

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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To: Principals of all grant-aided schools
cc: Chair of the Board of Governors

11 March 2020

CIRCULAR 2016/04: SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2016/17 TO 2017/18 SCHOOL YEARS (inclusive)

Department of Education (DE) Circular 2016/04 sets out the arrangements for schools to take up to five School Development Days (SDDs) to devote to school improvement matters. The Circular was originally due to expire on 31 July 2018, however it was decided that Circular 2016/04 would be extended for two years, therefore expiring on **31 July 2020**.

2020/2021 School Year

DE has considered the position for the 2020/21 school year and it has been decided that Circular 2016/04 will be extended for a further additional year, therefore expiring on **31 July 2021**. For planning purposes, this means that in the 2020/21 academic year schools may again take up to five SDDs for the purposes of school improvement and school/staff development. A third addendum to Circular 2016/04 is available on the DE website.

SDDs are intended to allow time for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in pursuit of school improvement and raising of standards. They provide time to devote to matters identified in School Development Plans as priorities for school development and improvement and should involve all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in planned development activities.

Schools should consider setting aside at least one SDD to conduct whole school development to support children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This is particularly important as we move towards staged implementation of the new SEN Framework.

Circular 2016/04 provides detail of what SDDs should be used for, the mechanisms for reporting the uptake and use of these days and the need to evaluate SDDs. 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.

A previous review of the use of SDDs highlighted a number of issues including confusion about the definitions of Baker Days, SDDs and Exceptional Closure days; the non-reporting of school development days to the Education Authority by some schools; limited detail in some of the returns to managing authorities about the training that is being delivered; and a lack of information about the impact and effectiveness of SDDs.

For information, definitions of Baker Days, SDDs and Exceptional Closure days can be found in 'A Guide for Governors' on the DE website at the following link:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-governor-roles-and-responsibilities>

DE will continue to evaluate the use of SDDs to inform a decision on the number of days available in future years and whether any changes are required. Schools will be kept informed of the position regarding the availability of SDDs beyond the 2020/21 school year.

I would ask Principals to bring this letter to the attention of the Chair of the Board of Governors of your school with a reminder that the school's annual report should include information on the use of SDDs. If you have any queries please contact Geraldine Catney, School Improvement Team on 02891 277640 or e-mail DEsit@education-ni.gov.uk

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