



Subject:

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND TARGET SETTING

Circular Number:
2008/13

Date of Issue:
August 2008

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided primary and post-primary schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Summary of Contents:

This circular sets out the general context for school development planning and provides benchmarking information for target setting.

Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:

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Governor Awareness:
Essential

Status of Contents:
Advice
Information for schools

Related Documents:
DE Circulars 1998/5 (primary),
“Target-Setting and
Benchmarking”
School Improvement pack
“Target Setting: Guidance for
Primary Schools”

Superseded Documents:
2007/16

Expiry Date:
Not applicable

DE Website:
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>

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Introduction

1. The Department is considering the responses to the proposals for a new school improvement policy as set out in Every School a Good School. While final decisions have yet to be made, it is satisfied that the focus on self-evaluation, school development planning and target setting should remain. It has however accepted the need to review the requirements set out in the school development planning regulations with a view to making the process more manageable, especially for small schools. The requirement to submit a copy of the Plan to the local education and library board will remain. The review of school development planning will commence in September and will take several months; in the meantime, schools should comply with the current legal requirements.

2. The Department felt that it would be helpful to schools if the annual circular setting out benchmarking information to inform target setting was broadened in scope to provide information on the general context which needs to be considered by schools in revising their School Development Plans.

Current Performance

3. Performance at GCSE (or equivalent) is the key measurement of achievement. The following statistics in respect of 2006/07 provide a general overview of performance:-
 - Just under two-thirds of pupils leave school with 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A*-C or equivalent (64.5%);
 - However the percentage achieving 5 or more GCSEs (A*-C) and which include English and mathematics is just over a half (52%);
 - Looking at GCSE English (and its equivalent) in isolation, 63% of pupils achieve at Grade C or better and 90% achieve at Grade G or better. This latter figure means that some 2,500 pupils fail to achieve functional adequacy in English;
 - In mathematics, the picture is broadly similar with 59% of pupils achieving at Grade C or better and 89% at Grade G or better.

- Looking at English and maths in combination, 54% of pupils achieve both at Grades A*-C and 87% at Grade G or better.
 - Over the past 10 years improvement in these statistics has been gradual and the stark reality is that some 12,000 pupils are failing to achieve good GCSE (or equivalent) standards in English and Maths and just under 3,500 fail to achieve functional literacy and numeracy.
4. Of course the post-primary sector is dependent upon primary schools for laying the foundations for learning and embedding basic literacy and numeracy. New assessment arrangements are being phased in over the next few years but in the meantime primary schools are required to provide teacher assessments of standards, using the same levels as reported in Key Stage Assessments. In overall terms one child in five leaves primary school with standards of literacy and numeracy below the level expected.
 5. These statistics are for the system as a whole and there is a wide variation in performance of individual schools. In some post-primary schools less than 10% of pupils will achieve at grades A*-C in English or Maths and in some primary schools less than 20% of pupils will be at the expected level at Key Stage 2. Whereas in some cases gaps in performance can be explained by factors outside the school, especially levels of disadvantage, it is also clear that there are wide gaps in performance of schools sharing broadly similar characteristics.

Public Service Agreements

6. In common with all other Departments, the Department of Education has been required to accept a set of targets as part of the financial settlement for the period to 2011. These are summarised in Annex 1. Again, it is worth pointing out that the targets are for average performance across the system and thus every school needs to play its part by improving performance year on year. The emphasis is on raising overall performance and narrowing the gap in achievement.

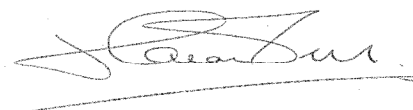
Effective Use of Data

7. Work has been initiated to improve data availability across the system and to devise a means of determining value-added. It is hoped that this exercise can be completed over the next few months and as a result schools will have access to improved information about performance. In the meantime, schools are encouraged to use the information in this circular; information in the Department's statistical bulletins; and information held within the school to assess trends and identify priorities for action.
8. The Education and Training Inspectorate has advised that the gap in achievement can be wide within schools and schools are therefore encouraged to analyse available data within classes and year groups.

Target Setting

9. Schools are required by legislation to set their own targets for improvement, including targets for literacy and numeracy and set these out in the School Development Plan.
10. In considering the level of targets to set, schools will wish to take into account a range of factors, including trends in performance by the school over previous years, the prior attainment of particular year groups, the context in which the school is operating; the priorities set in the School Development Plan, and, of course, what is challenging yet achievable. Annex 2 of this circular provides schools with benchmarking information to facilitate comparison of performance with schools sharing a similar socio-economic profile.
11. DE Circulars 2007/10 and 2006/26 advised schools about transitional arrangements relating to assessment and reporting requirements. Schools have been advised to continue to provide information to CCEA on their assessment outcomes in Language & Literacy and Mathematics & Numeracy using the existing end-of-key-stage level descriptors. Schools should continue to use these level descriptors when setting their targets during the transitional period.

12. The data set out in the attached supplement has been arranged to allow schools to put their recent performance into context and to compare it with that of schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM).
13. A copy of the circular has been placed on the DE website [<http://www.deni.gov.uk>] Any enquiries about the 2006/07 data or its interpretation should be addressed to **Ms Patricia Wyers or Mr Gavin King, Statistics and Research Branch**, at the address below. The telephone numbers are 028 9127 9252 or 028 9127 9259.
14. Enquiries about other aspects of the Circular should be addressed to **Mr Chris Hutchinson, School Improvement Branch**, telephone number 028 9127 9927.



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School Improvement Branch

PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT (PSA) TARGETS

1. **By 2011, 90% of school leavers achieving GCSE A* - G (or equivalent) level in English and Maths [PSA 19]** (Baseline: School Leavers Survey 2005-06 = 85%)
2. **By 2011, 68% of students gaining at least 5+ GCSEs A*-C by the time they leave school. [PSA 19]** (Baseline: School Leavers Survey 2005-06 = 64.2%)
3. **By 2011, 55% of students gaining 5+ GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths by the time they leave school [PSA 19]** (Baseline: School Leavers Survey 2005-06 = 52.6%)
4. **By 2011, at least 30% of FSME students achieving 5+ GCSE A*-C or equivalent including English and Maths by the time they leave school [PSA 10 and 19]** (Baseline: 2005-06 = 26.4%)
5. **By 2011, at most 1.5% of year 12 pupils with no qualification at GSCE A*-G level or equivalent [PSA 10 and 19]** (Baseline: Summary of Examination Results 2005-06 = 3%)
6. **By 2011, 65% of A level students gaining 3+ A levels at Grades A-C or equivalent in Year 14. [PSA 19]** (Baseline: Summary of Examination Results 2005-06 = 63.5%)
7. **By 2011, increase the participation rate of 16-17 year olds in full-time education or training to 95%** (Baseline: School Leavers Survey 2006-07 = 92%)