS



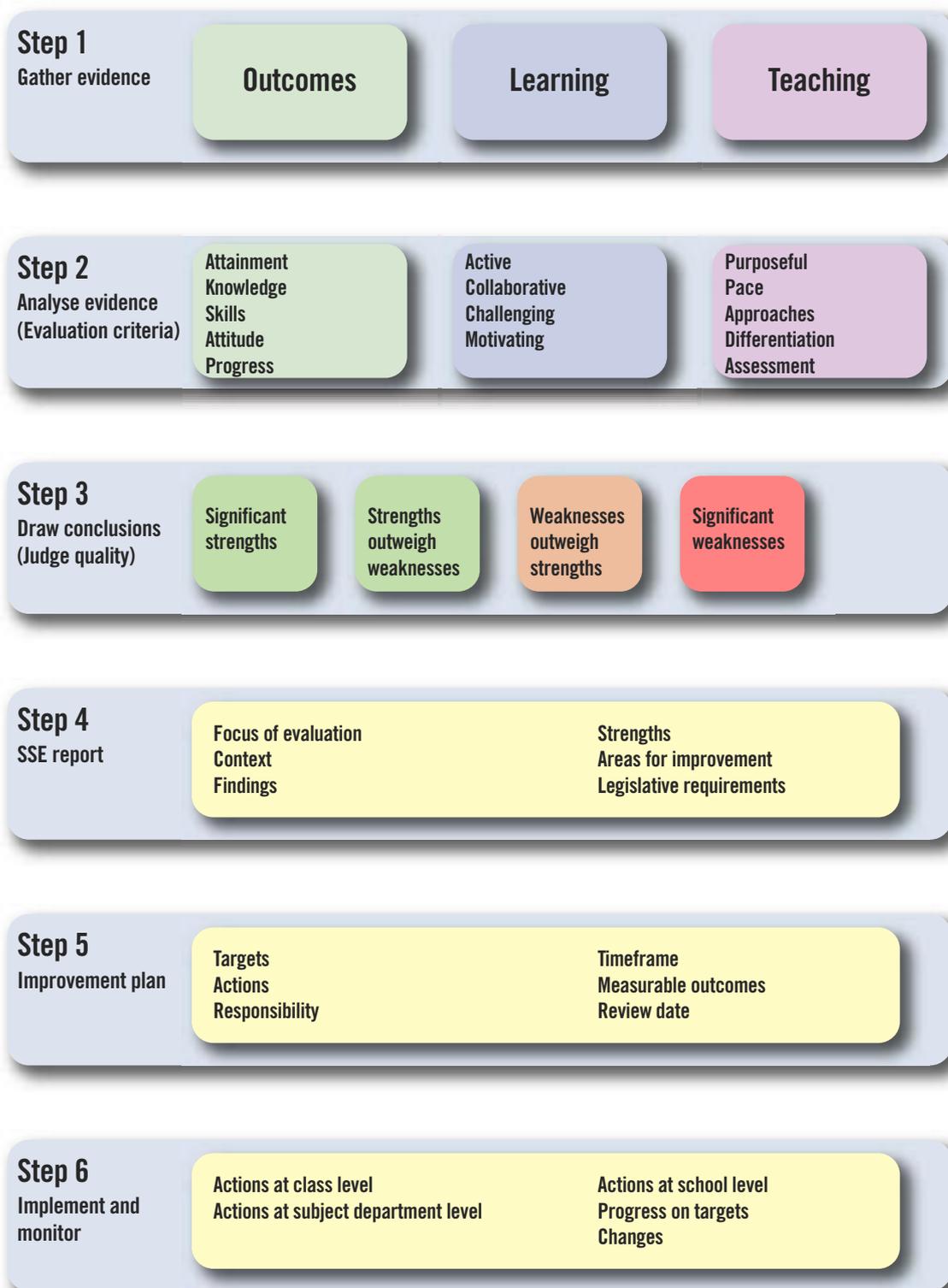
2.5 Key steps in the SSE process

The school self-evaluation process is best described as a series of six steps. Schools and teachers will already be very familiar with many of these steps from their experience of school development planning (SDP).

The first three steps outline the review element of the SDP process. These important steps ensure that conclusions about strengths and areas for improvement are based on evidence from a range of relevant sources. The next steps ensure that schools retain a record of the evaluation and describe the actions for improvement. The final step, implement and monitor, takes place over a three-year period.

The six-step process is outlined in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: THE SIX-STEP SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS



Step 1: Gathering evidence

Step 1 is the gathering evidence phase. Typically, information should be gathered from a number of sources. The type of information or evidence that needs to be gathered will depend on the focus of the school's evaluation. It may include both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data relates to data that can be expressed numerically or statistically and qualitative data relates to data arising from people's views or opinions. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered from a range of sources including teachers, students, parents, management, classrooms and other learning settings in the school.

It is important to guard against gathering too much information.

Schools already gather data for a variety of purposes and much of this will prove beneficial in the SSE process. Teachers' views and their records (assessment, uptake at foundation, ordinary and higher level in specific subjects and attainment in state examinations) are useful examples of evidence. It is also important to ensure that the views of others form part of the evidence base. The following list will help schools to decide which sources of evidence are most valuable to the aspects of practice being evaluated.

Possible sources of information for evaluating teaching and learning:

- Assessment records and data – formative and summative
- Learner and parent surveys (student/parent voice)
- Focus group discussion (teachers, board, students, parents)
- Interviews (teachers, board, students, parents)
- Individual teacher reflection
- Subject department reflection
- Whole-school reflection
- Peer dialogue/sharing experience/collaborative professional review
- Team planning and team teaching.

In the early stages of SSE, schools may decide to analyse assessment data and records of student progress as a starting point. They should also gather information from students and parents to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge to make accurate judgements. Professional reflection and dialogue between teachers, focusing on specific aspects of teaching and learning, will be very important when gathering evidence. As collaborative practices are further developed among the teaching staff, team teaching and professional collaborative review will become an effective means of gathering evidence.

Step 2: Analyse your evidence

When evidence has been gathered, schools will need to decide how to record and analyse the information. Step 2 involves analysing the information gathered and, in light of the school's context, benchmarking this against standards for the aspect(s) of practice being evaluated. **Evaluation criteria** are available in Chapter 4 for this purpose.

Example

When a school evaluates the quality of its provision in the area of literacy, student outcomes are an obvious place to start. Teachers should:

- Check knowledge and skills
 - Oral (listening and speaking)
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Application of knowledge and skills
- Check attainment levels
 - Value added (improvement or maintenance of standards)
 - Specific criteria (checklists)
 - National norms (standardised tests, examination results)
 - In-school trends
- Check student disposition
 - Motivation
 - Attitudes
 - Engagement in learning
- Use evaluation criteria and literacy checklist to help identify strengths and areas for development.

Step 3: Draw conclusions

Step 3 is about drawing conclusions based on the analysed data. Schools should determine, affirm and celebrate the strengths they identify in the aspects of practice being evaluated. They should also acknowledge the areas that should be prioritised for improvement. In order to be as objective as possible they should judge the quality using the **quality statements** in chapter 4 of the *Guidelines* as a set of standards, taking due cognisance of the school context. The quality statements illustrate the highest level of practice. Schools may have considerable strengths without reaching this level.

Example

Judging attainment levels, progress or outcomes of learning for students can require comparisons such as the following to be made:

- What progress has been made in further developing students' interpersonal skills during their participation in the Transition Year programme?
- How do our students' achievements generally compare with their achievements since enrolling in the school?
- How does the achievement of this year's cohort of students compare with the achievement of students over the last three to five years?
- How do our students' achievements in literacy compare with their achievements last year and when they enrolled in the school?
- How do our students' achievements in numeracy compare with their achievements last year and when they enrolled in the school?
- How does the achievement of this year's cohort of students in the state examinations compare with the achievement of students in this school over the last five years?
- How do our students' achievements in the state examinations compare with national norms in the context of our school?

Step 4: Complete the self-evaluation report

Step 4 ensures that schools keep a record of their self-evaluation and particularly of the findings. The school self-evaluation report will provide a basis for discussion and reflection amongst teachers, management and others in relation to the work of the school. It may be used by boards of management as an important information source in reporting to parents on the work of the school. It will provide a basis upon which school improvement targets can be developed and a school improvement plan agreed.

The school self-evaluation report should be no more than 2/3 pages. It should record:

- Aspects of practice chosen for self-evaluation
- A brief account of school context
- The findings
- Progression on actions for previously identified targets
- A summary of strengths (affirm and celebrate)
- A summary of areas requiring improvement
- Legislative and regulatory requirements to be addressed.

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.

Step 5: Develop a school improvement plan

School self-evaluation should result in action. The setting of specific targets is the starting point of action for improvement. Having formed a judgement based on the relevant information or evidence, a school will be in a position to decide on specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets to bring about improvement. This is an important step in determining the actions that need to be taken. In order to achieve targets for improvement, a school will need to devise a school improvement plan outlining the actions for improvement.

In Step 5, schools will devise a school improvement plan outlining the actions to be implemented over a three-year period. A template for this purpose is provided in Chapter 6.

The plan will contain:

- A summary of strengths and areas for improvement
- Targets for improvement with a focus on learner outcomes
- Actions required to achieve targets
- Reference to those who are responsible for undertaking actions
- A statement of how schools will check if targets have been achieved
- A timeframe for achievement of targets.

The school improvement plan should be no more than one to two pages long. The improvement plan is primarily for internal use. A **short summary** of the improvement plan should be provided to the whole school community.

Each school improvement plan becomes part of the developmental section of the whole-school plan.

Step 6: Implement and monitor

Step 6, the final step, is vital if the SSE process is to bring about improvement. It is only when the actions in the improvement plan are implemented that the work of the school can improve. All relevant school personnel should be aware of the actions to be implemented at individual teacher, class, subject department or whole-school level. These actions should become part of the normal teaching and learning process.

Actions must be monitored. Schools will need to decide:

- How monitoring will occur
- Who will be responsible for monitoring
- How progress will be determined and reported
- When and to whom progress will be reported (for example at staff meetings, planning meetings, board meetings)
- If targets and actions are realistic or need to be changed.

The role of the principal, deputy principal and teachers in the ongoing and systematic monitoring of the implementation of the plan is important. In this regard, the gathering and use of information at specified intervals to check on whether or not the required improvements are being made is necessary. The implementation of the school improvement plan ultimately leads to a new cycle of school self-evaluation.

Chapter 3

**A school self-evaluation quality framework:
teaching and learning**

This chapter presents a school self-evaluation quality framework for teaching and learning. The framework outlines themes and sub-themes to enable schools to evaluate teaching and learning in a systematic and coherent way.

3.1 Teaching and learning evaluation themes

School self-evaluation is about maintaining high standards and improving the learning experiences and educational outcomes for the students in our schools. It is important that in developing their school self-evaluation processes, schools focus in the first instance on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings in the school. It is also important for a school to adopt a planned approach to self-evaluation in order to obtain relevant and reliable information on an ongoing basis that can be used to inform school improvement targets. Clarity about what is to be evaluated, how it is to be evaluated, and when and by whom it is to be evaluated is required. Schools should also be aware of how the aspect of practice they are evaluating fits within a broad teaching and learning framework.

To assist schools in this regard, a quality framework for evaluating teaching and learning is provided. According to the framework, teaching and learning are viewed from the following three distinct, although nonetheless interrelated and sometimes overlapping, **themes**:

- 1 The quality of learner outcomes
- 2 The quality of students' learning experiences
- 3 The quality of teachers' practice

Figure 3.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING THEMES



3.2 Teaching and learning evaluation sub-themes

Under each of the themes, a number of important evaluation **sub-themes** are identified.

1 The quality of learner outcomes

- **Attainment of subject or programme objectives** relates to students' learning and achievements and their progress in programme and subject-specific learning, and in literacy and numeracy.

2 The quality of students' learning experiences

- **Learning environment** relates to the quality of the physical setting in which teaching and learning takes place
- **Students' engagement in learning** relates to students' learning experiences in terms of the range and suitability of the curriculum approaches the students experience in the course of their learning
- **Learning to learn** relates to how students' learning skills are developed and how schools equip students with the tools and skills needed for learning now and into the future.

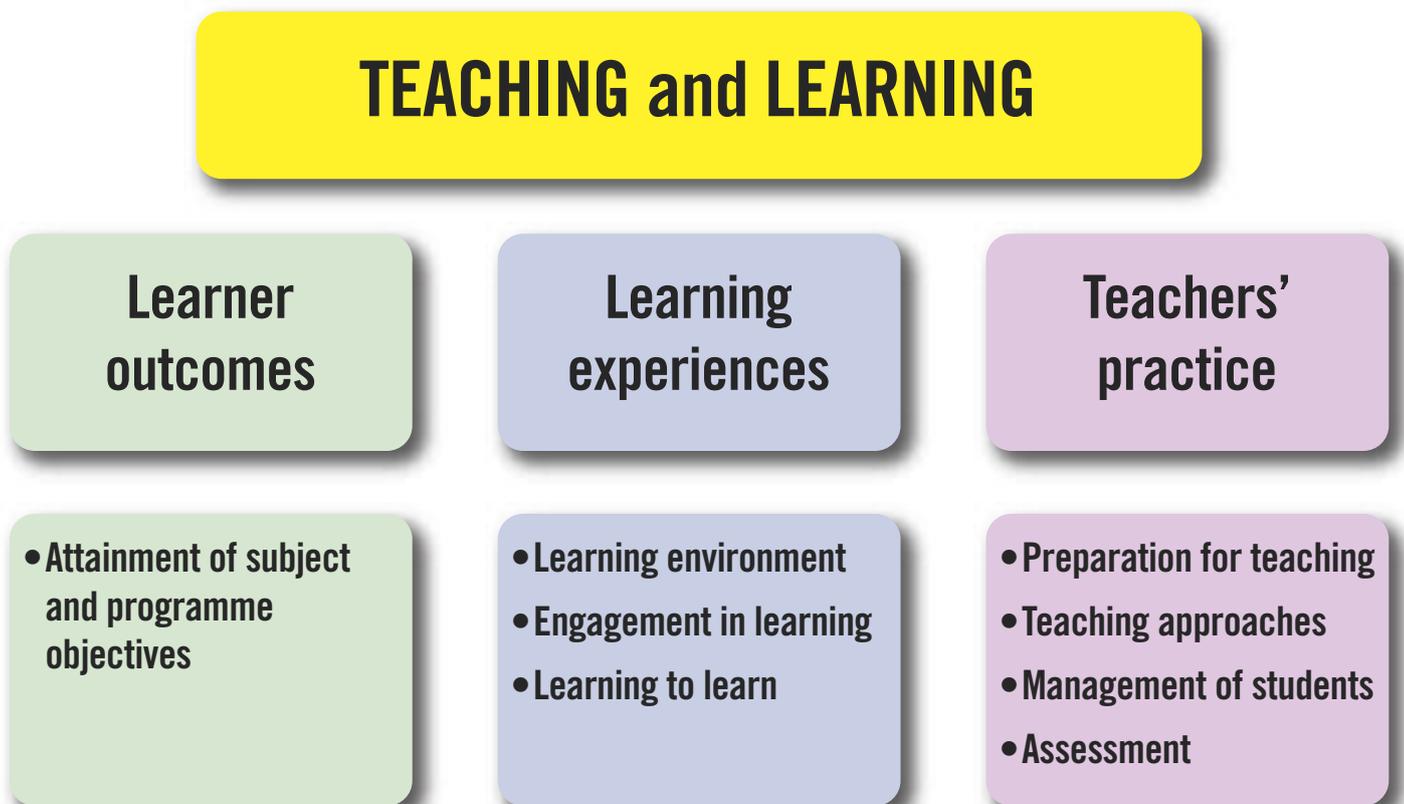
3 The quality of teachers' practice

- **Preparation for teaching** relates to how prepared teachers are for teaching the subjects and programmes they teach
- **Teaching approaches** relates to the effectiveness of the teaching approaches used in classrooms and in other learning settings in the school
- **Management of students** relates to the nature of teacher-student interactions and how learners are managed and organised during learning activities
- **Assessment** relates to the effectiveness of the school's assessment policy and practices in terms of how they contribute to assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL).

3.3 The teaching and learning quality framework

The evaluation themes and sub-themes to which they relate are set out in the **Teaching and Learning Quality Framework** in Figure 3.2. The framework highlights the links between learner outcomes and the teaching and learning processes that underpin the achievement of learning outcomes.

Figure 3.2 THE TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY FRAMEWORK



3.4 Getting started: using the teaching and learning framework

While schools have different contexts and will be at different stages of development, there are some aspects of practice that each school should consider as it starts to engage with the school self-evaluation process. By reflecting on the teaching and learning themes - learner outcomes, learning experiences and teachers' practice - schools will be able to quickly gauge the aspects of practice that are working well and those they might prioritise for improvement.

As school self-evaluation is a collaborative process, it is important that the focus of SSE each year is identified through a process of consultation. Answering the question “how well are we doing?” is a good starting point for school self-evaluation. At the beginning of each year, teachers and management will undertake a quick reflection on the three evaluation themes, using professional knowledge and evidence already available in the school, such as teachers’ records of assessment, subject uptake levels and state examination results. This will enable them to highlight the aspects of their practice that are working well and to identify aspects which require more detailed investigation.

An overview of good practice in the three themes (Figure 3.3) may be useful for general reflection on teaching and learning.

Figure 3.3 EVALUATION THEMES: AN OVERVIEW OF GOOD PRACTICE

Learner outcomes	Learning experiences	Teachers’ practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students’ overall attainment, with regard to knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects and programmes, has improved significantly in line with targets; and expected outcomes have been achieved • Students enjoy learning and have developed appropriate attitudes and dispositions • Students can meet the literacy and numeracy challenges of the subject • Students at risk of underachieving have made good progress • Students’ uptake levels and performance in state examinations compare favourably with national norms, within the school context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning settings are safe, well maintained, visually stimulating and supportive of literacy and numeracy • Students have access to appropriate materials, including ICT, to support learning • Students are enabled to engage actively in a range of suitably challenging, relevant and interesting learning opportunities • Students are given support as needed • Students are equipped with tools and skills for learning now and in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers prepare thoroughly for lessons; expected learning outcomes including literacy and numeracy development are clearly stated; and appropriate resources are in place • Expected learning outcomes are clearly communicated; lessons are suitably paced to enable progression in development of knowledge and skills • Teaching is focused, stimulating and relevant. All aspects of the subject, including subject-specific language, are thoroughly taught • All students are respected; high but realistic expectations are communicated; and efforts and achievements are affirmed • A range of assessment methods is used effectively to assess progress.

Following identification and agreement about the aspects of practice to be evaluated, schools should select the themes and sub-themes for school self-evaluation based on the identification and agreement of the areas of practices that require more investigation. It is suggested that schools start by looking at outcomes for students. The evaluation criteria for students' learning outcomes in Chapter 4 will serve as a useful benchmark in assisting schools to decide on the effectiveness of their practice. This will lead teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and of the learning experiences they provide for students. It will affirm good practice and inform the development of relevant and focused targets for improvement which will be a key part of a school's improvement plan.

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, requires schools to engage in robust self-evaluation from 2012-2013 and to put in place a three-year improvement plan which includes specific targets for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy. For this reason post-primary schools are asked to select literacy, numeracy and one other aspect of teaching and learning as the focus of SSE over the first four-year cycle. Schools might reflect on and analyse assessment data and standardised test results but will also seek the views of students and parents about attitudes to aspects of literacy or numeracy.

Schools will need to identify who will be responsible for the school self-evaluation process. Some elements of the process will take place within classrooms as part of the teaching and learning process. However, schools will need to decide how the overall process will be coordinated and how evidence will be gathered and analysed. They will also need to agree who will take responsibility for writing a concise SSE report, for developing a school improvement plan and for implementing the actions for improvement.

Chapter 4

Evaluation criteria and quality statements

When schools have gathered evidence and analysed the relevant information, they will wish to draw conclusions about their practice. To ensure that the judgements they are making are sound, evaluation criteria and quality statements are provided as benchmarks or standards.

4.1 Evaluation criteria

In subsequent pages, sample evaluation criteria related to each evaluation theme and sub-theme are provided to help schools develop their self-evaluation processes. The criteria delineate what quality means in specific aspects of each of the sub-themes and will help to guide schools in making judgements about students' achievement or aspects of teaching and learning. In addition the criteria provide management, teachers and other education partners with real clarity about what is important and a language for discussing what is working well and what needs to be improved. It is suggested that schools use the quality framework with themes, sub-themes and related criteria to organise their evaluation activities. This will allow schools to undertake an in-depth enquiry into teaching and learning, literacy and numeracy in a systematic and coherent way.

Schools will not focus on all evaluation sub-themes when engaging in self-evaluation. Rather they should:

- Select an aspect of practice on which to focus, for example literacy or numeracy or one of the sub-themes
- Examine student outcomes relevant to that area
- Reflect on the teaching and the learning experiences that led to the outcomes.

4.2 Quality statements

It is important, when engaging in self-evaluation, that schools arrive at sound and realistic evaluative judgements about the quality of the education they provide. Having gathered all the necessary evidence, the school will need to draw conclusions about the quality of learner outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning practices so that areas for improvement can be identified. An important requirement for arriving at sound and realistic evaluative judgements is the consistent use of valid benchmarks against which to judge quality.

To assist schools in this regard, exemplar quality statements for each evaluation sub-theme are presented alongside the evaluation criteria. The quality statements are exemplars which describe schools with significant strengths in the context of each sub-theme. Schools can use these statements as a benchmark against which to judge their own performance and to determine their strengths and if there are aspects of their work that need to be improved or developed.

The quality statements describe schools that have significant strengths. While it is desirable that schools aspire to this level, many schools will have a range of strengths and will have attained an acceptable standard without reaching the highest level.

The evidence-based findings of schools in relation to their strengths and the areas in which improvements are required will inform both the school self-evaluation report and the school improvement plan.

4.3 Using evaluation criteria and quality statements

The evaluation criteria are presented in bullet point form to enable schools to check what is important and what quality means in each of the sub-themes. The quality statements are presented in narrative form and describe a school that has reached a high standard in each sub-theme. They are presented side-by-side so that schools can use either or both when examining their own practice and making judgements about the quality of their performance.

The evaluation criteria and the quality statements will assist schools in making judgements. Based on the information or evidence gathered, schools should indicate, in the context of each evaluation sub-theme, whether:

- There are significant strengths
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- There are significant weaknesses.

4.4 Evaluation criteria and quality statements

Teaching and learning	
THEME 1	Learner outcomes
SUB-THEME 1.1	Attainment of subject and programme objectives
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Knowledge, understanding and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject or programme • The students' subject-specific skills are developed in accordance with the learning outcomes set out in the relevant syllabus or course descriptor and subject plan. These include where relevant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Skills for self-fulfilment and promotion of self-confidence to enable students to participate as active and responsible adults ○ Physical skills and interpersonal skills ○ Skills for the development of mental and emotional health and wellbeing ○ Skills in critical thinking, problem solving, communicating, data retrieval and analysis, initiative and enterprise ○ Vocational and technological skills ○ Scientific literacy skills • The students use their skills and knowledge competently
Attitude and dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students have developed the appropriate attitudes set out in the subject or programme for the year group • Students enjoy their learning of the subject and are motivated to learn
Literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In all subjects and programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students can meet the literacy and numeracy demands ○ Students competently and confidently use and apply the literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary to develop their learning ○ The overall attainment of the students with regard to each of the following literacy skills is improving or remains at a high standard: oral language, reading, writing, critical appreciation of digital and broadcast media ○ The overall competence of the students with regard to each of the following numeracy skills is improving or remains at a high standard: knowledge, understanding and application of mathematical concepts; problem-solving; communicating; and data acquisition and analysis
Attainment trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall attainment of the students with regard to the subject and programme is improving or remains at a high standard • Students, including those at risk of underachieving are attaining well and are making very good progress from their prior levels of achievement • High expectations are set for students' achievement in the state examinations • Performance in state examinations compares favourably with national norms, taking due cognisance of school context
School improvement plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning targets set out in the school improvement plan have been achieved.

¹ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) defines scientific literacy as the capacity to use scientific knowledge, to identify questions, and to draw evidence-based conclusions in order to understand and help make decisions about the natural world and the changes made to it through human activity. (Education at a Glance, OECD, Paris, 2002)

² Note that learning targets must be SMART

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENT ON ATTAINMENT OF SUBJECT AND PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

A school with significant strengths

The overall attainment of the students with regard to progress in learning and achievement of the expected learning outcomes of each subject and programme over the past year is in line with the targets set out in the school improvement plan and subject and programme plans. Subject knowledge, understanding and skills have significantly improved in line with the targets set. Students at risk of underachieving are attaining well and have made very good progress.

The students have developed appropriate attitudes to the subject or programme consistent with their year group. Students have developed skills appropriate to the subject or programme and to their age and ability. These include physical skills, interpersonal skills, and the enhancement of their mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Skills in critical thinking, problem solving, communicating, data retrieval and analysis, initiative and enterprise are also developed. Students' vocational and technological skills are also enhanced.

Students can meet the literacy and numeracy challenges of each subject and programme. Students competently and confidently use and apply the literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary to develop their learning. The overall attainment of the students with regard to all aspects of literacy is improving or remains at a high standard. The overall competence of the students with regard to numeracy is improving or remains at a high standard.

The students use their subject-specific skills and knowledge competently and confidently. The overall attainments of the students in the subject are improving or remaining at a high standard. Students' performance in state examinations compares favourably with national norms, taking due cognisance of school context.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning	
THEME 2	Students' learning experiences
SUB-THEME 2.1	Learning environment
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Organisation of learning areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All classrooms and learning areas are organised in a manner that supports learning. They are appropriately laid out for lessons, well resourced, and orderly • Access to appropriate learning settings is available to all students • Classroom learning environments provide for the needs of all students
Child protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers are aware of and follow the National Child Protection Guidelines
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classrooms are properly heated, properly ventilated, clean, well maintained • Due attention is given to student safety during lessons and in the organisation, layout and furnishing of classrooms and other learning areas • Students are properly supervised at all times
Resources (including ICT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have access to necessary and relevant equipment and materials during lessons • Students have access to appropriate library resources • ICT is available in the classroom and other learning settings • Individual students and groups of students have access to ICT to support their learning and to enable them to be active learners
Displays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school and classroom environments support, encourage and celebrate students' learning and achievements (concrete and visual materials, centres of interest, displays of students' work) • High-quality displays promoting the development of subject-specific literacy and numeracy are evident.

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENT ON LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A school with significant strengths

A safe, stimulating learning environment is provided for the students in this school. The teachers are aware of and follow the Child Protection Guidelines. Classrooms and other learning settings in the school are well maintained and due attention is given to student safety. All students have access to appropriate learning settings and these learning environments provide for the needs of all students.

Students have access to necessary and appropriate equipment and materials during lessons. ICT is available in the classroom and other settings; individual students and groups of students have access to ICT to support their learning and to enable them to be active learners during lessons and outside of lessons. A visually-stimulating, print-rich environment with high-quality displays of subject-related material and students' work is evident in classrooms and corridors. The learning environment supports the literacy and numeracy demands of the subject. The school and classroom environments support, encourage and celebrate students' learning and achievements.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning	
THEME 2	Students' learning experiences
SUB-THEME 2.2	Students' engagement in learning
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Active Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students are enabled to engage actively in their learning when appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Students work purposefully during lessons o Students are interested in the lesson content o All students participate in the lesson o There is a balance between teacher input and student participation o Opportunities are provided for students to report on and explain their learning o Students reflect on the activity and thus consolidate the learning that has taken place
Collaborative and independent learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are given purposeful and frequent opportunities to engage in collaborative learning • Students are given purposeful and frequent opportunities to engage in independent learning
Progressive skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students are enabled to develop appropriate subject-specific skills in a progressive and sequential way
Other learning experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students engage in relevant co-curricular activities (for example, fieldtrips, essay competitions, science and technology exhibitions) • Students are provided with a wide range of non-classroom based activities
Challenge and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students are adequately challenged in their learning • The students are adequately supported in their learning
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students enjoy their learning and are motivated to learn
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students achieve the expected learning outcomes of lessons
Equality of opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students are encouraged equally to participate in lessons.

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENT ON STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

A school with significant strengths

Students are enabled to engage actively in their learning in all lessons and the level of student interest and student participation is high. They are given purposeful and frequent opportunities to engage in independent learning, collaborative and co-operative learning, discussion and fieldwork. The subject matter in lessons is relevant to students' lives. They are enabled to learn skills within each subject area in a progressive way. They are suitably challenged in the activities organised for them in the classrooms and other learning settings in the school. They are given additional support as needed. Their learning is enriched by a range of co-curricular and out-of-classroom learning experiences. Students achieve the expected learning outcomes of lessons.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning

THEME 2

Students' learning experiences

SUB-THEME 2.3

Learning to learn

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Assessment for learning

- The students are involved in monitoring their own progress in learning
- The students are taught to reflect constructively on their work

Skills

- Teachers independently and collaboratively prepare lessons that develop learners' skills and dispositions to learning
- In junior cycle the students are taught and supported to develop the following key skills:
 - o Managing myself
 - o Wellbeing
 - o Communicating
 - o Being creative
 - o Working with others
 - o Managing information and thinking
- In senior cycle the students are taught and supported to develop the following key skills:⁴
 - o Information processing
 - o Being personally effective
 - o Communicating
 - o Critical and creative thinking
 - o Working with others

Personal organisation

- The students are enabled to:
 - o Reflect on their own learning styles and approaches to learning
 - o Plan
 - o Study
 - o Organise homework
 - o Revise
 - o Summarise
 - o Present their work to others
 - o Answer questions on their work
 - o Organise to work in teams

ICT skills in learning³

- The students are taught across a range of subjects and programmes, including literacy and numeracy, to use ICT to:
 - o Present and illustrate their work
 - o Access, assess and retrieve information (research)
 - o Organise and produce information
 - o Express ideas
 - o Develop, support and extend their learning.

³ ICT Framework: A Structured Approach to ICT in Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2007). Available at <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/ict%20revised%20framework.pdf>

⁴ http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Key_Skills_Framework/Key_Skills_Framework.html

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENTS ON LEARNING TO LEARN

A school with significant strengths

The school is equipping students effectively with the tools and skills they need for learning now and in the future. The students are aware of their individual strengths as learners. They are helped to reflect on their work and are purposefully involved in monitoring their own progress in learning.

The teachers focus effectively on developing the students' key skills.⁵ The students are guided systematically in developing the necessary skills to organise homework, study, summarise, revise, present their work to others and answer questions on their work. They are taught how to reflect on their own learning styles and approaches to learning. They are enabled to develop team skills through purposeful collaborative learning tasks across a range of subjects and programmes.

The students are provided with frequent, well-guided access to ICT and are enabled to use it to present and illustrate their work, access, assess and retrieve information (research), organise and produce information, express ideas and develop, support and extend their learning.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

⁵ In junior cycle students are taught the following key skills: managing myself, wellbeing, communicating, being creative, working with others and managing information and thinking. In senior cycle the students are taught the following key skills: information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working with others

Teaching and learning	
THEME 3	Teachers' practice
SUB-THEME 3.1	Preparation for teaching
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected learning outcomes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Clear, relevant and shared with students o Curriculum and syllabus based o Differentiated as necessary to cater for the learning needs and abilities of all students
Written plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearly collaborative subject plans are prepared and available • Written plans clearly indicate the expected learning outcomes and the teaching approaches, resources and activities that will facilitate the achievement of the expected learning outcomes
Literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject-specific plans reflect the school's literacy and numeracy strategy and action plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Monitoring of the implementation of subject-specific literacy and numeracy action plans is undertaken as part of the subject department's developmental planning process
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary and relevant resources, materials and equipment are identified and sourced in advance of lessons
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers plan for how they are going to assess the students' learning and take account of assessment for learning and assessment of learning approaches • The teachers' plans for assessment take cognisance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Programme statements, syllabus requirements and NCCA guidelines o Requirements for the state examinations o The whole-school assessment policy o The literacy and numeracy demands of their subjects o The requirements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.⁶

⁶ Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENT ON PREPARATION FOR TEACHING

A school with significant strengths

Teachers are thoroughly prepared for progressing student learning in each subject and programme. Subject and programme plans are collaboratively developed. These plans are used to guide teaching and learning. Expected learning outcomes are clear and relevant and are set out in the teachers' plans. Expected learning outcomes are differentiated where necessary to cater for the learning needs and abilities of all students.

Subject plans are informed by the whole-school literacy and numeracy strategy. Development of literacy and numeracy is appropriately integrated into subject plans and individual lesson planning. There is evidence that where necessary, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is synchronised with that of the English and mathematics departments.

Learning activities are carefully planned in line with subject and programme syllabuses and guidelines. Necessary resources are identified in advance of lessons and are available for students and teachers during the lessons. Teachers plan effectively for how they are going to assess the students' learning, taking due account of subject syllabuses, the NCCA guidelines and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning

THEME 3

Teachers' practice

SUB-THEME 3.2

Teaching approaches

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Learning outcomes

- Lessons are guided by syllabus-linked learning outcomes that are shared with the students
- Expected learning outcomes are achieved during lessons

Focus of learning

- Attention is given to the consolidation of student learning during and at the end of the lesson
- Attention is given within each subject and programme
 - o to the systematic development and application of knowledge and skills, including the students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills
 - o to the development of positive dispositions and attitudes towards learning

Approaches

- Teaching approaches support students in engaging with the literacy and numeracy demands of the subject
- Subject-appropriate teaching and learning methodologies with a focus on active learning are used
- Lessons are well structured (introduction, development, conclusion-review)
- A range of subject-appropriate approaches is used including
 - o Guided discussion
 - o Collaborative and co-operative learning
 - o Investigative approaches to learning
 - o Higher-order thinking and problem solving
 - o Encouragement of the student's personal and creative response to the subject
 - o Developmentally appropriate reference to requirements for state examinations
- Opportunities for collaborative and independent work are provided
- Students' prior learning, interests and experiences are taken into account in lesson organisation and content
- A broad range of activities is provided to enhance the holistic development of the student
- Appropriate links to other subjects are established and exploited with particular reference to cross-curricular opportunities to support students' literacy and numeracy skills

Differentiation⁷

- Teachers vary content, activities, methodology and resources and take into account the range of interests, needs and experience of the students
- Clear lower-order and higher-order questions are posed and these stimulate student response
- Questions are equitably distributed among the students
- There is effective differentiation to cater for the range of students' abilities

Resources

- Students are enabled to use relevant and necessary resources (including ICT) to support their learning

Assessment

- Assessment for learning is embedded in classroom practice (sharing learning intention with students, establishing assessment criteria, feedback)
- Assessment outcomes are systematically analysed and used to inform subsequent learning experiences for students.

⁷ "Differentiation is a process that allows for variation in, for example, pace, amount, content, level and method of curriculum presentation to ensure that learning experiences are appropriate for all students." – NCCA Draft Guidelines, 2002

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENTS ON TEACHING APPROACHES

A school with significant strengths

Teaching is focused, stimulating and relevant to the students' learning needs. Lessons are guided by appropriate syllabus-linked learning outcomes that are shared with the students and linked to the students' previous learning. Learning outcomes are achieved during lessons. Effective subject-specific teaching approaches are used. Opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy skills are well used. Subject-specific language is thoroughly taught. Lessons are well developed in a way that allows for progression of the students' skills, knowledge and attitudes

All aspects of the subject are thoroughly taught with progression apparent in the students' learning as they move from one year to the next. A broad range of activities is provided to enhance the holistic development of the student.

Very good use is made of resources (including ICT) to support students in their learning, to challenge them and to develop their subject-specific skills, including relevant literacy and numeracy skills. The needs and abilities of all students are catered for in the course of lessons through effective differentiation of provision. Clear lower-order and higher-order questions are posed. Attention is given to the consolidation of the students' learning.

Assessment strategies include both assessment for learning and assessment of learning. Assessment for learning is a key feature of classroom practice. Assessment outcomes are recorded efficiently and are used to inform subsequent lessons and the school improvement plan.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning	
THEME 3	Teachers' practice
SUB-THEME 3.3	Management of students
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive code of behaviour including an anti-bullying policy is implemented in a fair and consistent way • The school's code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy comply with the Equal Status Acts 2000–2011 • Parents are made aware of and fully support the implementation of the code of behaviour (e-copy, hard copy)
Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-student, student-student and student-teacher interactions are respectful • Students' efforts and their achievements are affirmed
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have high and realistic expectations of students in relation to their behaviour and their learning
Organisation of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is order and structure in the way activities are organised • Opportunities are provided for active learning followed by reflection and discussion, independent learning and collaborative learning • Active learning activities are complemented by co-curricular and non-classroom based activities • Students know and can apply lesson routines • Activities are organised in a manner which supports the development of students' listening and speaking skills.
Student voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' contributions and questions are encouraged and welcomed in the classroom • Due account is taken of students' views and opinions in accordance with their age and maturity
Equal opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is respect for all students regardless of their backgrounds, abilities and aptitudes • Differences across the equality grounds are understood, acknowledged and valued • Equal learning opportunities are provided for boys and girls • Students with special education needs are treated in an inclusive and equitable way • Students from minority groups are treated in an inclusive and equitable way

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENTS ON MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS

A school with significant strengths

The management of students during learning and routine activities is effective. A positive code of behaviour, including an anti-bullying policy, which complies with the requirements of the Equal Status Acts (2000-2011) is implemented in a fair and consistent way. Teacher-student, student-student and student-teacher interactions are respectful. The students' efforts and achievements are affirmed. Effective active learning tasks take place in lessons and the learning that has taken place during the activities is consolidated through reflection and discussion. These provide stimulating and enjoyable active learning experiences in classrooms and other settings, which are complemented by relevant co-curricular and non-classroom based activities. The teachers have high but realistic expectations of the students and they communicate these to them.

Students are enabled to work collaboratively during tasks in a range of subjects and programmes. They are also provided with opportunities to further their independent learning skills. Students have been explicitly taught strategies to organise their learning activities which will enable them to work as a team. Students' contributions and questions are welcomed in the classroom. Due account is taken of students' views and opinions in accordance with their age and maturity.

The school is inclusive and treats all students equitably and fairly. There is respect for all students regardless of their background. Differences across the equality grounds are understood, acknowledged and valued by all staff. Equal learning opportunities are provided for boys and girls. Students with special education needs and students from minority groups are treated in an inclusive and equitable way.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

Teaching and learning	
THEME 3	Teachers' practice
EVALUATION SUB-THEME 3.4	Assessment
EVALUATION CRITERIA	

Whole-school assessment policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has a written policy on assessing and reporting on students' progress • The assessment policy takes account of the requirements of each subject syllabus, NCCA guidelines and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
Subject-specific assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject plans include an outline of the practices and procedures involved in the assessment of written and non-written skills, knowledge and understanding • Subject plans include analyses of students' performances in state examinations and this analysis informs teaching and learning
Assessment in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of assessment approaches including assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL) is used to evaluate students' understanding and progress and achievement of expected learning outcomes in each subject area • Assessment modes address state examination requirements when appropriate (for example assessment of oral skills in Irish and modern languages, and practical skills in practical subjects). • Students are involved in the assessment of their work and progress through self-assessment and/or peer assessment • Students' work, including non-written and written work, is regularly monitored and corrected • Students are provided with constructive feedback on their learning • Teaching and learning are amended in the light of feedback • Teachers check students' understanding during and at the end of lessons • Standardised tests (when available) are used as appropriate
Assessment records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gathering of information on students' learning is timely and happens at regular intervals • Teachers' and school assessment records are useful and easy to interpret
Communication of progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful information regarding student progress is effectively communicated to parents at suitable intervals • Students are provided with meaningful feedback on their work to improve their learning • Information regarding student progress is shared with relevant staff members as necessary
Analysis and use of assessment information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment information is analysed and used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Inform teachers' setting of learning targets and learning activities for individuals, groups, the whole class o Inform the school improvement plan and to revise and update whole-school improvement targets.

Teaching and learning

QUALITY STATEMENT ON ASSESSMENT

A school with significant strengths

The quality of assessment is effective in terms of planning, the implementation of assessment approaches and the use and reporting of assessment information. The school has a written policy on assessment that takes due account of syllabus and NCCA guidelines on assessment. The policy provides practical guidance in relation to what should be assessed, how frequently and by what means it should be assessed. The assessment policy also provides guidance on how subject-specific assessment should take cognisance of and help develop the students' literacy and numeracy competencies. It makes provision for the assessment of knowledge and skills.

Assessment for learning⁸ is embedded in everyday classroom practice. Subject-specific assessment modes are outlined in subject plans. A range of assessment methods is used effectively to assess the students' progress. Assessment modes include state examination requirements (oral competency in the case of languages and practical skills in the case of practical subjects) when appropriate. Students' work is regularly and carefully monitored, students are provided with helpful feedback and they amend their work in the light of feedback.

Assessment information is analysed and used to inform the teachers' setting of learning targets for individuals, groups and classes. Whole-school analysis of the results in the state examinations is undertaken and the results of this analysis inform teaching and learning. Assessment records are useful and easy to interpret. Assessment information is used at school level to inform the school improvement plan and to revise and update the plan. Parents are provided with appropriate assessment information including the results of standardised tests at regular intervals.

Draw conclusions: the quality statement will help the school to judge the quality of this aspect of practice and place its own practice on a quality continuum

Significant strengths

Strengths outweigh weaknesses

Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Significant weaknesses

⁸ http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Assessment_for_Learning_AfL/

Chapter 5

Evaluation approaches and methods

This chapter outlines a range of approaches and methods that schools can use to gather the evidence necessary for making judgements during school self-evaluation.

5.1 Introduction

School self-evaluation requires systematic collection of information or evidence. Good information or evidence from one or more sources enables sound judgements about quality to be made. Limiting the scope of the information-gathering stage of self-evaluation to the collection of essential information only is important; too much information can lead to an unmanageable, unsustainable and unproductive school self-evaluation process.

Important sources of evidence in school self-evaluation processes are:

- The teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings in the school
- Students' work (for example, copies, files, folders, displays, portfolios, demonstrations of skill)
- Assessment data and information (both qualitative and quantitative)
- The board of management
- The principal, deputy principal and teachers
- Students and parents
- School documents (for example, the school plan and policies, subject department plans, teachers' plans, the code of behaviour, school inspection reports, previous school self-evaluation reports, school improvement plans, progress reports, agendas and minutes of meetings)
- Audits (for example, health and safety, finance).

In the context of evaluating teaching and learning, the type of information or evidence that needs to be gathered and the types of methods and tools necessary to gather the information can vary according to the evaluation theme. There are, however, some methods that are particularly important for gathering information or evidence on a number of teaching and learning self-evaluation themes. They are:

- Reflection on teaching and learning
- Discussion of specific topics
- Eliciting the views of teachers, parents, students
- Analysis of assessment and examination data and information
- Review of students' work
- Review of documents and records
- Team teaching or professional collaborative review.

Useful tools to support the gathering of information by one or more of the above methods include:

- Questionnaires and interview schedules
- Focus group schedules
- Checklists and reflection sheets
- Reflection/review/observation schedules for teaching and learning.

5.2 Some practical considerations

A school's development and use of agreed evaluation approaches and tools to gather information or evidence can help to promote consistency, objectivity and rigour in its information-collection process. This can contribute to sound, reliable and valid evaluative conclusions about aspects of the work of the school. However, in order for evaluation tools to be effective, their design and use should be guided by a number of practical considerations:

- **Relevance:** The tools should gather information or evidence relevant to the evaluation themes and sub-themes. They should not be designed or used to gather information extraneous to the evaluation
- **Simplicity and clarity:** Long or complex tools should be avoided
- **Efficiency:** The tools should be relatively easy and straightforward to use
- **Protocol:** The tools should be used in accordance with the school's agreed protocol for their use
- **Validity:** Consideration should be given to how the tools can assist in bringing together and comparing evidence of different kinds from a range of sources. This will contribute to establishing the validity of the conclusions drawn.

The approaches, methods and tools discussed in this chapter are presented with the aim of providing practical guidance to schools on how they can gather information or evidence during school self-evaluation. It is envisaged that schools will use tools such as those discussed in this chapter in a flexible way. Sample tools are provided in the *Appendix*. Schools may decide to use some or all of the tools provided or they may choose to develop their own tools to meet their self-evaluation data-gathering requirements.

5.3 Evaluation approaches, methods and tools

Evaluation approaches and methods

Schools will use a range of methods to gather evidence, depending on the area of practice being evaluated. It is important that schools build on the evidence that is already available. It is also necessary to ensure that evidence is gathered from a range of sources and that the views of all those involved in the school community are sought when relevant. A list of possible evaluation approaches and methods is outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 List of possible evaluation approaches and methods

Evaluation approaches and methods

- Audit of school’s code of behaviour with reference to the NEWB Guidelines⁹
- Analysis of suspension and detention rates
- Audit of the school assessment policy
- Audit of school safety statement
- Health and safety audit
- Health and safety inspection of classrooms and other learning settings
- Consultation with the board and teachers regarding Child Protection needs

- Review of use of ICT
- Review of written plans

- Eliciting views of teachers
- Eliciting views of students
- Eliciting views of parents

- Review of students’ copies/files/work
- Review of current assessment records
- Review of student progress records
- Analysis of student performance in state examinations
- Analysis of information on students’ attainments and achievements with regard to each of the literacy skills
- Analysis of information on students’ attainments with regard to numeracy skills
- Comparison of the outcomes of state examination attainments with school trends and national norms

- Teacher discussion and reflection
- Teacher self reflection
- Team-teaching and review
- Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning

⁹ *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for School*, National Educational Welfare Board, 2008, available at www.newb.ie

Evaluation tools

When deciding on the evidence to be gathered, schools will need to consider the most appropriate tools for this purpose. The list below (Table 5.2) may be useful in determining the most suitable tool for gathering the necessary evidence. It is important that schools gather only information that is appropriate to judge the quality of the area being evaluated. Samples of a range of evaluation tools that schools can use to gather the information or evidence necessary for school self-evaluation are found in the *Appendix*.

Table 5.2 List of possible evaluation tools

Evaluation Tools

- Checklist (document review)
- Checklist (subject plan, assessment records)
- Checklist (students' copies and files)
- Checklist (school's safety statement)
- Checklist (classroom maintenance)
- Checklist (subject specialist equipment)
- Checklist (analysis of detention records and NEWB returns)
- Checklist (review of material taught and progress made in line with subject plan)
- Checklist (literacy, numeracy)

- Excel tool developed by PDST for analysis of students' results in the state examinations

- Interview schedule
- Focus group schedule
- Questionnaires (student, parents, teachers)
- Teacher reflection sheet
- Reflection/review/observation schedule

- NCCA subject syllabus and guidelines
- Checklist (use of ICT)
- NCCA ICT framework¹⁰
- Prompt questions to facilitate data analysis
- NCTE E-learning Roadmap

¹⁰ ICT Framework: A Structured Approach to ICT in Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2007). Available at www.ncca.ie

5.4 Checklists

Checklists provide a simple format for recording basic factual information across a range of criteria. Instances in which they are particularly useful in the context of school self-evaluation include the analysis of documents (for example, the school's assessment policy, teachers' planning documents or students' written work) and the auditing of resources (for example an audit of the availability and use of ICT resources in classrooms). In devising checklists in the context of school self-evaluation, the inclusion of an open-ended comment section in addition to the basic *yes/no* tick or *agree/disagree* boxes is advised in order to facilitate the recording of additional relevant and necessary information.

Sample checklists are provided in *Appendix 1.1*. Checklists in relation to compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements are provided as appendices to the school self-evaluation report template in Figure 6.1.

5.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a versatile school self-evaluation tool. They allow information on the work of the school to be collected from a range of people including teachers, students, parents and the board of management. They can be used for the purpose of obtaining:

- Factual information (for example, frequency of use of ICT in lessons, type of assessment information communicated to parents)
- Information on the experiences and perspectives of parties on the work of the school (for example, whether students feel they have a say on how things are done in the school)
- Information regarding parties' levels of satisfaction with the work of the school (for example, parents' satisfaction levels with how the school reports to them on their children's progress in learning).

Designing and using questionnaires

Questionnaires can be designed in different ways. They can contain structured questions or open-ended questions. In designing and using questionnaires in school self-evaluation, schools are advised to:

- Determine in advance what they want to find out
- Explain why the respondents' opinions are being sought
- Assure anonymity and confidentiality
- Limit the number of questions asked
- Avoid unnecessary questions
- Avoid leading questions
- Lay the questionnaire out in a clear and logical order

- Give clear and simple instructions
- Keep the language of every item in the questionnaire clear and unambiguous (This is particularly important in the case of student questionnaires; how a questionnaire item is presented may need to vary according to the age of the student)
- Consider, in advance, how the information gathered through the questionnaire will be used.

Structured questionnaires

A structured questionnaire consists of items to which a person is asked to respond by selecting one of a number of response options.

Figure 5.3: Example of structured questionnaire items and response options

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
My child likes school					
I am aware of the code of behaviour and the school rules					
Management of students is good in the school					
I get good information from the school about how my child is doing in Mathematics					
Students and teachers respect one another					

While structured questionnaires are a relatively manageable, low-cost way of gathering information from a range of people and are thus a very useful school self-evaluation tool, there are nonetheless some disadvantages to their use:

- Respondents may not understand or may misinterpret the questions
- The questions may miss some important facets of the matter being evaluated
- The analysis of the data can be complex and time consuming.

Open-ended questions

Questionnaires can also consist, partly or entirely, of open-ended questions. These questions lead the respondent to consider a particular issue or topic but leave the form of the response open-ended.

Figure 5.4: Example of open-ended questionnaire items

What aspects of the mathematics curriculum are taught most successfully in the school?

What do you think we need to do next to improve literacy standards in the school?

Is there any way the school can improve its approach to homework?

Because open-ended questions have the advantage of allowing the respondent the freedom to say whatever they feel is appropriate, they may:

- Reveal the respondent's real attitudes and perceptions
- Provide extended answers
- Provide rich qualitative information
- Throw light on aspects of a topic or issue not previously considered by the evaluator.

The fact that open-ended questions can give rise to relatively long and/or individualised answers means that the information yielded through them can sometimes be time consuming and/or difficult to analyse. However, their potential to yield valuable and valid qualitative information suggests that open-ended questions used in small numbers can greatly enrich the evidence-gathering phase of school self-evaluation.

Sample questionnaires for both parents and students, containing both structured and open-ended items, are provided in *Appendix 1.2*.

5.6 Focus Groups

Focus groups are a particularly useful way of collecting information during school self-evaluation in that they can be used to explore in greater depth, themes or issues emerging from other information-collection methods such as questionnaires or individual interviews.

A focus group is a semi-structured information-gathering method in which a selected set of participants, for example, a group of teachers, students, parents or members of the board, gather to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes. The method involves the collection of information through group interaction on predetermined topics, the aim of the interaction being to further understanding of those topics. For example, a group of teachers may gather to explore in depth a number of issues related to the teaching of literacy in the school emerging from a review of lessons and questionnaires administered to parents. Much of the information yielded in a focus group discussion will be qualitative in nature.

The role of the leader or facilitator in a focus group discussion is important. For a focus group to be successful there needs to be participative discussion, reflection and scope for development and clarification of ideas and understandings. Expertise on the part of the facilitator in managing a group within a structured discussion situation is therefore required. The facilitator needs to allow participants to reflect on their experiences with the topics or themes, listen to one another's views and then build on their views. Questions during focus group discussions should ideally move from the general to the specific and from positive to negative. Before the end of the focus group discussion, participants should be enabled to reflect on and clarify what emerged in the discussion up to then.

The potential of focus groups for collective, probing reflection on a particular topic or theme and the expertise required in managing participants for such reflection to take place are two factors that distinguish focus groups from group interviews.

Focus groups need to be:

- Carefully planned
- Limited to a maximum of 6 to 8 participants
- Convened to discuss a small number of clear topics or themes
- Conducted within an agreed, realistic time period
- Guided by an interview schedule or discussion schedule
- Supportive of participative, reflective and developmental discussion
- Skilfully managed.

Sample focus group schedules are provided in *Appendix 1.3*.

5.7 Interviews

Interviews are another practical way of gathering information on the work of the school from members of the school community including board members, the principal, deputy principal, teachers, parents or students. They can facilitate professional conversations about teaching and learning or about particular evaluation themes or sub-themes among teachers. Because interviews tend to be relatively open-ended in their format, they can yield wide-ranging, rich information related to one or more evaluation themes or sub-themes. They can be a particularly useful method for a school commencing self-evaluation of a subject or programme that it has not previously evaluated by drawing attention to particular aspects of practice that should be investigated further.

Schools should be aware that gathering information through interviews and analysing that information can be time-consuming.

Planning and using interviews

Therefore, to maximise their potential usefulness in the context of school self-evaluation, interviews should:

- Be carefully planned
- Consist of a small number of clear, simple questions
- Be conducted within an agreed, realistic time period
- Be guided by an interview schedule
- Be flexible enough to capture unexpected or unanticipated views and opinions on the interview questions and related matters.

Sample interview schedules are provided in *Appendix 1.4*.

5.8 Reflection sheets

Reflection sheets are a useful means for capturing, in a relatively open-ended way, the perspectives of a number of different parties on key teaching and learning evaluation themes or sub-themes. For example, the sample reflection sheet provided in *Appendix 1.5* could be completed by the principal, deputy principal, teachers, board members or members of the parents' association in order to capture a range of perspectives on the work of the school. The information so gathered can be used to guide the self-evaluation of particular themes or sub-themes in more depth through other evaluation methods and tools.

5.9 Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning is a practical and powerful method of obtaining direct, first-hand information or evidence about teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings. It gives direct access to what students and teachers are doing and can be used to gather information on a range of evaluation themes or sub-themes.

In the context of school self-evaluation, professional collaborative review of teaching and learning can take a number of forms. For example a teacher could undertake self-observation of one of his/her lessons, focusing on a particular aspect of teaching and learning.

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning can also take the form of collaborative teaching and review. This type of review takes place in a team-teaching context where two teachers engage in collaborative planning for and teaching of a number of lessons. They subsequently reflect collaboratively on those lessons and specifically on the teaching and learning that took place. For schools that have not previously engaged in observation of teaching and learning as a data-collection strategy in school self-evaluation, collaborative teaching and review may be a useful first approach to gathering information or evidence on what is happening in classrooms and other learning settings in the school.

A teacher may invite a colleague to engage in professional review of a lesson or lessons. This may involve observing a lesson and subsequently discussing it in a reflective way. Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning may be well established in some schools through the observation of newly qualified teachers as part of a mentoring system or through initiatives that have encouraged teacher-to-teacher observation. For many schools, however, such observation of teaching and learning for the purpose of school self-evaluation is a relatively new development. In these schools, agreement between two teachers to observe each other's lessons focusing on a specific aspect of teaching and learning such as active learning or use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies might be a good place to start. To succeed as a method of gathering information during school self-evaluation, professional collaborative review of teaching and learning needs to be conducted in a collegial, respectful way within the terms of an agreed school protocol, using specific, planned criteria. It requires careful planning in relation to time allocation and student supervision arrangements.

Over time, as the practice of professional collaborative review becomes more mainstream in schools, this practice will evolve to include a wider range of colleagues, including the principal or deputy principal, engaging in collaborative review in accordance with agreed procedures.

A sample teaching and learning reflection/review/observation schedule is provided in *Appendix 1.6*. This schedule can be used as a tool for reflection by an individual teacher or to facilitate review in a collaborative teaching context.

Protocol for professional collaborative review of teaching and learning

A school protocol should be put in place to guide how professional collaborative review is to be conducted. The school's protocol for observation of teaching and learning during school self-evaluation should set out clearly the relevant processes and procedures that should occur before, during and after the observation and should include relevant schedule(s). A schedule should contain a set of clear criteria relating to particular self-evaluation themes or sub-themes. Its purpose is to guide the review and to provide a framework for recording information and for discussion. The use of a schedule for every observation thus helps to ensure that it is focused, reasonably objective and used for the purpose of gathering information on particular evaluation themes or sub-themes. It also contributes to consistency across the reviews conducted in the school.

A sample protocol for professional collaborative review of teaching and learning is provided in *Appendix 1.7*

Information arising from professional collaborative review of teaching and learning

One of the most important aspects of a school's protocol for professional collaborative review of teaching and learning during school self-evaluation is its provisions regarding the recording, sharing and use of information arising from the review. It is suggested that access to completed schedules be restricted to the teachers involved in the review. Only relevant information that might identify trends that will inform the evaluation should be shared.

Chapter 6

The school self-evaluation report and school improvement plan

This section offers advice to schools on reporting on their school self-evaluation and on devising a school improvement plan. It provides a sample template for a school self-evaluation report and a sample structure for a school improvement plan.

6.1 The school self-evaluation report

The primary focus of school self-evaluation should not be on the written work. Nonetheless, schools should complete a concise school self-evaluation report. This report should be no more than two or three pages long.

A school self-evaluation report sets out the school's evidence-based evaluative judgements about its strengths and the areas of its work requiring improvement. Those evaluative judgements or findings are used by the school to inform the school improvement plan and specifically, the improvement targets contained in that plan.

The school self-evaluation report serves a number of functions:

- It indicates how a school has fulfilled the requirement to evaluate its performance year on year
- It provides a basis for discussion and reflection among teachers, management, patron and others in relation to the work of the school
- It can be used by boards of management as an important information source in reporting to parents and the patron on the work of the school as required under the Education Act 1998
- It provides a basis upon which a school improvement plan can be devised and specific school improvement targets set.
- It can inform external evaluations undertaken by the Inspectorate.

The way in which the school self-evaluation report is written impacts on its usefulness in the context of any of the above functions. The language of the report should be clear, specific and accessible.

The report should record:

- The school context
- The main focuses of the evaluation
- A summary of the evaluation findings, namely:
 - o The school's main strengths
 - o The main areas of the school's work requiring improvement.

Schools should provide a summary report to the whole school community. Such a report will be very short and provide details of the findings with regard to the strengths identified and the areas the school intends to prioritise for improvement.

A sample template for a school self-evaluation report is provided in Figure 6.1. Checklists to assist the school in reviewing whether it is meeting the requirements of relevant legislation and regulation and whether it has necessary policies in place are provided as appendices to the report.

6.2 The school improvement plan

A school improvement plan sets out, in specific terms, what needs to be done to improve the work of the school. The school improvement plan becomes part of the developmental section of the school plan. It sets out school improvement targets based on the school self-evaluation findings and identifies the actions required to give effect to those targets. To be useful, a school improvement plan needs to be set out in clear and practical terms. School improvement targets should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART). In particular, it needs to specify how achievement levels in the subject or programme should improve as a result of actions to be taken by the school. Improvement targets may relate to any aspect of students' achievement including their knowledge, their skills and their attitudes. It is critical that the improvement targets are clearly linked to relevant baseline data that has been generated from the self-evaluation process engaged in by the school so that progress can be measured in an effective manner. The following are examples of improvement targets:

- X% of our junior cycle students have a positive disposition to reading. We will increase this to X +15% over the three-year period of this school improvement plan.
- X% of our students are taking higher-level English for Junior Certificate. We will increase this to X +10% over the three-year period of this school improvement plan.

The improvement plan should also specify:

- The actions needed to achieve the improvement targets.

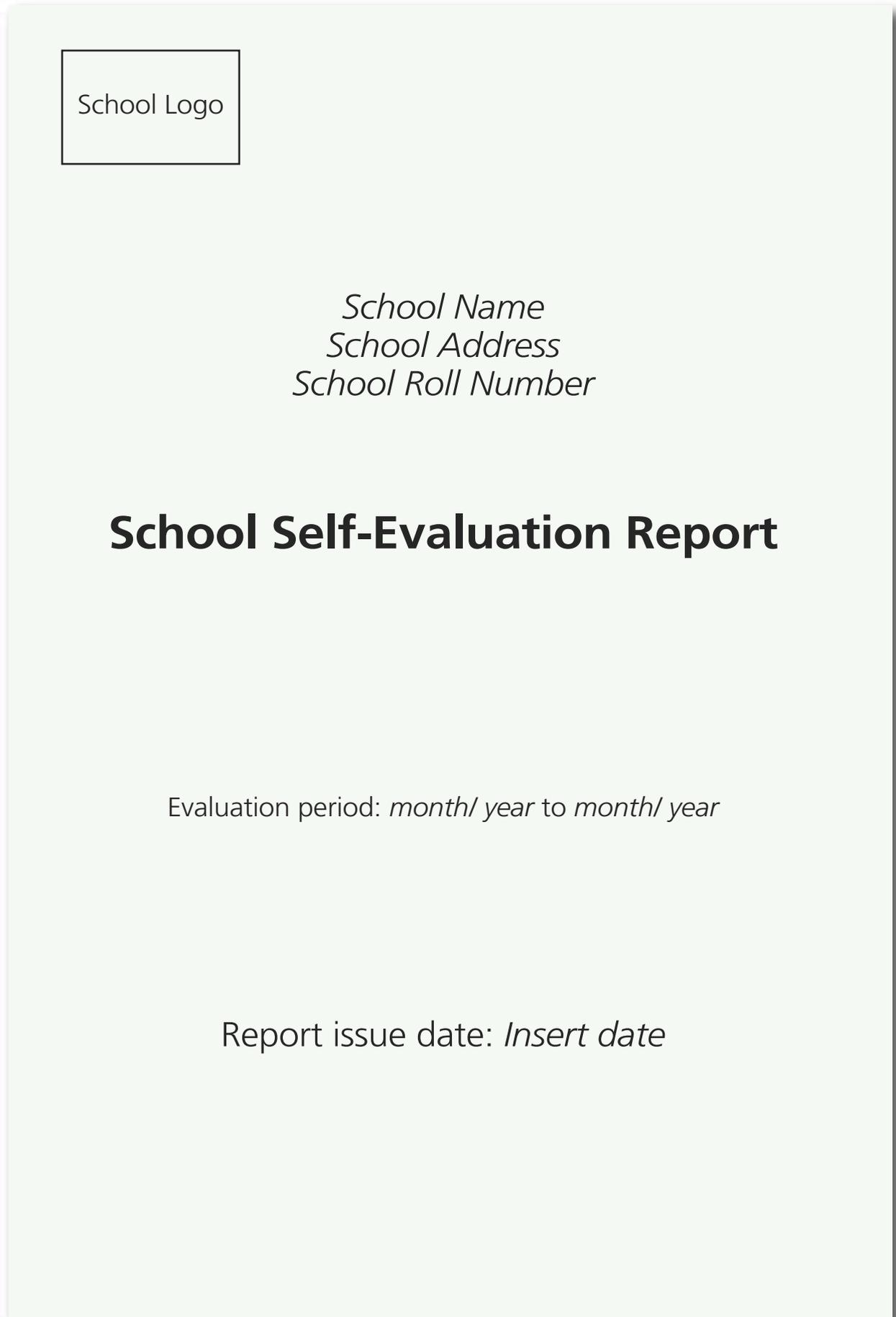
These actions need to address aspects of teaching and learning that the school has identified as areas for development. The actions should be linked with the improvement targets and be expected to have an impact on improving the areas highlighted in the targets. The action plan should identify

- The persons responsible and the time frame for those actions
- The success criteria or measurable outcomes by which achievement of the targets will be judged.

A sample structure for a school improvement plan is provided in Figure 6.2.

A summary of the school improvement plan should be provided to the whole school community.

Figure 6.1: Sample template for a school self-evaluation report



The image shows a sample template for a school self-evaluation report. It features a light green background with a white border. At the top left, there is a rectangular box labeled "School Logo". In the center, the following text is displayed in a serif font: "School Name", "School Address", and "School Roll Number". Below this, the title "School Self-Evaluation Report" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Further down, the text "Evaluation period: month/ year to month/ year" is centered. At the bottom, the text "Report issue date: Insert date" is centered.

School Logo

School Name
School Address
School Roll Number

School Self-Evaluation Report

Evaluation period: *month/ year to month/ year*

Report issue date: *Insert date*

School Self-Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The focus of the evaluation

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in (school name) was undertaken during the period (*month/year*) to (*month/year*). During the evaluation, teaching and learning in subjects and programmes were evaluated:

- Literacy (in L1 English in English medium schools/ in L1 and L2, English and Irish in Irish medium schools)
- Numeracy: Understanding and using mathematics
- Other aspects of teaching and learning across subject departments (please list as relevant)

This is a report on the findings of the evaluation.

1.2 School context

Comment on school ethos and particular context factors affecting the work of the school (for example, school participation in DEIS, school participation in other programmes or initiatives, changes in enrolment).

2. The findings

Indicate the quality of practice in relation to the aspect(s) of teaching and learning evaluated with reference to the sub-themes below where relevant.

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Attainment of subject and programme objectives
- Learning environment
- Students' engagement in learning
- Learning to learn
- Preparation for teaching
- Teaching approaches
- Management of students
- Assessment

3. Progress made on previously-identified improvement targets

-
-
-

4. Summary of school self-evaluation findings

4.1 Our school has **strengths** in the following areas:

(List the main strengths identified with regard to teaching and learning)

-
-
-

4.2 The following areas **are prioritised for improvement**:

(Specify the aspects of teaching and learning that need to be improved)

-
-
-

4.3 The following legislative and regulatory requirements need to be addressed:

(Specify the aspects that need to be addressed)

-
-
-

Appendix to School Self-Evaluation Report: legislative and regulatory checklist

Issue	Relevant legislation, rule or circular	Is the school fully meeting the requirements of the relevant legislation, rule or circular?	If no, indicate aspects to be developed
Valid enrolment of students	M51/93	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Time in school - Length of school year (minimum of 167 days for all year groups) - Length of school week (minimum of 28 hours for all year groups)	Circular M29/95	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Standardisation of school year	Circular 034/2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Arrangements for parent/teacher and staff meetings	Circular M58/04	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Implementation of national literacy strategy	Circular 25/12	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Implementation of Croke Park agreement regarding additional time requirement	Circular 025/2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Development of school plan	Section 21 Education Act 1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Guidance provision in secondary schools	Circular PPT12/05, Education Act 1998 (section 9(c))	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Whole-school guidance plan	Section 21 Education Act 1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Delivery of CSPE to all junior cycle classes	Circular M12/01 Circular M13/05	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Exemption from the study of Irish	Circular M10/94	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Implementation of revised in-school management structures	Circular M29/02, Circular 21/98, Circular 30/97, Circular 29/97	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Limited alleviation on filling posts of responsibility for school year 2011/12	Circular 53/11	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Parents as partners in education	Circular M27/91	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Issue	Relevant legislation, rule or circular	Is the school fully meeting the requirements of the relevant legislation, rule or circular?	If no, indicate aspects to be developed
<p>Implementation of child protection procedures</p>	<p>Circular 65/11</p> <p>Please provide the following information in relation to child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of cases where a report involving a child in the school was submitted by the DLP to the HSE <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of cases where a report involving a child in the school was submitted by the DLP to the HSE and the school board of management informed <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made and the school board of management informed <input type="checkbox"/> 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Implementation of complaints procedure as appropriate</p>	<p>Section 28 Education Act 1998</p> <p>Please provide the following information in relation to complaints made by parents during this school year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of formal parental complaints received <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of formal complaints processed <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of formal complaints not fully processed by the end of this school year <input type="checkbox"/> 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	
<p>Refusal to enrol</p>	<p>Section 29 Education Act 1998</p> <p>Please provide the following information in relation to appeals taken in accordance with Section 29 against the school during this school year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of section 29 cases taken against the school <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of cases resolved at informal stage <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of cases heard <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of appeals upheld <input type="checkbox"/> ▪ Number of appeals dismissed <input type="checkbox"/> 		

Issue	Relevant legislation, rule or circular	Is the school fully meeting the requirements of the relevant legislation, rule or circular?	If no, indicate aspects to be developed
<p>Suspension of students</p>	<p>Section 29 Education Act 1998</p> <p>Please provide the following information in relation to appeals taken in accordance with Section 29 against the school during this school year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of section 29 cases taken against the school <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of cases resolved at informal stage <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of cases heard <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of appeals upheld <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of appeals dismissed <input type="checkbox"/> 		
<p>Expulsion of students</p>	<p>Section 29 Education Act 1998</p> <p>Please provide the following information in relation to appeals taken in accordance with Section 29 against the school during this school year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of section 29 cases taken against the school <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of cases resolved at informal stage <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of cases heard <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of appeals upheld <input type="checkbox"/> - Number of appeals dismissed <input type="checkbox"/> 		

Appendix to School Self-Evaluation Report: policy checklist

Policy	Source	Has policy been approved by the board of management?	If no, indicate aspects to be developed.
Enrolment policy	Section 15(2)(d) of Education Act Equal Status Acts 2000-2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Code of behaviour, including anti-bullying policy ¹¹	Circular M33/91 NEWB guidelines Section 23, Education Welfare Act 2000 Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour, 1993, Circular M33/91 Equal Status Acts 2000-2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Attendance and participation strategy ¹²	Circular M51/93 Section 22, Education Welfare Act 2000	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Health and Safety Statement	Health and Safety Act 2005 Section 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Data protection	Data Protection Act 1988 Data Protection (Amendment Act) 2003	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Special education needs policy ^{13,14}	Education Act (1998) Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2011), Education (Welfare) Act (2000), Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004) Disability Act (2005)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Social, personal and health education (SPHE)/Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy	Circulars 37/2010, 23/2010, M27/08, M11/03, M22/00, M20/96, M4/95	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Substance use policy	Department of Education and Skills Directive; guidelines issued to schools in 2002	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Internet acceptable use policy	Department of Education and Skills Directive	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Child Protection Policy	Circular 0065/2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

¹¹ Under the provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) (section 23) the school's code of behaviour should conform to the specifications stated.

¹² Under the provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) (section 22) the school's attendance strategy should conform with the provisions stipulated.

¹³ Section 9 of the Education Act (1998) requires a school to "use its available resources" to identify and provide for the educational needs of those "with a disability or other special educational needs."

¹⁴ The EPSEN Act requires that schools be inclusive of and provide an appropriate education for students with special educational needs.

Figure 6.2: Sample structure for a school improvement plan

OUR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN	
Summary of main strengths as identified in last SSE in (specify date):	
Summary of main areas requiring improvement as identified in last SSE:	
Improvement targets (related to students' achievement)	
Required actions (Related to Teaching and Learning that will help to achieve the targets)	
Persons responsible	
Timeframe for action	
Success criteria/measurable outcomes	
Review date(s)	

Appendix

Sample school self-evaluation tools

Appendix 1.1: Sample checklists

Subject Department written plans	Yes	No	Comment
Common subject plans have been devised and written			
Expected learning outcomes are set out in the written plans			
Expected learning outcomes are clear and syllabus-linked			
Expected learning outcomes are differentiated to cater for different learning needs			
Teaching and learning methodologies and the resources to be used are clearly linked to the expected learning outcomes in the written plans			
Timeframes are suggested for the teaching of various components of the subject			
There are expected learning outcomes for the development of literacy skills in all subject areas			
There are expected learning outcomes for the development of numeracy skills in all subject areas			
Literacy and numeracy strategies in the subject and programme plans are consistent with the school's literacy and numeracy strategy			
Written plans clearly indicate how the students' learning is to be assessed			

Assessment of students' written work	Yes	No	Comment
High expectations are set for students' written work			
Written work including homework is monitored			
Samples of students' work are maintained and annotated			
Written feedback is provided			
Written feedback is clear and specific			
Written feedback refers to strengths and necessary next steps			
Students review and edit their work			
Students amend their work in light of feedback given			
Recording of student progress			
Student progress in literacy is recorded in a clear and meaningful way			
Student progress in numeracy is recorded in a clear and meaningful way			
Student progress in each subject area is recorded (specify areas)			

Sample checklist for evaluation of literacy¹⁵

The overall attainments of the students with regard to each of the following aspects of literacy are improving or remaining at a high standard in all subjects and programmes:		
Oral language (listening and speaking)	Students contribute effectively and appropriately to discussions	
	Students articulate their opinions clearly and fluently	
	Students explain their thinking clearly and effectively	
	Students present information clearly and effectively	
Reading	Students are able to understand, collate, summarise, apply and evaluate information from different texts ¹⁶	
	Students critically analyse the purpose and forms of different texts	
	Students discuss similarities and differences between texts	
Writing	Students make notes and summarise ideas effectively through written work	
	Students make effective use of subject-specific vocabulary	
	Students create texts in a variety of genres and for a variety of audiences	
The understanding and critical appreciation of broadcast media	Students are able to critically evaluate information and opinion accessed through broadcast media	
The understanding and critical appreciation of digital media	Students are able to navigate across digital texts	
	Students can locate information efficiently using digital sources	
	Students can critically evaluate information and opinion accessed through digital sources	
	Students are able to use digital media to create a wide variety of texts in different genres	
The students use their literacy skills competently in their learning in all subjects		
Students, including those at risk of underachieving, are attaining well and are making very good progress from their prior levels of achievement		
Uptake in English at higher level in the state examinations compares favourably with national norms		
Student performance in English in state examinations compares favourably with national norms		
Analysis of uptake and performance is linked to actions for improvement in the English subject plan		
The literacy learning targets ¹⁷ set out in the school improvement plan have been achieved		

¹⁵ Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. Literacy for learners in English-medium schools and settings should be understood primarily as literacy in English. In the case of Irish-medium schools, literacy should be understood as both Irish as the first language of the school and English.

¹⁶ Texts may be presented in traditional written forms, as well through oral, digital and visual media. In this context, texts may include, but are not limited to novels, filmed documentaries, leaflets, graphs, posters, charts, scientific symbols and social networks.

¹⁷ Note that learning targets must be SMART

Sample checklist for evaluation of numeracy¹⁸

The overall competence of the students with regard to each of the following skills is improving or remaining at a high standard:		
Knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts	Students display their understanding of number processes and concepts	
	Students are encouraged to hypothesise and propose solutions	
	Students can explain their reasoning	
Application of concepts and problem-solving	Students tackle problems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts	
	Students identify the relevant skills and concepts	
	Students work independently and collaboratively	
	Students evaluate their solutions	
	Students are aware of and avoid common mathematical misconceptions	
Communicating and expressing	Students contribute effectively and appropriately to discussions	
	Students use multiple representations	
	Students use mathematical language correctly	
	Students are encouraged to estimate and to develop mental agility	
	Students make effective use of ICT	
Integrating and connecting	Students make links to other areas of the curriculum	
	Students apply numeracy skills in a range of contexts	
	Students develop an understanding of the role of numeracy in everyday life	
	Students look for patterns and can identify similarities and differences	
Data acquisition and analysis	Students are competent in gathering, representing and analysing data	
	Students display an understanding of randomness, bias, chance and causality	
Implementing	Students develop the capacity to engage with and complete tasks and assignments	
Students, including those at risk of underachieving, are attaining well and are making very good progress from their prior levels of achievement		
The students use their numeracy skills competently in all subjects and programmes		
Uptake in Mathematics at higher level in the state examinations compares favourably with national norms		
Student performance in Mathematics in state examinations compares favourably with national norms		
Analysis of uptake and performance is linked to actions for improvement in the mathematics subject plan		
The numeracy learning targets ¹⁹ set out in the school improvement plan have been achieved		

¹⁸ Numeracy is not limited to the ability to use numbers, to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings

¹⁹ Note that learning targets must be SMART

Appendix 1.2: Sample questionnaires

School Name School Self-Evaluation Questionnaire for Parents

Dear parents and guardians,

We are undertaking a self-evaluation of teaching and learning in our school. To help us in that evaluation, we would be very grateful for your views and opinions on the matters in the questionnaire below. The questionnaire should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. We would be very grateful if you would complete it and return it to the school before xxxx. Please note that you may complete the questionnaire anonymously and that all individual responses will be treated confidentially.

Thank you very much.

Insert name (Principal)

Date: **Insert date**

Please put an **X** in the correct box:

My son/daughter is in :

1st Yr 2nd Yr 3rd Yr
5th Yr 6th Yr TY

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
My child is doing well in the school					
I am happy with the amount of homework my child gets					
Teaching is good in the school					
My child has very few free classes each week					
Teachers regularly check my child's written work					
I sign my child's school journal each week					
The school consults me if my child needs extra help					
School reports give me a good picture of how my child is doing					
There are good arrangements for parent-teacher meetings					
Management of students is good in the school					
I am aware of the code of behaviour/school rules					

Please turn over: Questions continued overleaf

EXAMPLES OF OPEN QUESTIONS

Are there any ways that the school could help your son/daughter further in the study of his/her subjects?

How effectively is the school at involving parents in raising literacy and numeracy standards in our school?

Are there any ways that the school could help your son/daughter further in his/her personal and social development?

Is there any way the school can improve its approach to homework?

Any other comments or suggestions

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Sample questionnaire for students

School Name
Teaching and Learning School Self-Evaluation Questionnaire for Students

Please put an **X** in the correct box:

Gender: Male

Female

Subject: _____

I am in: 1st Yr

2nd Yr

3rd Yr

TY

5th Yr

6th Yr

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
Lessons in this subject are interesting					
I am getting on well with my school work in this subject					
The teacher explains the subject clearly for me in my class					
The teacher encourages me to work to the best of my ability					
My knowledge and understanding is checked regularly in class in this subject					
The teachers correct my written work regularly					
The teacher tells me how I can improve					
The teacher listens to questions and answers them					
I get opportunities to work with other students in this subject					
We often use computers in lessons in this subject					
I get regular homework in this subject					
I take responsibility for my own learning					

Please turn over: Questions continued overleaf

SAMPLE OPEN QUESTIONS

What aspect(s) of this subject do you like most and why?

What aspect(s) of this subject do you like least and why? What would help you to learn this subject more easily?

What do you find hard to learn in this subject?

Any other comments

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Sample questionnaire for students

LESSON QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS²⁰

Please put an **X** in the correct box:

Gender: Male Female Subject: _____
I am in: 1st Yr 2nd Yr 3rd Yr
 TY 5th Yr 6th Yr

1. Do you feel confident in asking for help if you do not understand something in this subject?

Yes No

2. Do you have opportunities to correct your own work?

Yes No

3. Do your fellow students ever correct your work?

Yes No

If yes, please describe how this happens

4. Do you have opportunities to work together in pairs or small groups?

Yes No

If yes, how often?

Everyday Sometimes Rarely

In all subjects In some subjects In a few

5. Do you have opportunities to use computers in class?

Yes No

If yes, how often?

Everyday Sometimes Rarely

Please turn over: Questions continued overleaf

²⁰ This sample questionnaire may be used, for example, by a teacher to garner the opinions of the students in his/her class, or by a number of teachers in subject X across a year group.

SAMPLE OPEN QUESTIONS

What helps you learn in this subject?

What causes difficulties for your learning in this subject?

What types of activities help you learn best during lessons?

What types of homework help your learning?

Any other comments

Appendix 1.3: Sample focus group schedules

Focus Group Schedule			
Focus group participants		Subject(s) taught	
Facilitator		Date	
For discussion		Discussion	
General topics	Key questions	Main points made	
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths in relation to the teaching of literacy? • What are our concerns? • How can we improve? 		
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths in relation to the teaching of problem-solving skills across the curriculum? • What are our concerns? • How can we improve? 		
Subject X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths in relation to the teaching of Subject X? • What are our concerns? • How can we improve? 		

Focus Group Schedule			
Focus group participants		Subject(s) taught	
Facilitator		Date	
For discussion		Discussion	
General topics	Key questions	Main points made	
Co-operative/ collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In which subjects are we most successful at developing and using co-operative and collaborative learning approaches and skills? • How can we improve our work in relation to co-operative and collaborative learning? 		
Environment-based learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths in relation to environment-based learning? (refer to individual subjects) • In which subjects do we need to develop environment-based learning more? • What steps do we need to take to do this? 		

Appendix 1.4: Interview schedules

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: NUMERACY			
<i>Representative Group/ Subject Department</i>		<i>Interviewer</i>	
<i>Teachers</i>		<i>Date</i>	
NUMERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND/OR IN SUBJECT X			
How successful are we in integrating the development of numeracy into our subject?			
How closely do we collaborate with the mathematics department in planning our delivery schedule?			
Are we happy that our practice in carrying out calculations and other mathematical procedures and the use of mathematical symbols and terminology is consistent with that prescribed by the mathematics department?			
What is working well?			
Are there any problem areas?			
What action can we take to improve?			
How effective are we in developing students' problem-solving skills in our lessons? Are there any difficulties? How can we improve the teaching and learning of problem-solving?			
What strategies are most successful in enhancing the numeracy skills of students with special education needs?			
What are the most effective teaching and learning strategies for further developing the numeracy of students with very good mathematics ability?			
Do we provide opportunities for the assessment of numeracy when assessing students' learning in this subject?			
What resources, including ICT, are most useful in enhancing the teaching of numeracy in our subject?			
What changes should we consider in our practice to further facilitate numeracy development in our lessons?			
How effective is our approach to homework in consolidating students' learning of numeracy in our subject?			

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: LITERACY			
<i>Representative Group/ Subject Department</i>		<i>Interviewer</i>	
<i>Teachers</i>		<i>Date</i>	
LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND/OR IN SUBJECT X			
What are our strengths in the teaching of literacy in the school?			
Are there any areas of concern?			
How effective are we in further developing the reading skills of target students? What other strategies could be used to further develop the reading skills of these students?			
How effective are we in providing opportunities for the development of oral language in our lessons? What other strategies could be used for the further development of student oral literacy?			
Do we maximise opportunities for the development of students' writing skills in our lessons (structural aspects, writing process, a range of genres, writing for various audiences)? Are these opportunities effective? What other strategies could be used?			
Do our teaching methodologies provide for the development of subject-specific literacy skills? What strategies could we use to further develop subject-specific literacy skills in our lessons?			
What changes should we make to how we currently teach literacy skills in our subject area/ in the school?			
What resources do we find most useful in supporting the literacy demands of our subject?			
How effective is our approach to homework in consolidating students' learning of literacy in our subject?			

Appendix 1.5: Sample reflection sheets

Sample self-reflection sheet 1

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN OUR SCHOOL	
Strengths	Why
Areas for improvement	Why
Priorities for action	Why

Self-reflection sheet 2

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THIS LESSON
What worked well? Why?
What did not go according to plan? Why?
What will I do differently when teaching this lesson again or when using the same strategies?

Appendix 1.6: Sample teaching and learning reflection/review/observation schedule

Lesson Observation Schedule			
<i>Year Group</i>	<i>Level (H/O/F/C)</i>	<i>Date:</i>	<i>Teacher:</i>
	<i>No of Students:</i>		
<i>Subject:</i>	<i>Time:</i>	<i>Duration:</i>	<i>Observer:</i>
NOTE: SELECT RELEVANT POINTS ONLY DURING LESSON OBSERVATION. IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO COMMENT ON ALL PROMPTS			
<p><i>Preparation for teaching</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Necessary resources and materials are organised and readily available in advance of the lesson <p><i>Teaching approaches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lesson is guided by syllabus-linked learning outcomes which are shared with the students The lesson is well structured (introduction, development, conclusion-review) A range of the following teaching approaches are used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher and student questioning Guided discussion Collaborative and co-operative learning Investigative approaches to learning Higher-order thinking and problem solving Encouragement of the student's personal and creative response to the subject Developmentally appropriate reference to requirements for state examinations Relevant resources including ICT are used by teachers and/or students to support students' learning The varying needs and abilities of students are catered for through the use of differentiation Teacher questioning is clear, includes lower and higher-order questions and stimulates response from students Effective use is made of opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills Attention is given to consolidation of students' learning Constructive feedback is provided to students on their learning, and teaching and learning is amended in the light of that feedback <p><i>Management of students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher-student and student-student interactions are respectful The students' efforts are affirmed The teacher has high and realistic expectations of the students Students' contributions and questions are welcome <p><i>Students' engagement in learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students work purposefully during the lesson Students are interested in their learning All students participate in the lesson Students are properly challenged in their learning There is progression in the students' learning Students achieve the learning outcome(s) of the lesson 		<i>Observation/comments</i>	
<i>Key points discussed:</i>			
<i>Signed (Teacher)</i>		<i>Signed (Observer)</i>	
<i>Date</i>		<i>Date</i>	

Blank template for teaching and learning reflection/ review/ observation

Lesson Observation Schedule			
<i>Class:</i>	<i>Level (H/O/F/C)</i>	<i>Date:</i>	<i>Teacher:</i>
	<i>No of Students:</i>		
<i>Subject:</i>	<i>Time:</i>	<i>Duration:</i>	<i>Observer:</i>
<i>Areas to be observed (select relevant aspects of practice from the sample schedule)</i>		<i>Observation/comments</i>	
<i>Key points discussed:</i>			
<i>Signed (Teacher)</i>		<i>Signed (Observer)</i>	
<i>Date</i>		<i>Date</i>	

Appendix 1.7: Sample school protocol²¹

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning
<p>Prior to the lesson</p> <p>Whole -staff meetings to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the process • Confirm the focus of the process (that is, the evaluation theme or sub-theme) • Develop/share/finalise the lesson reflection/review schedule • Confirm that the purpose of the process is school improvement • Agree the information that will be maintained and shared. <p>The two teachers engaging in professional collaborative review of teaching and learning meet to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the lesson or lessons to be taught and reviewed or observed • Agree the time and length of the professional collaborative teaching period • Agree a time and venue for their review discussion and completion of the lesson reflection schedule • Agree the focus of the collaborative review.
<p>The lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lessons are taught and observed or reviewed
<p>After of the lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers discuss the teaching and learning that took place with reference to the criteria in the lesson reflection/review schedule • The teachers complete the lesson reflection/review schedule together • A record of information relevant to the area of focus of school self-evaluation will be maintained • Access to the completed lesson reflection/review schedule will be restricted to those agreed prior to the lesson • Relevant information to inform the school self-evaluation will be extracted and shared as agreed prior to the lesson • Aggregated information derived from all the lesson reflection/review schedules on a particular evaluation sub-theme will be used as agreed to inform the school self-evaluation report.

²¹ School leaders should ensure that all aspects of the protocol are thoroughly discussed and agreed

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