

**Circular Number: 2023/09**

**Subject:**

**SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2023/24 SCHOOL  
YEAR**

**Date of Issue: 20 June 2023**

**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.

**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 2023/24 school year.

**Enquiries:**

Any enquiries about the content of this circular should be addressed to:

School Improvement Team  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
BANGOR,  
BT19 7PR

**Governor Awareness:**  
Essential

**Status of Contents:**  
For information and  
action by schools

**Related Documents:**  
DE Circular 2016/04  
2016/04 Addendum  
2016/04 2<sup>nd</sup> Addendum  
2016/04 3<sup>rd</sup> Addendum  
DE Circular 2021/08  
DE Circular 2022/06

**Expiry Date:** 31 July 2024

**DE Website:**  
[Department of Education NI](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

**E-mail:**  
[DEsit@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DEsit@education-ni.gov.uk)

## SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2023/24 SCHOOL YEAR

1. The purpose of this circular is to advise schools that in the 2023/24 academic year they may 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. The expiry date for use of these days will be **31 July 2024**.
2. 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 and any interim plans developed due to COVID-19, as priorities for school development and improvement and should involve all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in planned development activities.
3. In 2023/24, schools should consider setting aside a 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.
4. In addition, the Department requires all grant-aided schools to have a RSE policy based on the ethos of their school; this is subject to consultation with parents and pupils and should be kept under review to inform the school's taught RSE programme. Schools may wish to consider using a SDD to support staff development and self-evaluation with a focus on the preventative curriculum including RSE.
5. The emotional health and wellbeing of both staff and pupils is of crucial importance. Schools may wish to consider prioritising the use of a SDD to develop whole school approaches to supporting emotional health and wellbeing.
6. This circular should be read in conjunction with Circular 2016/04 which provides details 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.

7. The Department has commenced an End-to-End Review of School Improvement, which will fundamentally consider DE's policy in relation to school improvement. The Review will include consideration of the future use of SDDs.
8. Furthermore, a Review of the Accountability Framework progressed as part of the commitments made in the Teachers' Pay and Workload Agreement 2017-19 has recently been completed, which refers to the use of SDDs. The review report is currently being considered by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) and will be used to inform the End-to-End Review of School Improvement. DE will engage with school leaders as that review progresses.
9. The Department will advise on the future availability of SDDs beyond the 2023/24 school year, taking account of any developments emanating from the Reviews outlined above.
10. 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. 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: [Guide to governor roles and responsibilities - \(opens in a new window\)](#)



**JEFF BROWN**  
**School Improvement Team**