

Subject:

**SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS
2024/25 ACADEMIC YEAR**

Circular Number: 2024/08

Date of Issue: 26 April 2024

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors (BoG) of all grant-aided schools;
- Education Authority (EA);
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS);
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG);
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE);
- Governing Bodies Association;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA);
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI);
- Controlled Schools' Support Council; and
- Teachers' Unions.

Governor Awareness:

Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and
action by schools

Related Documents:

DE Circular 2016/04
2016/04 Addendum
2016/04 2nd Addendum
2016/04 3rd Addendum
DE Circular 2021/08
DE Circular 2022/06
DE Circular 2023/09

Summary of Contents:

This circular, issued by the Department of Education, sets out the arrangements for schools to take up to five School Development Days in the 2024/25 school year.

Expiry Date: 31 July 2025

Enquiries:

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SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2024/25 ACADEMIC YEAR

Introduction

1. The purpose of this circular is to advise that the Department of Education (DE) is providing exceptional approval, to enable schools to again take up to five additional days (referred to as School Development Days or SDDs) for the purposes of school improvement and school/staff development in the 2024/25 academic year only. The expiry date for use of these days will be **31 July 2025**.

Purpose of School Development Days

2. SDDs are intended to be used for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in pursuit of school improvement and raising of standards and should continue to be applied for this purpose during 2024/25. The continuation of this provision recognises the time that is needed to devote to matters identified in School Development Plans (SDPs) as priorities for school development and improvement involving all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in planned development activities. These activities include:
 - schools' engagement in rigorous self-evaluation, taking account of data and other evidence, in support of school improvement and the raising of standards, particularly standards in literacy and numeracy;
 - the continued delivery of the statutory curriculum, ensuring that the content and its delivery, reflect and is tailored to the pupil cohort and is in line with the current guidance;
 - the continued implementation and delivery of the entitlement framework in post-primary schools;
 - the development of whole-school strategies and systems for early identification of all barriers to learning for children with special and other additional needs;
 - the development of school-based provision to meet the individual needs of all children presenting with barriers to learning, including the promotion of pupils' emotional health and well-being;

- issues related to the professional development, health, attendance and well-being of staff, including Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD);
 - the use of ICT in enhancing learning, teaching and assessment, continuing professional development and school leadership and management; and
 - promoting effective links with parents and the community.
3. Staff development sessions should also be regularly and systematically evaluated to ascertain their impact and effectiveness on school improvement, with the outcomes of evaluation feeding into the SDP process.

Allocation and Management of SDDs

4. The utilisation of SDDs reduces the days in which pupils are engaged in learning. The school closure can also be disruptive and potentially costly to parents and guardians who may be required to make alternative arrangements for their children. It is therefore essential that schools reflect carefully before deciding on the number of SDDs they wish to take and also satisfy themselves that the closure minimises disruption to pupils' learning. Parents and pupils should be given as much advance notice of closure dates as possible.
5. The exceptional approval for the provision of SDDs reduces the minimum number of school operational days from 190 days down to 185 days (if all five days are used). Schools are reminded of the statutory requirement that, during the operational days, pupils are required to be in school, under instruction, for a minimum of three hours each day if they are under eight years old. Pupils over the age of eight years are required to be in school each day for a minimum of four and a half hours, under instruction, separated by a break of thirty minutes. The minimum instruction time does not include time spent receiving religious education.
6. It is normal procedure for schools to submit written proposals each year for SDDs to the School Development Service (SDS) in the Education Authority (EA). In recent years, due to industrial action, only the dates of SDDs have been sought as part of the school calendar exercise to enable the EA to co-ordinate operational planning to ensure efficient provision of services such as school transport and meals.

7. This has resulted in a dearth of information regarding how SDDs are being utilised and has prevented the EA from considering proposals around how each school intends to use its Baker Days and SDDs, how the proposals link to the school's priorities in the School Development Plan, and to plan the most effective and efficient delivery of advice and support.
8. The Department has written directly to schools to garner information regarding how SDDs are being utilised during the 2023/24 academic year to inform the End to End Review of School Improvement and the potential need for legislative change. Based on the outcome of this exercise, DE and EA will consider the absolute need for a further request to gather information around usage in 2024/25.
9. As well as recording the details in their School Development Plan, schools should also include information about School Development Days in their Board of Governors' Annual Report. The report should include details of the days on which the school was closed and outline the main activities carried out on each day.
10. It is the responsibility of school principals to ensure that SDDs are used appropriately for whole school and staff development and to assure themselves that the use of SDDs is having a positive impact on school improvement.
11. The Department and its partner bodies will be engaging with schools and other stakeholders further as the End to End Review of School Improvement progresses, including the workstream considering the use of SDDs and Baker Days. This will inform the future availability of SDDs beyond the 2024/25 school year.
12. Definitions of Baker Days, SDDs and Exceptional Closure days and further guidance around school improvement can be found in 'A Guide for Governors' on the DE website at the following link: [Guide to governor roles and responsibilities - \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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