

Education and Training Inspectorate

**Quality Assurance
of Reports from the
Education and Library Boards, and Schools,
of the Operation of the Development and
Dissemination of Good Practice and Innovation
in Schools Initiative (DDGPI)**

September 1999-June 2002

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The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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1. CONTEXT

1.1 The Development and Dissemination of Good Practice and Innovation in Schools Initiative (DDGPI) was launched initially to provide resources for schools over the period 1999/2000 to 2001/02; the funding was extended later to include the 2002/03 financial year. The funding linked to the initiative was provided to enable those schools which had demonstrated good practice, or curricular or management innovation, to develop further that good practice or innovation, and to disseminate these developments to other schools; the examples of good practice or innovation would also be disseminated to other schools by the Curriculum and Advisory Support Services (CASS) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

1.2 Across the three financial years mentioned in paragraph 1.1 above, the total resources made available to the schools involved across Northern Ireland were £580,000, £1.9 million, and £3 million respectively. In the first year, up to £350,000 was allocated to schools situated in, or serving, areas of social deprivation. In subsequent years, at least 50% of the resources available were allocated to schools in such circumstances.

1.3 The ELBs invited schools to bid for the additional resources available through the DDGPI. The schools were required to demonstrate evidence of good practice/innovation, and to submit a plan for the further development and dissemination of that good practice/innovation. A Steering Group in each ELB, subject to terms and conditions determined by the Steering Group, and taking cognisance of guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) for the DDGPI, received bids and allocated resources to the schools. All participating schools were required to work with CASS in the wider dissemination of good practice/innovation with other schools, including schools in other ELBs.

1.4 The Steering Groups considered bids against the following criteria:

- the nature and quality of the proposal;
- evidence of improvement in curriculum outcomes over the previous three years;
- evidence of ongoing good practice;
- plans for monitoring and evaluating the initiative or innovation; and
- plans for the dissemination of good practice/innovation within the school.

1.5 A key element of the initiative was to ensure that the good practice/innovation was disseminated to a wider audience. A pre-condition for a school obtaining additional resources, was that it would support CASS in this dissemination, either by assisting CASS in delivering in-service training (INSET), or by writing descriptions of the good practice/innovation to be published or made available through the Northern Ireland Network for Education (NINE).

1.6 The ELBs were expected to monitor and evaluate the operation of each school's proposal, with schools submitting a progress report to their respective ELB Steering Group. Individual ELBs wrote a report of the operation and effectiveness of the DDGPI in their area. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate), carried out a quality assurance inspection (QAI) of the reports from schools on their work in the initiative, and also of the reports from the five ELBs. The QAI was undertaken in order to help assure the quality of good practice or innovation before subsequent dissemination to other schools.

2. THE EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 In the QAI, the Inspectorate carried out an external audit of the internal audit reports produced by the ELBs, including the reports from participating schools, in order to assess the level of success of the initiative. The QAI included an evaluation of the efficacy of the procedures used by each ELB in drawing up their internal audit reports, and an evaluation of the validity of the conclusions and recommendations presented in the internal audit reports.

2.2 In each ELB, two inspectors were responsible for leading the QAI. In arriving at their evaluations, each inspection team:

- discussed with senior officers the internal audit report, together with the supporting information provided by each ELB;
- scrutinised other relevant documentation, including applications and reports provided by individual schools to their respective Steering Groups;
- visited a selection of primary and post-primary schools involved in the DDGPI, talked to the teachers involved in the initiative, and evaluated the impact of the DDGPI on the provision within the school; and
- held discussions with the ELB personnel involved in the overall management of the DDGPI, and evaluated their management of the DDGPI and of the internal audit conducted by the ELB.

2.3 A number of quantitative terms are used throughout the report. 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%

3. THE MAIN FINDINGS EMERGING FROM ACROSS THE FIVE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

3.1 The findings are based on evidence from the reports produced by the ELBs, from the schools' own reports, and as a result of the visits to the schools by members of the Inspectorate.

3.2 Nearly all of the schools operated professionally and competently within the objectives and procedures set out in the DE guidance for the DDGPI. The participating schools initiated a varied, and often innovative range of projects.

3.3 Through the oversight of the Steering Groups (consisting of officials from the ELBs and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)), and the work of CASS at all levels, there has been good support for the initiative. The schools reported positively on the quality of this support.

3.4 The Steering Group in each ELB provided sound management of the allocation of funds under the initiative.

3.5 In the participating schools, the staff involved worked diligently on their chosen focus and there was, in general, good progress in the areas identified for development. The wide range of topics included aspects of literacy, numeracy, the raising of academic achievement, the use of information and communication technology (ICT), the development of pastoral care, and support for pupils with special educational needs.

3.6 The quality of the action plans submitted by the schools, as part of their bid for DDGPI funding, improved substantially over the period of the initiative; this improvement was largely the result of effective CASS support. There was much reshaping of action plans at the end of the first year; in the following years, however, the action plans prepared by the schools were more refined and better

focused. The further refinement of the action plans remains an area for improvement.

3.7 Most of the schools in the initiative are making good progress in the areas targeted in their action plans. Furthermore, the improvements in the quality of the action plans, including the closer monitoring by the schools of the progress and outcomes of the initiative, indicate clearly that they (the schools) are becoming more adept at self-evaluation. This good practice could usefully be extended across all schools within the initiative, and the Inspectorate sees this as a priority for future work by both the schools and the ELBs.

3.8 In all of the schools visited, there was evidence of progress and discernible gains in the range of teaching approaches being developed and disseminated.

3.9 The principals and staff in the schools involved commented positively on:

- the ample opportunities to disseminate aspects of good practice, particularly within their own school;
- the beneficial impact on staff development; and
- the sense of strengthened collegiality, particularly through the discussions about, and the implementation of, new learning and teaching methods.

The Inspectorate findings, based on the evidence submitted by the ELBs and the schools, and gathered during the school visits, concur with these comments.

3.10 The support of the principal and senior management was crucial in ensuring the success of the initiative in the schools.

3.11 In most of the schools visited, the findings of the QAI indicate that even relatively small amounts of financial support, targeted effectively on raising attainment, acted as a catalyst for improvement.

3.12 The effective operation of the initiative has involved ELB officers in much additional and intensive support. Given the growth in the number of schools applying to enter the DDGPI, there are future priorities for action, in particular the need for:

- the improved gathering of first-hand evidence, by both schools and the ELBs, in order to support the evaluations of the outcomes within the schools and across the ELBs; and
- the further promotion of the dissemination of good practice developed within and across schools.

3.13 CONCLUSION

3.13.1 All five ELBs participated willingly in the quality assurance process; they built well on their previous experience of the QAI of their contribution to the outworking of the School Support Programme (SSP). The outcomes and recommendations recorded in each ELB report are, in the main, valid. The internal audit teams drew on a range of evidence including completed applications for DDGPI funding from schools, school action plans, and written reports of progress made within the DDGPI.

3.13.2 The ELBs' internal audit reports, and the schools' reports to the ELBs should make clearer:

- the range of first-hand qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered to demonstrate improvements resulting from the use of DDGPI funding; and
- the overall findings and recommendations for action.

3.13.3 The Inspectorate's external evaluation of the ELBs' audits of the implementation of the DDGPI endorse many of the strengths highlighted. These strengths include the:

- improved staff morale and a growing sense of collegiality in many of the schools;
- additional mechanisms for funding schools other than those in the School Support Programme (SSP);
- opportunity for schools to opt into the process and to accept ownership of it;
- increase in the number of schools engaging in a critical self-evaluation of their work;
- progress and real improvements in learning and teaching in many of the participating schools;
- greater encouragement for the sharing of good practice within and across schools;
- clear evidence that, in many schools, relatively small amounts of financial support can have a major impact through the good practice developed;

- ongoing improvement in the setting of clear and realistic targets as part of the action planning process; and
- development of, and the recognition given to, good practice across a wide range of projects.

3.13.4 The key areas for improvement are the need:

- to increase the gathering and use of accurate, first-hand qualitative and quantitative evidence within and across schools and the ELBs, in order to validate the findings, and to support the process of any future self-evaluation(s); and
- in most ELBs to focus more on facilitating the wider dissemination of good practice/innovation within and across schools, including schools across the ELBs.

3.13.5 The preparation of the internal reports by the ELBs, together with accompanying appendices, provides a sound foundation for the future quality assurance of other aspects of the Boards' work, and is assisting CASS with its work in promoting self-evaluation in schools.

3.13.6 Overall, the DDGPI supports schools well in the development and, to a lesser extent, the dissemination of good practice/innovation which focused mostly on improving learning and teaching.

3.13.7 The DDGPI provided time and resources to promote effective and ongoing school improvement, and did so within a sound framework and at a reasonable cost.

3.13.8 In summary, the DDGPI is a worthwhile initiative which has made good use of the funding allocated to it. The inspection has also identified some areas for improvement which, if addressed successfully, have the potential to improve further the future operation of the initiative.

4. THE BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (BELB)

4.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

4.1.1 Many of the schools in, or serving, areas of social deprivation within the BELB area have been supported by this initiative. Few post-primary schools, however, have to date, participated in the DDGPI; in particular no selective post-primary schools have been involved. The lack of involvement of post-primary schools was most noticeable in the first two years of the initiative. In the fourth cohort, however, there was a considerable increase in the participation of post-

primary schools. Special schools and nursery schools opted into the initiative in cohorts two and three respectively. Overall, increasing numbers of schools are participating in the initiative, and all of them are participating in a two-year development programme. By 2005, the BELB estimates that up to 85 schools will be involved in the initiative within the Board's area.

4.1.2 The DDGPI was managed and co-ordinated by a Steering Group consisting of officials from BELB and the CCMS; CASS officers from the BELB provided in-school and on-going support.

4.1.3 The Steering Group considered closely the bids made by individual schools. Applicant schools were required to demonstrate evidence of good practice, submit a plan for its further development, and to disseminate that good practice within their own schools; the potential for the success of a school's project, as judged by the Steering Group, was a key factor in approving a bid. The criteria and guidance for the use of DDGPI funding, drawn up by the Steering Group in BELB, were clear and in line with DE guidelines.

4.1.4 It was expected that schools would outline how they intended to monitor and evaluate the progress and success of their initiative in the form of an action plan; the process of action planning also addressed the baseline position and targets for each group, and this process created ownership by the schools of individual projects. The Steering Group examined carefully all individual bids and scored each against the criteria outlined in the DE guidelines. The Steering Group then took the ultimate decision on the bids to be selected. The BELB gave detailed feedback to all applicants; unsuccessful bids received clarification and encouragement for developmental improvements in preparation for the next cohort submission date; up to 50% of schools availed of this assistance. A sample of schools, in which the aims and objectives were unclear, was invited to attend the Steering Group meeting in order to discuss their application; this gave the Steering group members a clearer overview of the potential effectiveness of individual projects. It also allowed members of the Steering Group to challenge the parameters of some of the initiatives, encourage more innovative work, and add suggestions as to how projects could move forward and improve value for money. There was much reshaping of action plans at the end of the first year of the initiative; in the following years, however, the action plans had become more refined and better focused.

4.1.5 Although several clusters of schools are engaged in wide-reaching projects such as 'Poetry in Motion', 'Thinking Skills' and the 'Early Learning Programme', the individual schools concerned are still obliged to provide their own action plans. In a few instances, the finances allocated to the schools were used for substitute cover, and the consequent release of a teacher allowed the project to move forward more

effectively. Over the period 1999-2003, the BELB allocated to schools all of the monies earmarked for DDGPI spending. The BELB monitored how schools spent the finances they received for the DDGPI. The schools involved submitted a report at the end of each year outlining their expenditure and, in addition, CASS officers visited the schools to verify the expenditure.

4.1.6 The progress and success of each school initiative were monitored and evaluated systematically. Schools used the BELB guidance framework to assess the impact of their projects in relation to the original aims, and produced interim and final reports. The BELB monitored developments related to the DDGPI in several ways. First, the principals of a sample of participating schools reported to the Steering Group at monthly meetings and secondly, CASS officers produced qualitative reports after visiting the schools concerned. In addition, a CASS database, updated on a monthly basis, was used to record specific areas of development and progress that had taken place. All schools engaged professionally and competently with the objectives of the DDGPI.

4.1.7 The internal quality assurance of this initiative, carried out by the BELB, was comprehensive and rigorous. However, while the BELB's report on the initiative states that progress was satisfactory in all instances, the Inspectorate found that progress was uneven, ranging from several schools which achieved outstanding success to others in which the rate of progress was relatively slower.

4.1.8 In the fourth year of the initiative, the BELB organised three dissemination conferences to celebrate the success of the initiative and to introduce the process and outcomes to other schools; this conference allowed for the formal dissemination of 18 projects. In addition, a further five projects were disseminated through the NINE website. Three separate projects, all involved in a consortium arrangement of a large number of schools, were disseminated by other means. For example, resource materials associated with the 'Thinking Skills' project were produced and distributed to other schools, and the 'Poetry in Motion' project was mediated by means of a public performance of the pupils' work. The BELB intends to set up a website dedicated to the DDGPI projects. The BELB also reports that a minority of the projects were disseminated beyond Northern Ireland schools due to the interest shown by educationalists from other countries. Several individual schools reported that they planned to disseminate the good practice developing from their projects to other schools. In post-primary schools, dissemination strategies have included the involvement of several departments and the mediation of information and approaches, for example, language across the curriculum. One school had visits from many other schools, both within and beyond the BELB area, in order to learn from its approaches for enhancing literacy standards among boys.

4.2 SCHOOL VISITS

4.2.1 The Inspectorate visited a sample of schools as part of its external quality assurance of the DDGPI. The schools involved were engaged in a rich, varied and innovative range of projects, chosen by them, and approved by the Steering Group. The principals and teachers displayed strong commitment and had worked assiduously on their adopted topics. The topics in the schools visited included the Primary Movement Programme, parental involvement, literacy and numeracy support, circle time, the development of play therapy, the use of ICT in learning and assessment, music technology, and citizenship.

4.2.2 The teachers working on these projects had carried out effective and detailed action planning. The principals reported that other aspects of their work benefited as a result of engaging in the process of planning for improvement. In all of the schools visited, good progress had been made, and real improvements were evident in the range of teaching approaches developed and the short-term learning outcomes achieved by the pupils. Among the benefits that accrued from taking part in the initiative, the principals and teachers emphasised the opportunities taken to disseminate aspects of good practice, in particular, within their own school, and the positive influence of this dissemination on staff development. The support of the principal for the DDGPI school co-ordinator was a crucial factor in ensuring the success of the DDGPI, especially in primary schools.

4.2.3 In the best practice, the DDGPI challenged school leaders to devise the best possible implementation strategy for the project, created a strong commitment from the teachers involved, drew in support from governors, led to the productive engagement of parents and, in some instances, resulted in greater collegiality among the whole staff.

4.2.4 All the DDGPI schools produced an interim report at the end of their first year in the initiative. Most of the schools evaluated thoroughly how they were achieving their development targets as indicated in their submissions and action plans. The reports dealt appropriately with the impact of the project on pupil achievement and learning, and on improving teaching approaches. The BELB provided valuable guidance and advice to schools, enabling them to review the development focus of their project and to revise their action plans. Most schools reported that CASS support was good, although not all schools required such support.

4.3 CONCLUSION

4.3.1 The Inspectorate's external evaluation of the BELB's audit of the implementation of the DDGPI found many strengths. These include the:

- positive contribution made by DDGPI to the school improvement programme in a number of schools;
- invitational nature of the DDGPI allowing schools to opt into the process and to accept ownership of it;
- strict adherence by the BELB to the selection criteria for schools as laid down in the advice provided by DE;
- rigorous procedures instigated by the BELB to assure the success of the DDGPI;
- valuable guidance and advice given by the BELB to schools, thus enabling them to review the development focus of their project and to revise their action plans;
- effective involvement of CASS in supporting the work in schools;
- challenge for schools to engage in critical self-evaluation and to develop a culture of improvement into their working practices, leading to the raising of educational standards;
- progress and real improvements made in learning and teaching in a number of schools;
- useful start made to the sharing of good practice within and across schools; and
- setting of clear and realistic targets by schools as part of the action planning process.

4.3.2 The key areas for improvement are the need to:

- attract more post-primary schools, and especially, selective post-primary schools into the DDGPI; and
- gather more accurate evidence on the progress made by schools involved in the initiative.

4.3.3 The DDGPI has supported schools effectively to develop and disseminate a series of worthwhile projects. It acted as a catalyst for schools to take a leading role in and a responsibility for developing aspects of their own practice. The projects were chosen by the school and developed within the school. The DDGPI process provided time, finances and other resources to schools as well as a sound framework for on-going school improvement through rigorous action planning. A great deal has been achieved by all who have participated in the DDGPI. It entailed much additional work for the BELB officers. At times they report that they were unable to monitor developments as closely as they would have liked given the steady growth in the number of schools entering into the DDGPI.

4.3.4 The members and officers of the BELB, the schools and the local and wider community can have confidence in the work being undertaken in schools under the DDGPI and in the quality and level of support provided.

5. THE NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (NEELB)

5.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

5.1.1 The NEELB internal audit team has produced a comprehensive written report and supporting documentation that provide a solid foundation for future quality assurance work by the ELB on the effectiveness of initiatives such as the DDGPI. The report contains much pertinent comment and useful information, including:

- a description of the selection processes;
- an outline and specific examples of the support available to those schools bidding for inclusion, and participating in the initiative;
- an overview of the DDGPI projects supported by the NEELB;
- a summary of the outcomes of the DDGPI projects undertaken in each of the 45 schools involved, and an NEELB analysis of the progress achieved by each school;
- a description of the arrangements to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the DDGPI, including examples of specific improvements in a range of projects;
- a description and an analysis of the effectiveness of the dissemination arrangements for the DDGPI in the NEELB; and
- a set of conclusions on the effectiveness of the DDGPI in the NEELB.

5.1.2 In the report, the NEELB internal audit team outlines the work of its officers in the operation and management of the DDGPI. Most notably, the SSP Steering Group, the Assistant Senior Education Officer (ASEO) and the General Adviser for School Improvement have prominent roles. They, in turn, receive support from the specialist advisory staff and the link officers for each school; the report provides a number of specific examples of such specialist support for schools in the initiative. The ELB acknowledges the need to review its information systems in order to provide a more effective analysis of the extent and quality of its support for schools. Those schools visited by the Inspectorate as part of the QAI recorded their strong appreciation of the contribution of the NEELB officers.

5.1.3 In reaching its evaluations, the NEELB internal audit team draw on a number of useful sources of evidence: examples of presentations made by participating schools to the Steering Group at its annual presentation days, progress reports written by each school, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the initiative following a visit to each of the 45 participating schools by the General Adviser. The Board needs, however, to place greater emphasis on promoting and gathering objective, direct qualitative and quantitative evidence from schools, in order to support its evaluations.

5.1.4 In the course of the DDGPI, the NEELB developed clear procedures to guide its processes of decision-making. The Steering Group invites schools to submit proposals in an application form and an action plan using a common format. Following the screening of bids from schools by its advisory staff, the Steering Group assesses the quality of the proposals using criteria that reflect those outlined in the DE guidance. The internal audit team identified the need to refine aspects of the assessment criteria; the QAI findings confirm this as an area for improvement. Appropriately, the NEELB requires schools to outline clearly in their action plans, the intended objectives and actions to be developed in the DDGPI projects, along with the associated success criteria.

5.1.5 The NEELB has given due consideration to particular key matters relating to the finance provided under the DDGPI; a member of the NEELB budgetary control team adds a useful dimension to the monitoring processes used by the Steering Group. The internal audit team has provided DE with a summary overview of its annual financial allocations to schools involved in the initiative, and the findings from school visits by the Inspectorate point to examples of the careful administration of funds to individual schools.

5.1.6 The Steering Group has developed incrementally a set of clear guiding procedures to monitor the implementation of the DDGPI projects in schools, and the dissemination of their outworking. There are annual dissemination conferences

during which schools, at the end of their first year in the initiative, make a presentation on the focus and level of success of their DDGPI work. The internal audit team finds these conferences to be a valuable part of the dissemination process. The NEELB also asks schools to write a progress report at the end of their second year in the initiative. The NEELB assessed the initial written reports as varied in quality and, appropriately, introduced a standard report proforma for schools. The result has been more cohesive, written reports with schools placing a greater emphasis on the progress achieved against their original success criteria. The internal audit team has concluded that, in future, schools need to identify in their action plans a measurable baseline position, in order to be better placed to assess quantifiable progress; the QAI findings endorse this as an area for improvement.

5.1.7 Many of the findings of the NEELB internal audit team, in terms of the effectiveness of the initiative, are valid. The findings of the QAI confirm that:

- the DDGPI has been effective in almost all of the schools;
- the DDGPI conference days and school reports have been invaluable in evaluating the effectiveness of the initiative;
- the DDGPI projects have contributed to increased pupil enjoyment and enthusiasm; and
- a number of the schools have made better use of quantitative data as an improvement tool.

5.1.8 The QAI confirms the evaluation by the internal audit team that the dissemination process has been 'fairly effective'. The good practice developed by schools, however, needs to be disseminated more systematically across a wider range of schools through, for example, a more sophisticated use of ICT.

5.1.9 The Inspectorate would confirm the key strengths highlighted in the conclusion of the internal audit report. The recommendations for further action need to be more firmly based on the main priorities outlined in the report. The inspection team would concur strongly with the recommendation to assist schools to identify their baseline position more clearly.

5.2 SCHOOL VISITS

5.2.1 The evidence from the school visits made by the QAI inspection team indicates that:

- the teachers involved have generally gained much professionally from their participation in the initiative, especially in terms of enhanced confidence and competence;
- the schools valued the support provided by the NEELB through the DDGPI;
- the schools have acquired, and in almost all instances used to good effect, much useful additional resources for learning and teaching;
- almost all of the schools addressed clearly and enthusiastically their stated priorities for developing and improving the quality of the pupils' experiences and attainments; in a small number of schools, when the priority for development became too broad and over-ambitious, the outcomes were less successful;
- there are clear examples of effective sharing of good practice within and amongst participating primary schools; there is a need to extend further the process and practice of dissemination within participating post-primary schools; and
- with the valuable assistance of NEELB officers, schools are beginning to improve their expertise in writing good quality evaluations and reviews of the progress they achieved through the DDGPI.

5.2.2 The external evaluation by the Inspectorate highlights the many strengths in the comprehensive and detailed internal audit conducted by the NEELB. The findings of the school visits concur with the areas for improvement identified by the internal audit team, namely to extend the methods of dissemination to a much greater degree and to continue to promote in the participating schools, the writing of progress reports that are more evaluative.

5.3 CONCLUSION

5.3.1 The Inspectorate's external evaluation of the NEELB's audit of the implementation of the DDGPI finds many strengths. These include the:

- schools' strong acknowledgement of the valuable support of the NEELB officers in the DDGPI;

- clear procedures which the NEELB has developed to guide its decision-making processes for the DDGPI;
- annual conferences which are a valuable part of the dissemination process;
- developing work to help schools include more evaluative comments when reporting on their progress;
- professional gains and development of the teachers involved, especially in terms of enhanced confidence and competence; and
- effectiveness of almost all of the schools in developing ways of improving the quality of the pupils' experiences and attainments.

5.3.2 The key areas for improvement are the need to:

- increase the use of objective, first-hand qualitative and quantitative evidence to validate the findings and support the recommendations of any future self-evaluation exercises; and
- disseminate and monitor the good practice developed by the schools more systematically.

5.3.3 The external evaluation highlights much effective practice in both schools and the ELB, such as:

- the ongoing development of the organisation and management of the DDGPI;
- the discernible benefits to many learners and teachers;
- the enhanced levels of resourcing in schools; and
- the good support provided by the NEELB for the participating schools.

5.3.4 The DDGPI has supported schools effectively to develop and disseminate a series of worthwhile projects. The initiative has provided time, finances and other resources to schools for on-going school improvement work. A great deal has been achieved by all who have participated in the DDGPI. The members and officers of the NEELB, the schools and the local and wider community can have confidence in the work being undertaken in schools under the DDGPI, and in the quality and level of support provided.

6. THE SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (SEELB)

6.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

6.1.1 The SEELB quality assurance report, and the accompanying detailed appendices, provide useful and relevant information including:

- a description of the processes used to select the schools;
- a description of the support available to schools selected for DDGPI funding;
- how the SEELB operated the initiative;
- a list of the schools involved, with a useful summary of the DDGPI objectives within each school;
- a description of the individual projects;
- a summary of the dissemination arrangements within the SEELB; and
- the conclusions reached by the SEELB on the effectiveness of the DDGPI within its area of responsibility.

6.1.2 The quantitative data supplied, which sets out the considerable time spent by ELB officers in schools on DDGPI work, endorses the view of SEELB CASS view that their support of this initiative is an important priority. Through the effective use of ICT, the ELB records carefully the time spent by CASS officers on DDGPI work; more importantly, the Board analyses this information well to consider how its officers can use their time even more efficiently.

6.1.3 The internal report and accompanying documentation provide helpful information on a number of examples of well-tailored, specialist CASS support for schools involved in the DDGPI. A 'School Support Agreement', drawn up for individual schools where a Board officer is working with a school on a substantive piece of work, requires schools and CASS to set down agreed targets, not only for the individual school, but also for the ELB officers working in the school. The best quality School Support Agreements set out the precise arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of qualitative and quantitative data to see if DDGPI priorities have been met. The ELB should provide the necessary INSET to ensure that this good practice is extended to all DDGPI schools.

6.1.4 The SEELB internal audit team drew on a range of evidence to compile its report, including completed school applications for DDGPI funding, responses from questionnaires sent to schools, school action plans and, in more recent times, the schools' own reports of progress made. While the range of evidence gathered was generally sufficient for the purposes of the internal audit, the structure and detail of the internal audit report did not set out more sufficiently:

- the strengths, issues and key priorities for action;
- the improvements resulting from the provision of DDGPI funding for individual schools, and for schools in general; and
- the overall findings and recommendations for future action.

6.1.5 The findings of the ELB's internal report are generally valid and appropriate, for example:

- following the dissemination conferences, most schools had discussed further what they could apply or develop within their own school;
- a small number of schools reported that they were involved in disseminating work to other schools;
- evaluation reports, progress reports and conference evaluations submitted to the SEELB highlighted some of the excellent work developed through the DDGPI; and
- following the dissemination conferences, all 18 schools who completed questionnaires identified the benefits to them of attending the conferences, and several stated they had implemented aspects of good practice they had heard about at the conferences.

6.1.6 The internal report did not make sufficiently clear:

- the evaluation of the outcomes of the provision of DDGPI funding for separate schools, and an overall evaluation across the ELB; and
- the range of first-hand evidence gathered to support these evaluations.

6.1.7 The responsibility of the evaluation of bids by schools for funding and the allocation of DDGPI funding is discharged by a Steering Group which includes representatives from the SEELB and CCMS. The evidence from the ELB's report indicates that the Steering Group has clear and thorough procedures to guide its decision-making in selecting suitable schools, procedures which adhere to the associated DE guidance. The requirement for schools to present orally their action

plans has been helpful in ensuring that a school gives its action plan careful consideration before a presentation to the Steering Group. Appropriately, the SEELB requires schools to accompany their applications with action plans, including associated success criteria. While the quality of the action plans has improved substantially over the period of the initiative to date, these still vary across the schools, from good to poor. In particular, the majority of the action plans showed only a weak link between their proposals for monitoring and evaluation to more precise success criteria.

6.1.8 A key objective of the DDGPI is that schools disseminate the good practice they develop, both within the school itself and, if appropriate, across other schools. The annual 'Dissemination Conferences', during which participating schools make a presentation to other interested schools on the remit and success of their work, are judged by the internal audit team to be an effective part of the dissemination process. Following a visit to two of these conferences, and as a result of subsequent school visits, the QAI team endorses strongly the validity of the ELB's positive evaluation of the benefits of the schools' attendance. Appropriately, the ELB has identified the more effective dissemination of good practice within and across schools as a key priority. It intends, for example, to access more schools through the provision of a website on NINE which will include a range of examples of good practice.

6.1.9 The appropriate CASS officers have discussed the quality assurance report and have implemented the recommendations within the agreed time scales. The evidence from the school reports, and the ELB's audit, indicates that the operation of the DDGPI has facilitated:

- enhanced staff morale and a sense of collegiality within the schools;
- schools other than those in the SSP gaining additional funding for work which has often been innovative;
- the development and recognition of good practice; and
- increased communication within and, to a lesser extent, across schools, on important aspects of learning and teaching.

6.1.10 The evidence from the Inspectorate visits to schools endorses the findings set out at paragraph 6.1.9 above. In addition, the priorities which the SEELB has identified for further development in its facilitation of the DDGPI are appropriate. These include:

- the further development of its links with other ELBs in the implementation of the DDGPI; and
- that schools involved in year 3 of the DDGPI will produce a self-evaluative report of progress made at the end of the academic year.

6.2 SCHOOL VISITS

6.2.1 All the schools visited were highly appreciative of the work of CASS in supporting their DDGPI objectives. The findings of the QAI show that the schools are engaging professionally and competently with the objectives of the DDGPI, and are benefiting from the additional resources. Furthermore, the findings also confirm the SEELB's view that, 'in large measure', the schools are using DDGPI funding effectively to develop good practice.

6.2.2 There is evidence of some effective sharing of good practice within and amongst participating schools, for example, in the development of literacy skills in clusters of primary schools, and in science and technology. The evidence from the visits shows a general need to improve further the present procedures for the dissemination of the good practice developed within, and particularly across, schools.

6.2.3 The schools visited by the members of the inspection team were engaged in a varied and often innovative range of projects, and clear benefits were evident for the pupils. Common themes included literacy, numeracy, ICT, aspects of pastoral care, and raising standards of academic achievement. The staff involved have worked diligently on their chosen focus, and there is evidence of progress and discernible gains in the range of teaching approaches being developed and disseminated. Evidence from the school visits also show that relatively small amounts of financial support in individual schools can have a major impact through the good practice developed. Most of the schools are making good progress in their targeted areas, and there is clear evidence that those schools involved in the DDGPI are becoming more self-evaluative; the theme of improved self-evaluation within the DDGPI schools should be seen as an important priority for inclusion within the future work programme of CASS.

6.2.4 The staff in the schools visited, including principals and senior management, highlighted the opportunities which participation in the DDGPI provided to develop and disseminate aspects of good practice, particularly within their own school. They also commented positively on the beneficial impact on staff development, and on collegiality amongst the staff. The QAI findings indicate clearly that the leadership and support of the principal are crucial in ensuring that the DDGPI objectives, as set out in the schools' action plans, are met.

6.3 CONCLUSION

6.3.1 The external evaluation of the SEELB's audit of the implementation of the DDGPI has discerned many strengths. These include the:

- benefits of additional levels of resources to the DDGPI schools;
- many positive features in the organisation and management of the DDGPI by the ELB;
- clear benefits for pupils in the participating schools;
- schools engaging in a varied and often innovative range of projects;
- teachers involved working diligently, professionally and competently on their chosen focus;
- valuable advice given by the SEELB to schools involved in the DDGPI;
- evidence of progress and discernible gains in the range of teaching approaches developed and disseminated;
- evidence of those schools involved in the DDGPI becoming more self-evaluative; and
- appreciation in all of the schools visited, of the work of CASS staff in supporting their DDGPI objectives.

6.3.2 The key areas for improvement are the need:

- for schools and the ELB to gather and evaluate more first-hand evidence to support their evaluations of DDGPI work; and
- to promote further the dissemination of the good practice developed within and across schools.

6.3.3 There are many positive features in the organisation and management of the DDGPI by the ELB. For example, the SEELB has a clear rationale for its support of schools within the DDGPI. The Board has worked hard and responded quickly to the schools' applications for DDGPI funding. It has devoted adequate resources to support schools in their applications for DDGPI funding. The DDGPI has provided schools with time and resources, within a sound framework, to allow effective and ongoing school improvement. Overall, the DDGPI has allowed effective support for schools in their development, including much work which is focused appropriately on learning and teaching. A great deal has been achieved by all who have engaged in DDGPI work.

6.3.4 The findings of the QAI confirm the steady progress of the SEELB CASS as a self-evaluating organisation. Furthermore, the inspection confirms the SEELB's view that, in large measure, the schools are using DDGPI funding effectively to develop good practice. The ELB has summarised accurately its current position in supporting work in schools involved in the DDGPI, and has a sound and developing base from which to implement any future quality assurance exercises. The members and officers of the SEELB, the schools and the local and wider community can have confidence in the work being undertaken in schools under the DDGPI and in the quality and support provided.

7. THE SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (SELB)

7.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

7.1.1 The Steering Group, comprising senior officials from the SELB and the CCMS, have a responsibility to evaluate the schools' DDGPI bids and action plans, and to allocate funds to help the schools implement their plans. Due to staffing changes at a senior level in the SELB, there were personnel changes to the Steering Group over the period of the initiative to date; the current group has been in place since September 2002.

7.1.2 The Group adhered strictly to the DE's guidance in administering the DDGPI funding. For example, the Steering Group members challenged schools' proposals, and made suggestions on how themes could be more purposeful, and deliver better value for money. During the first year of the initiative, there was much editing of action plans; in the last two years, the plans have become more refined, and with a much clearer focus. The Steering Group viewed the 'development' of good practice as equally important as its 'dissemination'; over time, and for a variety of reasons, the Steering Group took a much broader view of the DDGPI guidance. It considered strongly that a school's involvement in the DDGPI had, with the support of CASS, the potential to ensure improved practice in a wide range of schools. In

addition, with increased experience, the Steering Group reported that it became more confident in its ability to evaluate more effectively the bids from schools.

7.1.3 The SELB had appointed, to each school, a link officer to take lead responsibility on liaising and facilitating the DDGPI in individual schools. The link officers generally had a detailed knowledge of the schools; this detailed knowledge was used to drive the initiative forward.

7.1.4 The progress and impact of each funded school initiative were monitored closely and evaluated by the SELB. Schools used the ELB's guidance framework to assess the success of their project, and provided written reports. This internal quality assurance was comprehensive and rigorous; it was supplemented by visits to schools, meetings with principals, and others at a senior management level.

7.1.5 The SELB report and findings identified a number of features emerging from the involvement of the Steering Group and the schools in the DDGPI, these included the need:

- to provide an appropriate level of support matched to the specific needs of individual schools, in effect a recognition that schools were at different stages of development, and that support needed to be prioritised and customised;
- to provide appropriate support to assist schools to write their action plans using well-defined targets. The development of action plans by each school is seen as a fundamental element in the strategy for school improvement within the DDGPI. Documentation revealed that a significant number of bids required further discussion, and more detail, prior to approval; some of the schools needed appreciable support, primarily from the link officer, to devise their action plans;
- to secure time to promote more fully the role of the link officer to visit all schools more regularly and frequently, and to provide more support within schools;
- to break down the 'isolation' felt by some schools, by developing the idea of joining schools into clusters; (where this clustering happened, it led to successful staff development with positive outcomes for the pupils); and
- to ensure the availability of future funding for DDGPI so as to aid future ELB and school planning.

7.1.6 The SELB's evaluation forms for participating schools requested information on the progress and outcomes of the DDGPI for the school in general, and for the pupils in particular. A significant minority of the schools' reports, as required by the Board, were both comprehensive and evaluative; in addition, some of the reports made helpful recommendations for future outworking of the DDGPI and identified future staff training needs.

7.1.7 Evidence from these reports and from Inspectorate contacts with the schools revealed that the DDGPI allowed:

- the schools to gain access to some additional funding for innovative work and, in a number of instances, relatively small amounts of DDGPI financial support to act as the catalyst in bringing about improvement in the schools;
- an increase in staff morale and team building;
- recognition and affirmation for schools where good practice was taking place;
- networking among schools at primary and post-primary levels; and
- training for CASS officers who could then disseminate practice to other schools within the ELB.

7.1.8 The findings of the QAI confirm the areas which the SELB has identified for further improvement in relation to DDGPI including the need:

- to ensure that CASS staff are not diverted from providing support for schools outside the initiative. (In some instances, DDGPI work deflected CASS support from some schools where support was needed urgently);
- to redirect CASS personnel from allocating or administering funding, to using their time more effectively in working with the schools involved;
- for more discussion and sharing of ideas across the ELBs and CASS in Northern Ireland on how best to effect improvement in the DDGPI schools;
- to develop more effective ways of supporting schools, including the wider use of the 'clustering' of schools;
- to celebrate and disseminate more fully the good practice found in schools;

- to develop improved 'exit strategies' for schools leaving the initiative by promoting sustainability in the work arising out of their inclusion in the DDGPI; and
- for an improved strategic approach across the SELB to encompass all personnel who are supporting schools in important areas such as ICT, and literacy, and the promotion of positive behaviour.

7.2 SCHOOL VISITS

7.2.1 The evidence from the school visits, conducted as part of the QAI, indicates that the schools are at different stages of development. For some schools the initiative supported them in addressing issues identified from inspections and for others, it promoted and extended good practice. In primary schools, common themes included, improving the learning environment, literacy, numeracy and ICT. In the post-primary sector, the projects supported included, raising academic achievement, improving behaviour, raising self-esteem, mentoring, and improving learning.

7.2.2 The visits revealed that most schools:

- engaged competently with the objectives and procedures within the DDGPI;
- were making good progress in the areas targeted within their action plans. In some schools, the impact of DDGPI was very successful in improving practice, particularly in pastoral care;
- are becoming more self-evaluative;
- were confident that their participation in the initiative was beneficial and assisted school improvement. For example, there was improved development planning with a clearer focus on the quality of learning and teaching in the schools;
- were addressing long-standing problems such as pastoral care, and the pupils' behaviour, in a more creative and innovative manner; and
- were willing to support staff in other schools through sharing their experiences and expertise.

7.2.3 In discussions with teachers in a sample of schools involved, almost all spoke favourably of the support they received from the SELB officers, and they valued highly the discussions which enabled them to reach a joint decision as to the best way forward. For example, in the post-primary sector, the SELB has put in

place a support team which includes two principals and a vice-principal, who worked with the senior management of the participating schools to provide guidance and support.

7.3 CONCLUSION

7.3.1 The external evaluation of the SELB's audit of the implementation of the DDGPI has found many strengths. These include the:

- effectiveness of the Steering Group in following DE guidelines;
- evidence of good outcomes in the schools involved;
- opportunity for a wider range of schools to gain access to additional funding for innovative work;
- sound and committed management and leadership in the schools; and
- the SELB and the Steering Group's identification of important areas for improvement.

7.3.2 The key areas for improvement are:

- the need to review dissemination procedures, improve exit strategies and promote sustainability in the work for schools leaving the programme; and
- the need to focus more sharply on the specific arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the success of the initiative.

7.3.3 The SELB has recognised that schools which gained most from their involvement in the DDGPI possess a combination of features such as:

- good leadership at senior and middle management levels;
- projects which were aligned effectively to the schools' development priorities. (In the best practice, successful schools built on their own 'good practice' with a well-established baseline and recognised strengths);
- projects which were manageable, realistic and focused on the pupils' needs; and
- effective internal communication. (Successful schools were those which had ensured that all staff were aware of the school's DDGPI objectives, and its potential benefits to staff and pupils).

7.3.4 The SELB DDGPI team has identified appropriate areas for development which are both practical and realistic, and, if implemented, have the potential to improve the operation of the DDGPI. The recommendations were supported by evidence from the schools' reports, the ELB reports, dissemination meetings, school visits and Inspectorate meetings with the SELB personnel. The members and officers of the SELB, the schools and the local and wider community can have confidence in the work being undertaken in schools under the DDGPI and in the quality and level of support provided.

8. THE WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD (WELB)

8.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION

8.1.1 The WELB quality assurance report, and the accompanying detailed appendices, provide useful and relevant information including:

- a description of the selection process used;
- the range of support available to help schools develop their bids;
- the support provided to schools participating in the initiative;
- a summary of the projects supported;
- a summary and analysis of the schools' evaluation reports;
- a description of the processes used in the WELB's monitoring and evaluation of schools involved in cohorts 1, 2 and 3;
- the WELB's analysis of the operation of individual projects;
- the WELB's analysis of the effectiveness of the initiatives;
- a description of the dissemination process; and conclusions.

8.1.2 Within the WELB, the SSP Steering Group assumed responsibility for the DDGPI. Since the initiative began in 1999, of the schools within the WELB area, 41% of primary schools, 60% of post-primary schools, 70% of special schools and 33% of nursery schools have applied to participate in the DDGPI. In most sectors, at least 85% of the applications were accepted; however, no nursery schools received approval to be part of the initiative at this time. Subsequently, allocations were made to nursery schools in 2002 and 2003.

8.1.3 From the beginning of the initiative the WELB adopted a team approach to the development and dissemination of good practice. The Steering Group was aware from the monitoring of cohorts 1 and 2 that the processes in place did not always secure the best return for the resources invested. As a result of this evaluation, a bid to the WELB CASS for additional officer time to support the DDGPI was made. Approval was given for an allocation of officer time to devote to schools participating in the initiative. Schools were invited to bid for additional resources. There was an induction day for those schools whose bids were successful, and contact continued between the link officer and the school. Each school was expected to provide monthly action plans for the steering group, a note of deadlines set and an account of associated monthly expenditure. While the quality of the monthly action planning from the schools varied, the WELB reports that both the action plan and the deadlines proforma proved to be valuable tools for helping with the implementation process.

8.1.4 A proforma was provided for each school in order to help the school promote its own monitoring and evaluation. In addition, link officers made visits to schools, meeting with those most closely involved with the DDGPI. At the end of each project year, all schools were invited to a dissemination day to share findings and outcomes with other schools, some with shared interests and others from different phases and holding different priorities.

8.1.5 In reaching its evaluations, the WELB paid particular attention to the analysis of the schools' evaluation reports. Within cohorts 1 and 2, the WELB noted the difficulty of getting first-hand experience of the operation within individual projects and their need to depend on these reports from the schools. These reports seldom mentioned any negative aspects of the work, even though as a result of the analysis of the cohort 1 reports, for example, the Steering group found that a large number of schools did not use the lead-in time effectively for forward planning. The WELB highlighted the progress made in the development of monitoring and evaluation arrangements from cohorts 1 and 2 to the present format cohort 3. Within cohort 3, for example, the liaison officers made return visits to the schools and encouraged a more reflective approach to the school's own evaluation.

8.1.6 The WELB report identifies a number of strengths and areas for improvement emerging from the initiative. The strengths include:

- the goodwill associated with the opportunities brought to the educational community expressed in comments, for example, at principals' conferences and ELB meetings;

- the increase in the number and quality of bids from cohort to cohort as evidence of the schools' growing appreciation of, and engagement with, the initiative;
- the benefits, reported by the majority of schools, in terms of their understanding of, and engagement in, improvement, as a result of being in the initiative; and
- the progress noted from cohorts 1 to 2 in the identification, and increasing use by the schools of quantitative evidence to support their bids, and report their improvements.

The areas for improvement, identified by the WELB, emerging from the initiative are that:

- in a small number of cases, individual schools regarded the DDGPI as simply an opportunity for additional funding, with no consideration for the range or quality of their bid to join the initiative;
- contacts with schools during the processes of bid preparation indicated that this process required a level of reflection, analysis and evaluation some way above the everyday work of schools, and that the process of improvement was a significant challenge for many schools.

8.1.7 An unexpected outcome of the initiative was the incentive it provided for the collaboration among groups of schools, urban and rural, mainstream and special, second and third level, collaboration which was often based on common themes.

8.1.8 The findings of the QAI concur with the features and areas for improvement identified by the audit undertaken by the WELB. In addition, the WELB needs to develop further its monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to bring greater consistency to its implementation of the DDGPI.

8.2 SCHOOL VISITS

8.2.1 The evidence from the school visits which formed part of the QAI, indicates that the schools:

- valued the support provided by the WELB through the DDGPI, and the opportunity which the initiative provided for them to reflect critically on existing learning and teaching styles;
- were making good progress in the areas identified as part of their involvement in the DDGPI;

- were becoming more self-evaluative and autonomous in their attempts to bring about improvement in learning and teaching;
- valued the opportunities for some members of staff to work as a team, and to collaborate with other schools through the variety of cluster groups which had been created; and
- in the main, commented favourably on the support given by the DDGPI link officers.

8.3 CONCLUSION

8.3.1 The external evaluation of the WELB's audit of the implementation of the DDGPI has discerned many strengths. These include the:

- effective scrutiny and monthly monitoring through the school's planning, by the WELB, of the work going on in schools;
- procedures put in place to allow schools to manage the funding in a systematic manner;
- benefits to the schools afforded by the additional funding;
- good work observed during the school visits; and
- the clear focus within the participating schools to bring about improvement in learning and teaching.

8.3.2 The key area for improvement is:

- for the WELB to continue to develop its monitoring and evaluation procedures in order to ensure a greater consistency in the monitoring and evaluation of the DDGPI initiative.

8.3.3 The WELB has a clear rationale for its support of schools within the DDGPI; effective procedures are in place to facilitate application to the initiative, to provide support for the schools involved, and to enable schools to monitor and evaluate their progress. Procedures are also in place to allow the schools to disseminate good practice internally, and to other schools.

8.3.4 The members and officers of the WELB, the schools and the local and wider community can have confidence in the work being undertaken in schools under the DDGPI and in the quality and level of support provided.