

# School Development Planning

Information for  
Boards of Management



School Development Planning Initiative

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## What is the school plan?

The school plan is a statement of the school's:

- *educational values*
- *policies*
- *priorities for development*
- *strategies for improvement*

## Should all schools not have the same plan?

No. Schools are unique. Each school operates in its own unique context and so has its own particular requirements. School plans should reflect this. Each school should plan to meet its own needs and the needs of its students in accordance with its own values.

Schools can learn from each other. Many features of a good school plan, reflecting good practice, will be common to most schools. However, policies should not be simply copied from other schools as this will not serve the school's or the students' needs.

## What is the school plan for?

The school plan is a working document (or more usually, a series of documents) in two sections. The school plan should contain (1) a permanent section, including the mission statement and school policies which guide the way things are done in the school and (2) a development section which outlines the school's strategy for improvement. The documents have value only insofar as they help the school to operate effectively in accordance with its characteristic spirit (the values and aims of the school), meet its responsibilities under law, and meet the learning needs of its students.

Planning is not an exercise undertaken to produce documents for their own sake; the documents must reflect the real life of the school, positively influence its development and focus on improving learning outcomes for students.

### Why is school development planning required by law?

The chief reasons are:

- Schools are complex organisations. They face a demanding and changing set of challenges. They need to plan to be able to manage this complexity in order not to be overwhelmed by it.
- Systematic collaborative planning focused on teaching and learning improves student achievement.
- The Education Act and other relevant pieces of recent legislation place responsibilities on schools that can be met only by careful planning and at a whole school level.
- The quality of schools varies. School development planning can help schools identify the strengths and weaknesses in different aspects of the service they provide, thereby contributing to school improvement.
- School planning promotes consistency of approach to issues such as discipline, bullying, etc., and so provides a more secure and organised learning environment.
- School planning promotes teacher professionalism and teacher learning. It is a form of professional co-operation that is vital for the delivery of a high-quality education service. It builds a team approach to the challenges that teachers face in schools and helps them to work together in order to better meet the learning needs of students.
- School planning promotes collaboration within the school community and allows everyone to take ownership of decisions made and policies agreed.
- Whole school policies can address fundamental issues facing schools today. These include the impact of social disadvantage on students' chances in school, special educational needs, and the challenge of genuinely including students of all backgrounds, abilities and ethnicity in the life of a school.
- School partners have an opportunity to contribute to the welfare and development of their school, in a climate of openness and mutual respect.

## What must be in a school plan?

The Education Act (1998) says that a school plan must state a school's measures to promote equality of access and participation, including those targeted at students with disabilities and special educational needs. Several further policies are required by law (see Appendix A).

Taking account of these requirements, schools are encouraged to decide, on the basis of sound evidence, what is important and achievable in their own circumstances and to chart their course of action accordingly. They are expected to give priority to developments that have a significant bearing on teaching and learning.

*Particular requirements apply in the case of DEIS schools. Schools participating in DEIS, the national action plan for educational inclusion, are required to have a DEIS plan as part of their school plan. A DEIS plan focuses on the following 8 areas: retention, attendance, literacy, numeracy, examination attainment, educational progression, partnership with parents, and partnership with others – schools, community, and external agencies. It is a set of action plans specifying:*

- *Targets for improvement in each area*
- *Actions or measures to achieve the targets*
- *Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation*

*In preparing the DEIS plan, schools are expected to collate and analyse their baseline data in the key areas to guide the selection of targets and improvement measures.*

## What is usually in the school plan?

School plans vary. In addition to the above requirements, typically a school plan might have some or all of the following (the list is not exhaustive):

- *School profile* (history, traditions and ethos)
- *Mission statement*
- *Policies*, especially those policies required by law or by the Department of Education and Science e.g. admissions, attendance, special needs
- A brief *history of the planning process* in the school (meetings, structures to help planning; consultations with teachers, parents, trustees/patron, students and the board of management; task groups working on particular areas; records of evaluations of planning decisions and adopted policies)
- *Priority areas* identified by the school for special attention
- *Action plans* that address the agreed priorities
- *Subject planning* issues (This might include for each subject: an agreed plan for the delivery of the syllabus written in terms of the learning outcomes the students will achieve, assessment procedures, approach to special needs and learning support, and policies promoting improved teaching practice and student learning. The subject plan should be a document that demonstrates sharing of good practice and common approaches to the teaching and learning of the subject)

- *Plan for student support (the whole-school guidance plan), outlining provision for guidance, counselling and pastoral care*
- *Any action plans the school may have drawn up to address recommendations from Subject Inspection or Whole School Evaluation reports.*

### Who draws up the school plan?

The board of management has statutory responsibility for overseeing school planning. The school partners should be consulted about relevant content of the school plan. Typically, the trustees/patron, parents and students may, for example, fill in questionnaires, attend focus group meetings or review drafts of policies or action plans. Sometimes they are more directly involved through membership of planning committees.

The greater part of the work, however, is usually done by the principal and teaching staff. Partnership is a new experience in many schools. As it is an important dimension of school planning it is best nurtured sensitively.

### Are all teachers involved in school planning?

The 'Programme for Prosperity and Fairness', which was agreed to by the Department of Education and Science and the teacher unions and management bodies, stated that school development planning was the basic element of the agreed modernisation programme in the education sector at first and second levels. The subsequent national agreement, 'Sustaining Progress' included a commitment on the part of teachers that they would continue to implement and embed school development planning in the school system. The latest national agreement, 'Towards 2016' also includes that commitment. Participation in school development planning is now part of a teacher's professional role.

### What structures are most common in a school to support planning?

While experience varies from school to school, development planning is usually overseen in the first instance by the principal. To support the planning process practically, schools usually have one or more of the following:

- A school development planning coordinator (this role is often performed by a member of the in-school management team either as a full post of responsibility or as part thereof)
- A steering committee to oversee the planning process
- Task groups, working on particular areas
- Subject Departments, with convenors or coordinators to chair meetings, keep minutes and make reports.

## In practical terms, what does school development planning entail?

In order to plan effectively, a school needs time, good planning structures and appropriately designated roles, as outlined above. The more school development planning is embedded in school routine, the better.

Those engaged in planning need to meet several times and to report back to key groups (e.g. staff meetings, parents' council/association, student council and the board of management).

Planning often requires facilitated workshops for the whole staff as well as smaller group advisory meetings, particularly if an outside facilitator is supporting the process. Facilitated meetings for other partner groups are rarer but they do occasionally take place.

Action planning has to be carried out and policies drafted, ratified and implemented. An action plan is an account of a course of action that the school will undertake to gain an improvement in an area it has prioritised for planning. It works best when it specifies what is to be done, by whom, when, how, and the planned outcomes that would indicate success.

## What is meant by the 'process' of planning?

Process means 'how' you plan. This takes time and requires collaboration and the commitment of all involved. In the end, there can be as much value in the collaboration and learning that a good planning process promotes as in the content of the finished policy or development plan.

In particular, the reflection, self-evaluation and discussion that go into good planning help all participants to learn more about their school and enrich their various roles in it, be it as teacher, parent, student, board member or patron/owner. This leads to the greater capacity of the school to meet future challenges and creates a better climate for good teaching and learning.



### What is the recommended process of planning?

While the process varies depending on the focus of the planning at any given time, there are five general features. Participants may engage in open and constructive dialogue at every stage of the process.

1. The mission, vision and aims of the school should guide the process and promote the key values of the school, especially regarding teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and the social, personal and spiritual development of the student.
2. Planning may start with a review to evaluate how the school is currently functioning. The review may focus on the school as a whole, or on a pre-selected area. The choice of a specific area for review may perhaps be guided by the Department of Education and Science Inspectorate publication, *Looking at our school: a guide to school self-evaluation*, or by recommendations from a Whole School Evaluation or Subject Inspection report. Evidence, facts and opinions may be examined to support conclusions about how the school is doing.
3. A successful review results in agreed priorities for planning. The priorities are areas or aspects of the school where improvement is seen to be most needed and achievable at this time. Not everything can or should be the subject of planning at any one time. Some things must wait till later.

A small group (often called a 'task group') is usually designated to work on each priority area. In some cases it is the subject department that is the most suitable group to do this work. Such a group can investigate further the issues raised in relation to the agreed priority and produce proposals for action or a policy statement. An action plan is most likely to be implemented effectively if it is explicit about what it is intended to achieve, what precisely needs be done, by whom and when, and what strategies will be used to measure progress.

4. Further discussion and amendment may then follow, so that the plan or policy is agreed by all partners and ratified by the Board of Management. It must then be implemented. Implementation cannot be left to chance but needs to be monitored carefully and reported on regularly. Changes may be made to the plan or policy as changing circumstances demand.
5. After a reasonable period, the policy or action plan may be evaluated to see how successful it has been in bringing about the desired outcome. Depending on the degree of success achieved, the plan or policy may be continued, changed, or stopped.

If the measures taken have been unsuccessful, it may be necessary to reconsider how the priority area can be addressed.

### What is the role of the Board of Management in the planning process?

The board is responsible for ensuring that the characteristic spirit of the school, as expressed within the school plan, is in line with the educational philosophy of the trustees/patron.

Every board should ensure that all relevant issues of principle or policy are reflected in the plan.

Since the board has a statutory responsibility for the school plan, the key elements of the plan—including priorities for development, significant proposals for action, and policies—must be ratified by the board.

The board should:

- Ask the principal to engage with the teaching staff and other partners in school development planning
- Ensure that partners are appropriately consulted and informed at all stages
- Receive regular updates on progress and offer comments on significant areas of concern or need
- Ratify, after consideration, acceptable proposals for inclusion within the plan and amend or seek further work or clarification on proposals that raise concerns
- Compile an 'annual report', including an account of progress on the achievement of objectives set out in the school plan and communicate these to parents, as outlined in Section 20 of the Education Act (1998)
- Pay close attention to Whole School Evaluation and Subject Inspection reports and consider carefully how to follow up on recommendations that have a significant whole school dimension or resource implication
- Support the planning process as required, particularly in facilitating necessary training and the reasonable allocation of resources. The board may positively commend the work done in the planning process in its communication with the partners, to help nurture a climate of collaboration and reflection in the school.

*(This list is not exhaustive.)*

Members of the board or a subcommittee of the board may play a more active role in chosen areas of the school plan, for example, drafting a particular policy, participating in a task group along with representatives of other partners, or attending facilitated planning sessions

### **Must a school plan be ratified by the board of management?**

Yes. The board is responsible for officially adopting the school plan. This authority cannot be delegated.

### **When is a school plan finished?**

Never! A school plan is best viewed as continuous work in progress. While policies may be completed and action plans for improvement carried out, these should be subject to review and evaluation. New areas for improvement can be identified in new cycles of planning. Planning works best when it is an integral part of normal school business, not something just added on to meet legal requirements or engaged in as a once off exercise.

### **How can a board keep up to date on school planning and ensure that it is meeting its responsibilities?**

- Put school development planning as a standard item on the board's agenda.
- Reflect at agreed intervals (once a year, at least) on how the school plan is progressing and whether it is developing appropriately in order to meet the real needs of the school and its students
- Reflect on whether the board is supporting the planning process adequately and whether the board itself has particular needs that must be met to enable it to support the planning process better, e.g. training or more information
- Try to meet the partners (e.g. representatives of the patron, staff, parents' association and student council) periodically to maintain good communication and ensure that every voice is heard.

## How can schools manage to plan?

Schools are very busy places and may experience difficulty in finding time to plan effectively for school improvement and meet their responsibilities under recent legislation.

This means that:

- Prioritising areas and policies of greatest importance at any given stage is essential
- Planning can progress only in stages over time
- It is best to avoid planning that is overambitious; nevertheless, it is important that planning manages to address the most important needs and developmental priorities of the school
- Boards need to consider how they can best facilitate the provision of time for planning and recognise that there is no shortcut to effective planning.

## What happens if the plan gets things wrong?

Not everything works as planned. Circumstances change. Good ideas can prove unmanageable in practice. Participants need to be encouraged to think imaginatively as well as realistically about how to improve the culture of teaching and learning in their school. Sometimes important developments carry a risk of failure as the challenges posed are formidable.

Making mistakes or finding that the plan has not taken account of unexpected circumstances does not imply bad planning. Schools should monitor and evaluate planning decisions regularly, and certainly at all key stages of implementation. Unsuccessful decisions can be identified and the necessary changes made. In this way flawed practices or policies are less likely to become part of school routine.

School development planning is also a process of learning for all those involved. Often successes generate a momentum for further change and improvement. This improvement is not likely to be achieved through a single sweeping change. It is rarely accomplished without some setbacks or amendments along the way.

## Has school development planning any relationship to whole school evaluation?

Yes. The quality of school planning is one of the five areas looked at in a whole school evaluation (the others are school management, curriculum provision, learning and teaching, and the quality of support for students). In addition, a high value is placed on effective collaboration and planning throughout the whole school evaluation process.

Whole school evaluation is designed to complement a school's self-evaluation activities. School development planning is the means by which schools may conduct self-evaluation with a view to targeting their plan for improvement where it may be most productive. The recommendations from whole school evaluations and subject inspections may be used to refocus or initiate a cycle of development planning or to support current planning priorities.

### **Is there any support for schools to help them with their school development planning?**

The School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) was established by the Department of Education and Science to support schools in school development planning. For details of the resource materials for school planning that are available for download, please consult the SDPI website – [www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie)

From September 2010, support for school planning is being provided through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

# Appendix A: Required Policies

## Appendix A: Required Policies

**This Appendix gives an indication of the main requirements that arise from legislation, departmental circulars, and official guidelines. The list of policies is not exhaustive.**

	<b>Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)</b>	<b>Source of requirement</b>	<b>Requirement for document</b>
1.	Equality of access to and participation in the school for all students, including those with disabilities or other special educational needs	Education Act 1998, 21 (2)	Explicit part of school plan
2.	Equality of opportunity for male and female staff and students	Education Act 1998, 9 (e)	
3.	Data protection	Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003 Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit
4.	Access by parents of a student (or by a student of 18+) to records relating to the educational progress of the student	Education Act 1998, 9 (g)	
5.	Integration of students with disabilities or other special educational needs – admission, participation, provision, accommodation	Education Act 1998, 15 (2) (d) & (g) EPSEN Act 2004	Extension of point 1 above
6.	Admissions	Education Act 1998, 9 (m)	Explicit
7.	Code of behaviour, including procedures for suspension and expulsion, compliant with NEWB <i>Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools</i>	Education (Welfare) Act 2000, 23 Education Act 1998, 15 (2) (d) NEWB Guidelines 2008 NEWB Audit Checklist	Explicit
8.	Anti-bullying policy	DES Guidelines 1993 DES Requirement Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit
9.	Dignity in the workplace (prevention and management of workplace bullying)	Codes of practice under 3 Acts: Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 Industrial Relations Act 1990 Employment Equality Act 1998 Codes on HSA website – <a href="http://www.hsa.ie">www.hsa.ie</a>	Explicit

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
10.	Statement of strategy for fostering appreciation of learning and encouraging attendance at school	Education (Welfare) Act 2000, 22	Explicit part of school plan
11.	Attendance – maintenance of register and attendance records, communication with EWO re individual students, annual reports to EWO and parents' association re attendance levels	Education (Welfare) Act 2000, 21	Explicit
12.	Guidance and pastoral care	Education Act 1998, 9 (c) & (d) DES Circular M37/03 DES Circular PPT12/05 DES Inspectorate: <i>Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance</i> Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	
13.	Moral and spiritual development (interpreted by some sectors as religious education/faith formation)	Education Act 1998, 9 (d)	
14.	Irish language and culture	Education Act 1998, 9 (f) & (h)	
15.	Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education--RSE)	Education Act 1998, 9 (d) DES Circulars M4/95, M20/96, CI 23/10 DES: <i>Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy Guidelines</i> RSE Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit
16.	Assessment and evaluation	Education Act 1998, 9 (k)	
17.	Homework	Standard recommendation in DES Whole School Evaluation reports	
18.	Management and staff development	Education Act 1998, 9 (j)	
19.	Substance Use	National Drugs Strategy 01-08 DES Circular 18/02 Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit
20.	Intercultural Strategies	National Children's Strategy 2000	Explicit part of school plan

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
21.	DEIS Plan (focusing on retention, attendance, literacy, numeracy, examination attainment, educational progression, partnership with parents, and partnership with others – schools, community, and external agencies)	DEIS National Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 2005 DES SIU Letters to DEIS Schools 2006, 07, 08 DEIS Templates/Guidelines on SDPI website – <a href="http://www.sdpi.ie">www.sdpi.ie</a>	Explicit requirement for schools in DEIS Programme
22.	Literacy and numeracy	National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002  DEIS National Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 2005	“All school development planning will include a focus on literacy and numeracy and the setting of targets in these two areas” Appendix A2 Explicit requirement for schools in DEIS Programme
22.	Health & Safety (including, for example, safety audit, risk assessments, fire safety procedures, first aid, out of school activities, psycho-social health, etc.)	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 HSA Guidelines Duty of care	Explicit
23.	Child Protection – adoption of DES <i>Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post-Primary Schools</i> without amendment	DES Guidelines 2004 DES Circular 62/06 Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit (The DES Guidelines <b>are</b> the policy but must be explicitly adopted by the school’s Board of Management)
24.	Internet safety – acceptable usage policy	DES Requirement Template/Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	Explicit
25.	Student Council	Education Act 1998, 27 DES Guidelines 2002 Template / Guidelines on DES website – <a href="http://www.education.ie">www.education.ie</a>	

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
26.	Healthy eating and active living	National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005 "All schools, as part of their school development planning, should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, with the necessary support from the Department of Education and Science. Such policies should address opportunities for physical activity, what is being provided in school meals, including breakfast clubs, school lunches"	

### Abbreviations

<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Science
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
<b>EPSEN</b>	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
<b>EWO</b>	Educational Welfare Officer
<b>HSA</b>	Health and Safety Authority
<b>NEWB</b>	National Educational Welfare Board
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sexuality Education
<b>SIU</b>	Social Inclusion Unit



**School Development Planning Initiative**