



Subject:

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND TARGET SETTING

Circular Number:
2011/03

Date of Issue:
3 March 2011

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided primary and post-primary schools;
- Education & Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Education & Skills Authority Implementation Team;
- Teachers' Unions.

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:
Information for schools

Related Documents:
DE Circular 2010/22: "School Development Planning".
"School Development Planning"
– Guidance for schools.
DE Circulars 1998/5 "Target-Setting and Benchmarking".
"Target Setting: Guidance for Primary Schools".

Superseded Documents:
2010/04

Expiry Date:
Not applicable

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

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Introduction: Performance of the Education System

1. The Department has set priorities to tackle underachievement and promote the raising of standards for all pupils. Research shows that setting high expectations for achievement is a key factor in raising the educational standards achieved by pupils.
2. All Departments, including the Department of Education, must set targets to improve performance as part of their financial settlement. The Department currently has PSA targets for the period 2008 to 2011 and will soon set out, in the revised literacy and numeracy strategy, updated long-term targets to 2020, along with milestone targets for the 2011 to 2015 period. The education targets are summarised in Annex 1, with current performance also shown through the latest available figures. These will be updated in May to show the most recent data on the achievements of school leavers.
3. These statistics are for the system as a whole and incorporate a wide variation in performance of individual schools. In some cases gaps in performance can be related to factors outside the school, especially levels of disadvantage; however, it is also clear that there are wide gaps in the performance of schools sharing broadly similar characteristics.
4. The figures show that, while progress has been made, there is a pressing need for continued improvement in educational attainment across our system. DE's targets are an average of the performance of all pupils and schools. To achieve our goals, the emphasis is on raising overall performance and narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest achievers and between the most and least disadvantaged pupils.
5. At the heart of a school's work to raise standards is school development planning, robust target-setting and evaluation of progress, all informed by the effective use of data. This circular sets out the annual data that should be used to inform the process of benchmarking and target setting by schools. It also provides information on the general context that needs to be considered by schools in preparing or revising their School Development Plans.

School Improvement

6. The Department's over-arching policy for raising standards and tackling underachievement is "Every School a Good School – a policy for school improvement". This emphasises that self-improvement is the responsibility of every school. Each school needs to play its part in raising standards through year-on-year improvement by meeting the needs of all of its pupils.

7. Self-evaluation, using performance data and other information, leading to sustained self-improvement is at the core of the policy. School-level and pupil-level data will inform self-evaluation (including identifying areas where action might be taken to bring about improvement) and benchmarking of performance against other schools with similar free school meals characteristics. The data will support planning for improvement at pupil, class, year group, key stage and whole-school level. Effective self-evaluation, and the actions that flow from it, should deliver educational improvement for all pupils. Self-evaluation is an integral part of the school development planning process and the resulting actions and targets are captured in School Development Plans.

School Development Planning

8. Schools must comply with the current legal requirements for School Development Planning, including the obligation to submit a copy of their Plan to their Education and Library Board and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, CCMS. Revised legislation and guidance setting out the requirements relating to the preparation of school development plans were published by the Department in January 2011 and are available via the DE website (<http://www.deni.gov.uk>).

9. Schools are required by legislation to set their own targets for improvement, including targets for literacy and numeracy. These must be included in the School Development Plan.

Target Setting

10. Targets need to be challenging, yet achievable. When setting targets schools will wish to take into account a range of factors, including:

- i) trends in performance by the school over previous years;
- ii) the prior attainment of each year group;
- iii) the context within which the school is operating and how it compares to schools in similar circumstances; and
- iv) the priorities set in the School Development Plan.

11. Annex 2 of this circular provides schools with benchmarking information to inform the setting of targets. The Department continues to review the benchmarking data it provides to schools. To ensure manageability and a focus on using data that is pupil based and related to pupil achievement, it has decided to provide data relating to free school meal bands only (and to no longer provide size band data, as this relates to a characteristic of the school, not the pupil, and should have no bearing on pupil performance). FSM entitlement (FSME), as an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage, is strongly correlated with pupil attainment. The Department is clearly focused on tackling underachievement and the link to socio-economic disadvantage, in support of efforts to raise standards and ensure all pupils are enabled to fulfil their potential. The data has therefore been arranged to allow schools to put their recent performance into context and to compare themselves with schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals.

12. Schools are encouraged to use: the information in this circular; information in the Department's statistical bulletins; information held within the school; and information provided by the Education & Library to assess trends and identify priorities for action.

13. The eSchools data warehouse became operational in September 2009. The regular reports issued by the warehouse provide a summary of performance information that schools can use to identify trends, compare themselves with similar schools and inform their self-evaluation and school improvement. DE Circular 2009/04 provides further information about eSchools.

Assessment & Reporting

14. DE Circulars 2010/06 and 2009/15 updated schools on the arrangements relating to assessment and reporting requirements. Schools are required 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 pending the introduction of new levels of progression.

15. When a pupil leaves a school, it is a legal requirement for the school they are leaving to transfer a formal record of the pupil's academic achievements and progress; this must be provided to the principal or Board of Governors of the receiving school within 15 days. This should always include the end-of-key stage data, especially for the end of Key Stage 2 (and the end of Key Stage 3 where a pupil is transferring to a Senior High School), as this data is used as part of the funding calculations for post-primary schools.

Future Developments – Early Publication of Primary Benchmarking Data 2011/12

16. The annual benchmarking circular is currently published when final validated data for all Key Stages and of Year 12 examinations data, published in the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER), is available. The Department, taking account of feedback from primary schools in particular, is aware of a desire for this information to be circulated to schools as soon as possible to assist in the planning process. The Department has considered steps that might be taken to achieve this and has decided to publish data relating to primary schools earlier in the school year. This means that, from the 2011/12 school year, the Department will publish provisional Key Stage 1 and 2 benchmarking data in time for the start of the school year (there are not normally any major changes to the provisional data ahead of the final data but the Department will notify schools if such a situation were to arise). As the provision of post-primary data is dependent on the receipt of the SAER data, the Department will publish post-primary data under cover of a separate circular at the earliest available opportunity, normally in the spring.
17. A copy of this circular has been placed on the DE website. Any enquiries about the 2009/10 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.

18. Enquiries about any other aspects of this Circular should be addressed to **Mr Chris Hutchinson, Standards and Improvement Team**, telephone number 028 9127 9415.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'C Hughes'.

Chris Hughes (Dr)
Standards & Improvement Team

PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT (PSA) TARGETS

Target:

By 2011, 90% of students achieving GCSE A*-G (or equivalent) level in English and Maths by the time they leave school [PSA 19] (Baseline: School Leavers Survey 2005-06 = 85%)

Current performance:

In 2008/09, 88% of school leavers achieving GCSE A* - G (or equivalent) in English and Maths

Target:

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%)

Current performance:

In 2008/09, 70% of pupils left school with 5 or more GCSEs at Grades A*-C or equivalent.

Target:

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 = 54%)

Current Performance:

In 2008/09, 58% of school leavers achieved 5 or more GCSEs (A*-C), including English and mathematics.

Target:

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%)

Current Performance:

In 2008/09, 30% of FSME students achieved 5 or more GCSEs (A*-C) including English and mathematics.

Target:

By 2011, reduce to 1.5% of year 12 pupils with no qualification at GCSE A*-G level or equivalent [PSA 19] (Baseline: Summary of Examination Results 2005-06 = 3%)

Current Performance:

In 2009/10, 1% of pupils left school with no qualifications at GCSE A*-G or equivalent.

Target:

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%)

Current Performance:

In 2009/10, 65% of Year 14 students gained 3 or more A levels at A*-C.

Target:

By 2011, increase the participation rate of 16-17 year olds in full-time education or training to 95% (Baseline: Participation in full-time education and vocational training by 16 and 17 year olds in Northern Ireland 2005/06= 87%)

Current Performance:

In 2009/10, 86% of 16-17 year olds were in full-time education or training.