

**Subject:**

**SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS  
2026/27 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**Circular Number: 2026/12**

**Date of Issue: 4 March 2026**

**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
- Teacher Unions.

**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  
DE Circular 2023/09  
DE Circular 2024/08  
DE Circular 2025/04  
DE Circular 2026/10

**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 2026/27 school year.

**Expiry Date:** 31 July 2027

**Enquiries:**

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

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# SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2026/27 ACADEMIC YEAR

## Introduction

1. The purpose of this circular is to provide further advice, subsequent to Circular 2026/10, around the Department of Education's (DE) exceptional approval to enable schools to 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 2026/27 academic year only. The expiry date for use of these days will be 31 July 2027.

## 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 used for this purpose during 2026/27.
3. The continuation of this provision recognises the time that is needed to support the School Development Planning process and matters identified in School Development Plans (SDPs) as priorities for **whole school development and improvement** involving all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in planned development activities. These activities include:
  - schools' engagement in the School Development Planning process including rigorous self-evaluation, taking account of data and other evidence, in support of school improvement and the raising of standards and closing of the gap between those most and least disadvantaged and between boys and girls, particularly standards in literacy and numeracy;
  - the continued delivery of the statutory curriculum;
  - 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 - this does NOT include parent/teacher consultations or pupil report writing.
4. 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

5. The utilisation of SDDs reduces the days in which pupils are engaged in learning. 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.
6. 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).
7. In December 2025, the Education Minister also agreed to provide additional closure days to facilitate schools to undertake activity contributing to the TransformedED agenda. This has **temporarily reduced the requirement to 182 days in 2026/27**.
8. As per normal procedure, schools should submit their requested proposed dates for using SDDs to the Education Authority (EA) within their school calendar returns.
9. There should be a clear and transparent link between the schools' areas of focus in the School Development Plan (SDP) and how SDDs are utilised for the purposes of school improvement. The one-year action plan(s) developed as part of the SDP process may include detail of how SDDs will be used. Schools must also include information about SDDs 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 and the Board of Governors 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. SDDs are intended to be used as a full day in school when all staff work together on school improvement related work. The use of twilight sessions after school as an alternative to full day SDDs is not permitted except with the prior approval in advance from the Department in exceptional circumstances only.
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).

## Review of the use of Baker Days and SDDs

13. The Department's [TransformED NI strategy for teaching and learning excellence](#) contains a commitment to review the use of Baker Days and SDDs. As a result of this review the Department concluded that additional non-contact days have considerable benefits and consideration should be given to provision in the longer-term. The Department will therefore progress legislative change to create flexibility for this provision and to consider how best such days can support improvement coherently and efficiently across the education system.

14. A copy of the Executive summary of the [review of SDDs and Baker Days](#) can be found on the Department's website.
15. Whilst the review recommends alignment of some or all SDDs, the Department has not moved to implement this element in 2026/27 due to the specification of dates for the exceptional additional days for TransformED related activity.

Kathryn Menary  
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