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The Education and Training
Inspectorate

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Report on An Evaluation of School Development Planning

in Primary and Secondary Schools

1999-2000

CONTENTS

1. THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THE REPORT ARE TO:

i. summarise the Inspectorate's findings on the quality of school development planning and the influence of the work on classroom practice in a sample of primary and secondary schools;

ii. identify the main trends, including the particular strengths and weaknesses of current practice, in school development planning;

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iii. assess the state of readiness of primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland to undertake school development planning as a statutory requirement.

2. QUANTITATIVE TERMS USED IN THE REPORT:

A number of quantitative terms are used in the report to present findings.

These terms should be interpreted as follows:

almost/nearly all	more than 90%
most	75%-90%
a majority	50%-74%
a significant minority	30%-49%
a minority	10%-29%
very few/ a small number	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of provision the Inspectorate relate their judgements to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

GRADE

1. Significant Strengths   good (ranging to outstanding)

2. Strengths outweigh weaknesses   satisfactory (ranging to good)

3. Weaknesses outweigh strengths   fair (ranging to satisfactory)

4. Significant weaknesses   poor

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1   The report is based on evidence from a sample of 23 secondary schools and 45 primary schools drawn from each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) areas; (see Appendices 1 and 2). The evidence was gathered by the District Inspectors (DIs) during planned district visits (DVs) to the schools. Two visits were made to each school: the first visit took place during the first term of the 1999-2000 academic year; the second visit took place towards the end of the second term or early in the third term. During these visits, the inspectors held discussions with principals, members of the senior management team (SMT) and teachers; they observed lessons, and examined school development plans and other relevant curriculum documentation.

3.2   A key aim of the DV was to encourage and enable schools to monitor and evaluate aspects of their own work, and thereby contribute to the raising of standards and to the promotion of a culture of self-evaluation and self-accountability, and a commitment to school improvement.

3.3   In order to provide information that might allow the Inspectorate to improve further the effectiveness of DVs, the participating schools were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the inspection exercise. A copy of the evaluation form is included as Appendix 3. A total of twenty one responses were received from the secondary schools, and forty-three from primary schools.

Almost all of the returns indicated that the schools valued the DV and found it a helpful way of reviewing aspects of their work.

In the primary schools, features commonly reported as useful were:

i.   the development of professional working relationships between the schools and the Inspectorate and the opportunity for teachers to work collaboratively with the district inspector;

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ii. the encouragement for principals and class teachers to work together to evaluate objectively their work in school development planning;

iii. the confirmation from the Inspectorate that the schools were making good progress in development planning and that this work was having a positive influence on the quality of the pupils' experiences and standards of achievement;

iv. the confidence which the DVs gave to principals and teachers in the contribution of school development planning to school improvement.

One primary school rated the exercise as neither good nor poor and a few schools suggested improvements, including:

i.   the need to review the time spent in carrying out DVs in small schools;

ii.   the need to ensure that the written report provided for the school was clear and unambiguous.

In the secondary schools, features commonly reported as useful were:

i.   the external affirmation and encouragement given to schools for the work they were doing;

ii.   the confidence which the process of the DVs gave to principals, especially new principals and teachers in the contribution of school development planning to school improvement;

iii.   the promotion of the monitoring and evaluating role of members of the SMT.

One secondary school rated the exercise as neither good nor poor and a few suggested improvements, including:

■   the need to supply examination statistics to the Inspectorate in advance in order to help set the context for the DV exercise;

■   the need to ensure that the written report provided for the school was less general.

3.4   In recent years, the school development plan (SDP) has become a common and accepted way of setting out a school's curricular and other intentions. It provides a context and a framework within which the school can monitor, evaluate and improve the nature and quality of its curricular and other provision and the standards achieved by its pupils. Its key purpose is to assist the school in identifying its strengths and weaknesses so that it can build on the former and address the latter. In so doing, it offers an effective way to harness the collective expertise of the teachers, to promote team-work, and to plan for and implement change for improvement. Evidence from inspection reports indicates that there was considerable variation in the style and quality of schools' plans. In 1998, the then Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) gave to schools

guidance and advice on development planning in the booklet 'School Development Planning' which was published as part of the 'School Improvement' series of documents. The guidance stressed the need for schools' plans to focus on major issues central to teaching and learning and on the standards of the pupils' work.

3.5   In coming to a view about development planning, the Inspectorate considered a range of factors, including:

- the nature and clarity of the current development plans;

- the effectiveness of the process of school development planning;

- the match of school development planning with general planning, classroom practice and standards of achievement;

- the overall effectiveness of the schools' development planning;

- the readiness of schools to cope with school development planning as a statutory requirement.

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4.   MAIN FINDINGS

4.1   THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - CONTEXT

4.1.1   Almost all of the schools surveyed had a SDP and in most of these the SDP was intended to extend over a period of three years; a minority of schools had produced SDPs to span two, four or five years. While very few schools had no formal SDP, they had identified a number of issues for development. In a

minority of schools, a recent change in principal meant that a new development plan had not yet been formulated to take account of the direction which the recently appointed principal and his/her staff and governors wanted to establish for the school.

4.1.2   Although, for the majority of schools, development planning is part of the management culture and some schools have extensive experience of this process to guide their work, a new impetus was given to development planning through the publication of the 'School Improvement' series of documents by the then DENI, especially the booklets 'School Development Planning' and 'Target Setting'.

4.2   THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - CONTENT

4.2.1   In most of the schools, the SDP set clear priorities which took account of the context within which the school was working and the teachers' evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. These SDPs were linked closely to the aims of the school and dealt mostly with curriculum matters; within the plans the government's priorities of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) were the most common issues addressed. In a minority of the primary schools, there was a lack of understanding about planning for school improvement and no evidence of an in-depth whole school review nor a formal audit of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

4.2.2   The SDPs, in most schools, struck an acceptable balance between development work focused on organisational and resource issues and work that is focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and the standards achieved by the pupils. In a few schools the plan focused too much on organisational and resource matters.

4.2.3   While there was a clear focus and an appropriate emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and on standards of achievement in the majority of the SDPs, in a significant minority of both primary and secondary schools, the development plans did not address adequately the quality of teaching and learning and improvements in the standards of the pupils' achievements.

4.2.4   Effective school development plans identified the steps which the school intended to take to achieve its objectives. A common way of working which many secondary schools found to be both practical and valuable was for

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baseline position to be devised for each priority. In these instances, action plans set out details of specific targets and the approaches to be used; they also identified those responsible for the action. In addition, procedures were set out clearly and reviewed continually by various committees, ensuring that appropriate checks and balances were built into the process. Regular progress reports allowed adjustments to be made to the development plan. In a minority of secondary schools, where development planning was ineffective, there was no indication of realistic short, medium or long-term goals identified by the school and there was no mention of any intermediate, explicit steps to be taken by the school to chart its actions and to implement fully its plan.

4.2.5   Just under one half of school development plans identified effectively 'success criteria' related particularly to improvements expected in teaching, learning experiences or the standards of the pupils' work. The majority of schools did not identify expected outcomes or link them to specific teaching and learning objectives. In the minority of schools, where success criteria and stated outcomes were effectively used, they were linked to improvements in the pupils' experiences and they usually entailed monitoring closely the pupils' work. In such cases, the schools were confident in their ability to evaluate success, the success criteria were quantifiable, and included the following:

- the setting of realistic targets based on benchmarking data made available to schools by the Department of Education (DE);

- measurable improvements in outcomes and achievements in key stage assessments and public examinations;

- increased rates of attendance;

- and uptake in extra-curricular and other activities which reflected the ethos of the school.

4.2.6   In the majority of those schools which had identified success criteria, these were expressed in broad terms and the expected outcomes were not sufficiently specific. In a minority of the primary schools the baseline situation was not yet established clearly, expected outcomes were too general and the staff had a poor understanding of the need to set criteria based on an evaluation of the current position with regard to the quality of the learning outcomes.

4.2.7   Development plans were well-costed and were matched closely to the school's financial planning, especially in relation to staff training and resources, in just under one-half of all of the schools sampled. Development plans needed to be aligned more closely to the school's budget in the majority of both primary and secondary schools. Often, there was little indication in either the development plan or the accompanying action plans of details concerning costs for staff training, staff time, substitute cover, resourcing and the use of outside agencies required to implement fully the plan. In a few secondary schools, and in a significant minority of the primary schools, there was no estimate of any budgetary implications.

4.2.8   The development plans of most schools set priorities which were manageable in their breadth and depth, realistic and achievable, and they included timescales for key objectives. A minority of schools worked on too many priorities simultaneously, giving too little time to address fully and completely the issues, or causing difficulties in monitoring and managing the plan. In the best practice, the process of evaluation and development was a continuous one and was embedded in the life of the school; within these schools the staff recognised the need for school development planning and they worked well together to achieve their goals.

4.3   THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - PROCESS

4.3.1   Almost all schools consulted extensively with their staff, senior staff, and in some cases, with the curriculum and advisory support service (CASS) of the ELBs, prior to drawing up their development plans; in a few instances, the governors were kept informed of the SDP and of current and future curricular developments, in a few secondary schools and in most of the primary schools, CASS was informed so that training could be implemented to support the priorities identified in the plan. Most schools acknowledged the efforts of CASS in supporting the work of the school in development planning. In about half of the primary schools the parents were consulted about, or informed of, the work which the school was doing in relation to development planning and in a few of the secondary schools pupils were consulted through student councils which reported their perspective to members of the senior management team (SMT).

4.3.2   Most schools drew upon an appropriate evidence base to determine the nature and priorities of the SDP. For example, the staff's view of the school's strengths and weaknesses was taken into account in most schools, usually on staff development days. In secondary schools, curriculum audits were carried out across departments in order to establish baseline positions in key areas of the school's work such as literacy, numeracy and ICT.

4.3.3   A few schools, both primary and secondary, have been particularly rigorous and thorough in gathering evidence to help formulate their plans by:

- ■   considering explicitly the nature and quality of the pupils' classroom work, as a result of observation of classes;

- monitoring and evaluating the pupils' written work on a regular basis;

- reviewing the pupils' achievements in key stage assessments.

4.3.4   In a small number of secondary schools a detailed evaluation of external examination results, including an analysis of the data, obtained from the Computerised Local Administration System for Schools (CLASS), informed the development plans. Target-setting and benchmarking based on DE circulars are only beginning to influence development planning in both primary and secondary schools.

4.3.5   A significant minority of development plans did not identify procedures to monitor and report on progress made towards achieving the plan's objectives and lacked evaluative analysis of the impact of development. The majority of schools, however, have suitable procedures built in at the planning stage to monitor, evaluate and report regularly on the progress of implementing their SDPs.   Principals reported that, often, changes had to be made to development plans to take account of issues which were outside the control of the school, for example, the cost of vandalism, changes in enrolment, priorities for ELB support and changing government priorities.   In small primary schools particular difficulties arose since the success or failure of the development planning process depended on a very few people; changes in staffing or staff illness had an adverse effect on the quality and influence of development planning in a very few instances.

4.4   THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - QUALITY, EFFECTIVENESS AND READINESS

4.4.1   Of the 45 primary schools surveyed, just under one-half displayed significant strengths in the overall quality and effectiveness of development planning. Weaknesses were identified in particular aspects of development planning in a significant minority of primary schools.   In the majority of the primary schools where the process of school development planning had been promoted and implemented actively over a number of years, progress has been good.   In these schools the effective manner in which the process has been carried out has resulted in agreed action and improvements which benefited the children and helped to set clear standards of good practice.

Almost all of the primary schools were at a stage where they were ready to undertake school development planning as a statutory requirement.

4.4.2   The following features were identified in those primary schools where there were significant strengths in development planning:

- the effective leadership and the vision of the principal in developing a climate of review and development;

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- the commitment and willing participation of the staff;

- a strong sense of team work;

- school development planning based on a clear assessment of need and an approach which set realistic targets;

- the clear arrangements in place to support the work in development planning;

- an appropriate emphasis on continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning;

- clear and active support from the SMT and co-ordinators;

- the targeting of sufficient resources to meet objectives;

- good support from ELB CASS;

- the strong culture of self-evaluation and self-accountability;
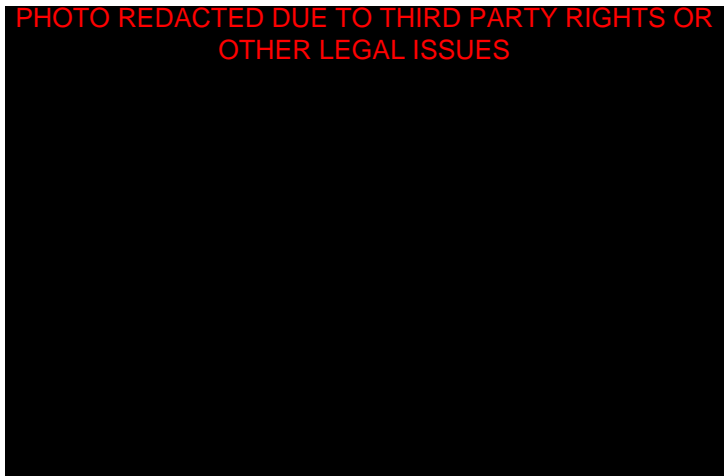
- the confidence of teachers in implementing strategies which had been discussed during the review and development process;

- the improvements which the teachers observed in the quality of the children's learning experiences and the standards they attained;

- appropriate in-service support which was well matched to the development plan;

- the account which the plan took of the context of the school and the use of an appropriate range of evidence;

- the development of a plan which was seen by the staff to be manageable and practicable.

4.4.3   In those primary schools where there were weaknesses in the work related to development planning there was a need to:

- evaluate and articulate more clearly specific strengths and weaknesses within the school;

- take more account of the context of the school in determining a development plan which was manageable;

- express more clearly the intentions in terms of outcomes in teaching, learning experiences and standards of work;

- prioritise and indicate the steps to be taken in achieving the objectives and to give more thought to the costing of the SDP;

- have a better match between the development plan and in-service training;

- take more account of the outcomes of assessment and to engage more fully in benchmarking and target setting;

- establish clearer procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of the influence of the development plan on the work of the school;

- identify more clearly the specific success criteria for expected improvements;

- review more regularly the priorities within the development plan and take account of the changing context of the school.

4.4.4   A majority of the secondary schools in the sample produced effective and good quality development plans; these schools are at a stage where they are ready to undertake development planning as a statutory requirement. In these schools, the concept of development planning was well-established and the plans were having a positive influence on their work. Departmental planning was aligned closely to, and reflected fully the targets and priorities of, the development plan in the majority of schools visited. Classroom practice suggested that less progress was being made, particularly in relation to the priority of improving teaching and learning, and the standards of the pupils' work. There was often a difference between the intention of raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning, and the practice. The majority of the secondary schools in the sample found development planning to be an effective way of working; they were fully committed to and involved in the process of development planning as a means of managing and improving the school. Most schools were integrating successfully into their plans the DE's whole-school themes of literacy, numeracy and ICT along with their own identified areas of need and development.

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4.4.5   The following features were identified in those secondary schools where there were significant strengths in development planning:

- a greater involvement of staff in the process of systematic whole-school review and development; staff's views had been sought, taken into account and valued;

- an increased sense of ownership of and commitment to development planning;

- improved communications among management and staff;

- a more collegial approach to, and collective responsibility for, planning within the school;

- a sharp identification of the school's priorities with good concentration on curricular issues;

- enhanced opportunities for staff development;

- the promotion of a strong management culture and cycle of forward planning, frequent review and evaluation of progress in key areas of the school's work;

- an increased focus on areas designed to enhance the quality of the pupils' learning and attainment;

- suitable account taken of DE's whole-school priorities of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

4.4.6   In those secondary schools where there were weaknesses in the work related to development planning there was a need to:

- reduce in number and prioritise the areas for development;

■ consider the extent to which the planning focuses explicitly on effecting improvements in teaching, the quality of the pupils' learning and the standards they achieve;

■ align development planning more closely to financial planning;

■ develop arrangements to monitor and evaluate progress more effectively;

■ match more carefully whole-school development planning and departmental planning;

■ clarify targets and action plans based on a rigorous analysis of the school's current position;

■ engage more fully in target-setting and benchmarking.

5.   CONSTRAINTS

5.1   The following difficulties preventing the successful implementation of development planning were encountered by a minority of schools:

■ the unwillingness of some staff to countenance a change of culture whereby they were consulted and expected to contribute to whole-school development;

■ the refusal or lack of confidence of staff to engage in self-evaluation as part of the development planning process;

- the demotivation or disaffection of some staff, and their reluctance to participate in, or commit fully to, a process which they found to be too demanding;

- the reported inconsistencies in the frequency and quality of the service provided by CASS at both whole-school and departmental level;

- the problems encountered by staff in setting, monitoring and working towards specific targets.

6.   CONCLUSION

6.1   In those schools where there was effective planning, it included rigorous procedures to monitor action and progress based on measurable specifics, and identified personnel with the responsibility to carry out this work. In the main, however, the key elements of school improvement, target-setting and benchmarking were given insufficient attention.

6.2   A few schools had not progressed beyond the stage of reviewing and assessing their strengths and weaknesses; they needed guidance and support on to how to see through the central issues. A few schools too needed to reduce the number of the priorities on which they were working and address more fully the central issues.

6.3   In a few instances, schools were taking responsibility for their own continuous improvement through development planning and self-evaluation. This was contributing to improvements in the pupils' work, in the standards they attained and in the increased effectiveness of teaching and learning. More schools, however, need to place teaching and learning issues at the heart of the development planning process in order to effect improvement.

6.4   A majority of schools approached development planning in a sound and measured way; they have made good progress in this way of working and they are well-advanced in their state of readiness to move forward on this issue.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS VISITED

Ardmore PS, Craigavon

Ballycarry PS, Carrickfergus

Ballylifford PS, Cookstown

Blackmountain PS, Belfast

Brownlee PS, Lisburn

Buick Memorial PS, Ballymena

Carnalbanagh PS, Glenarm

Chapel Road PS, Londonderry

Clonalig PS, Crossmaglen

Cranmore Integrated PS, Belfast

Crossgar PS

Currie PS, Belfast

Deervaghroy PS, Omagh

Glencraig PS, Holywood

Greenwood PS, Belfast

Holy Cross Girls PS, Belfast

Holy Rosary PS, Belfast

Killean PS, Newry

Killowen PS, Rostrevor

Killyman PS, Dungannon

Limavady Central PS

Maze PS, Lisburn

Moyle PS, Larne

Nazareth House PS, Londonderry

O'Neill Memorial PS, Crossnacreevy

Portglenone PS

Portrush PS

Rathmore PS, Bangor

Roan PS, Dungannon

Springfarm PS, Antrim

St Columba's PS, Claudy

St Francis PS, Banbridge

St John the Baptist PS, Portadown

St John the Baptist PS, Roscor

St Malachy's PS, Castlewellan

St Mary's PS, Aghadowey

St Mary's PS, Dungannon

St Mary's PS, Saintfield

St Matthew's PS, Limavady

St Ronan's PS, Lisnaskea

St Teresa's PS, Omagh

Tildarg PS, Ballyclare

Tir-na-nOg PS, Ballyclare

Trillick PS, Omagh

Wheatfield PS, Belfast

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS VISITED

City of Armagh HS

Downshire CHS, Carrickfergus

Markethill HS

Masserene College, Antrim

Movilla HS, Newtownards

North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine

Omagh Academy

Our Lady of Mercy HS, Belfast

Rainey Endowed GS, Magherafelt

Rathmore GS, Belfast

Royal Belfast Academical Institution

Saintfield HS

St Brecan's HS, Londonderry

St Ciaran's HS, Ballygawley

St Colman's College, Newry

St Eugene's HS, Castlederg

St Joseph's HS, Enniskillen

St Mark's HS, Warrenpoint

St Mary's Downpatrick

St Mary's HS, Limavady

St Mary's JHS, Lurgan

St McNissi's Garron Tower, Carnlough

The High School, Ballynahinch

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The Education and Training
Inspectorate

EVALUATION FORM: DISTRICT VISITS: SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING 1999-2000

Name of School: _____ **Reference Number:** _____

Do you consider that:

1. The purpose of the District Visit was clear? Yes No

2. The requests for information made reasonable demands on the school? Yes No

3. School Development Planning was an issue of sufficient importance for the District Visit? Yes No

4. The District Visit was helpful to you (and others) as a way of reviewing aspects of the school's work? Yes No

5. The time spent on the District Visit was valuable to the school? Yes No

6. In terms of professional value to the school, how would you rate the procedure of the District Visit? **Please tick one box.** Yes No

   Good ☐   Neither Good Nor Poor ☐   Poor ☐

7. Thank you for your comments. In order to help us review and develop our procedures further we would welcome any additional comments you may wish to make on the existing practice and future potential of the District Visit.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Please return completed form to: Mrs E Wells, Inspection Services Branch,
                                       Department of Education, Rathgael House,
                                       43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR

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