

**Subject:**

**Circular Number:**  
**2010/22**

**SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING –  
REGULATIONS & GUIDANCE**

**Date of Issue:**  
7 January 2011

**Audience:**

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta;
- Governing Bodies Association; and
- Teachers' Unions.

**Summary of Contents:**

This Circular sets out the requirements for the Boards of Governors to prepare, and periodically revise, a school development plan in accordance with SR 2010 No. 395, The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, which come into operation on 24th January 2011.

**Enquiries:**

Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:

Mr Chris Hutchinson  
Standards and Improvement Team  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
43 Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
BANGOR BT19 7PR

**Governor Awareness**  
Essential

**Status of Contents:**  
Information for schools

**Related Documents:**  
Circular 2005/19

**Superseded Documents:**  
Circular 2005/19  
(with effect from January 2011)

**Expiry Date:**

**DENI Website:**  
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>

**Tel: 028 9127 9415**  
**Fax: 028 9127 9100**

**Email:**  
**[chris.hutchinson@deni.gov.uk](mailto:chris.hutchinson@deni.gov.uk)**

## **SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS – REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE**

### **Introduction**

1. This Circular is to advise schools of revised regulations and guidance, setting out the requirements on Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools to prepare and maintain a school development plan (SDP).
2. The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (made under Articles 13(3) and 90(3) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998) will come into operation on 24th January 2011. They will apply to all school development plans prepared from 24th January 2011 onwards – schools do not have to make immediate changes to their current SDP as a result of these regulations taking effect. However, they should comply with the new requirements when they next come to revise their SDP in line with the timescales set out in Regulation 7 (i.e. following a school inspection or at the end of the 3 year period to which their SDP applies).

### **Self-evaluation and school development planning leading to school improvement**

3. *Every School a Good School – a Policy for School Improvement* emphasises that school improvement is first and foremost the responsibility of the school. It is based on the premise that schools themselves are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can bring about better outcomes for pupils. Self-evaluation leading to sustained self-improvement is therefore at the core of the school improvement policy.
4. Schools should engage in a rigorous and reflective process of self-evaluation against the characteristics of a good school set out in *Every School a Good School*, which align to the indicators set out in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) *Together Towards Improvement*. Self-evaluation should be informed by the effective use of performance and other data, including inspection evidence, and by consultation with pupils, parents and staff, to identify those aspects of school life that are successful, and those where improvement is required. The resulting actions considered necessary to effect improvement should be captured in the SDP, which

will provide a useful tool to manage and monitor the implementation of planned actions.

### **Review of requirements for school development planning**

5. Schools have been required to prepare an SDP since 1998 and regulations were previously made in 2005. The Department gave a commitment as part of *Every School a Good School* to review the requirements relating to school development planning. The Department issued draft regulations for consultation from 2<sup>nd</sup> February until 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010, inviting views from schools, educational support bodies, key equality interests and the Education Committee. A total of 77 responses were received, with the majority being in favour of the proposals. The issues raised by respondents have been addressed in work to revise the regulations and to prepare supporting guidance material. A summary of the consultation findings, and the Department's response to the issues raised, is provided at Annex A. A report on the analysis of the consultation findings is available via the Department's website.

### **Priorities for school development planning**

6. The Department's key priorities in revising the regulations and guidance material have been to ensure that:
  - the focus of school development planning is on raising standards, particularly standards of pupil's achievement in literacy, numeracy and ICT.
  - planning for improvement is supported by planning for the effective use of the school's financial, human and other resources; and
  - the process of self-evaluation and development planning is manageable and provides flexibility for schools to determine their own priorities.

### **School Development Plans – Regulations**

7. The regulations continue to set out the:
  - matters to be dealt with by a school development plan;
  - period for which a school development plan is to have effect;
  - arrangements for the publication of a school development plan; and

- arrangements for the monitoring, review and revision of a school development plan.
8. In preparing and/or revising the school's plan, the Board of Governors must also continue to consult with the principal, consider the findings from any inspections of the school, and consider any guidance given by the Department, the relevant Education and Library Board, and in the case of Catholic maintained schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

### **Guidance on School Development Planning**

9. To support the revised regulations, the Department has also revised its guidance on school development planning. The guidance aims to assist schools as they seek to embed a reflective, inclusive, robust and evidence-based process of:
- setting an ethos, vision statement for the school;
  - self-evaluation;
  - planning;
  - implementing actions to bring about improvement in pupil outcomes; and
  - monitoring and reviewing progress.
10. Many of the key principles remain unchanged (e.g. the purpose of the SDP, roles and responsibilities, the importance of ethos). However, the revised guidance is intended to be more streamlined and user-friendly, and clearly focused on promoting and embedding in all our schools a high-quality process of self-evaluation and development planning.
11. The guidance therefore takes schools through the cycle of self-evaluation and development planning, referenced to the characteristics of a good school. It sets out some characteristics of effective school development planning, drawing on the ETI's *Evaluation of School Development Planning 2007-08*. The guidance also signposts schools to the range of resources available to support them in their development planning, including the revised *Together Towards Improvement* documents published by the ETI.

## Further Information

12. Copies of this Circular, the regulations, guidance and case studies of schools found to demonstrate effective practice in school development planning are available via the Department's website at [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools\\_impvt\\_prog\\_pg/03-schools\\_school\\_improvement\\_programme-school\\_development\\_planning\\_pg.htm](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools_impvt_prog_pg/03-schools_school_improvement_programme-school_development_planning_pg.htm). A limited number of copies of the guidance booklet will also be made available on request from the Department.
13. Schools can also seek advice and support in their school development planning from their Education & Library Board and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, CCMS. Schools can seek support and assistance from C2k on managing data and school leaders can avail of RTU's leadership development programmes.



---

**LISA BOAL**

Standards and Improvement Team

### **Department's Response to Issues Raised in Consultation**

The Department issued draft regulations for consultation from 2<sup>nd</sup> February until 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and responses were received from 77 organisations and individuals. In general, responses were broadly supportive of the revised regulations and recognised the central role of the SDP in driving whole-school planning and improvement.

The main issues arising related to (a) manageability; (b) support and (c) the inclusion of a new requirement to promote sustainable development. A brief summary of the issues raised and the Department's response is provided below.

#### **(a) Manageability of the SDP process**

##### Feedback

Many respondents commented that the school development planning process needs to be straightforward, user-friendly and not overly prescriptive or burdensome. Some also commented that the Schedule to the draft regulations could be made clearer and should align with Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement.

##### Response

The Department has revised the regulations further to ensure greater clarity, provide flexibility for schools to set their own priorities, based on their self-evaluation, and alignment with Every School a Good School, while retaining the focus on standards. The previous list, as set out in the Schedule, of specific issues to be addressed is now shorter and more closely linked to the 4 areas in Every School a Good School, i.e. leadership, child-centred provision, high quality teaching and learning and effective links with parents and communities.

#### **(b) Support for governors and school leaders**

##### Feedback

Many respondents raised the need for support in preparing their SDP, including guidance and feedback for schools, support for governors and support for school leaders and teachers in the effective use of data.

### Response

The Department has prepared revised guidance in support of the regulations, which includes a list of further supporting materials. The Education & Library Boards (as part of the coherent support plan), working, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, with CCMS, have identified support for school development planning as central to their support for schools for school improvement. That support includes the relationship with the Link Officer who can provide advice and support in developing the SDP, securing the provision of any professional development and other support needs identified in the plan, and who will also provide feedback on the SDP, particularly on the targets set by the school

### **(c) Education for Sustainable Development**

#### Feedback

A majority of respondents opposed the addition of a statutory requirement for schools to include the promotion of sustainable development in their SDP. Respondents instead suggested that this should be left to schools to decide.

#### Response

The Department taken account of the issues raised in the consultation, the range of reforms schools are already implementing, and our clear focus on standards, and the current financial climate. The Department has therefore decided to proceed on a non-statutory basis – rather than create a statutory requirement, the Department, through the school development planning guidance, is strongly encouraging schools to consider how they might promote sustainable development when preparing their SDP. It is therefore a matter for schools, depending on their own priorities, to consider how they might wish to take this forward, building on the provision for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the revised curriculum and drawing on the ETI report and the Boards' guidance on effective practice in promoting ESD.