



Subject:

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND TARGET SETTING (PRIMARY)

Circular Number:
2011/18

Date of Issue:
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Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided 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 in primary schools.

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Superseded Documents:
2011/03

Expiry Date:
Not applicable

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

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Introduction: Performance of the Education System

1. The Department's priorities include tackling underachievement and raising standards for all pupils. Research shows that having high expectations for pupils' achievements is a key factor in raising educational standards. Benchmarking data allows schools to ensure their aspirations for their pupils are suitably high.
2. Previously, annual benchmarking data was published for primary and post-primary schools together, once final validated data was available. However, primary schools wanted the benchmarking information as early as possible in the school year to inform their planning. To achieve this we will from now on publish provisional Key Stage 1 and 2 benchmarking data at the start of the school year. There are normally no major changes between the provisional and the final data, but if there are the Department will notify schools.
3. The provisional data includes all primary schools. Many schools show a correlation between pupils' levels of disadvantage and overall achievement; however, it is also clear that there are wide gaps in the performance of schools sharing broadly similar characteristics.
4. The aim of our school improvement programme is to break the link between disadvantage and pupils' educational performance. The figures show that, while progress has been made, there remains a need for continued improvement in educational attainment across our system. We will continue to focus 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, with robust target-setting and evaluation of progress, 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 provisional benchmarking information to inform the setting of targets. The Department continues to review the benchmarking data it provides to schools. We will continue to provide data relating to free school meal bands as 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 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 the 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, as this data is used as part of the funding calculations for post-primary schools.
16. A copy of this circular has been placed on the DE website. Any enquiries about the 2010/11 data or its interpretation should be addressed to **Ms Patricia Wyers** or **Mr John Toogood, Statistics and Research Branch**, at the address below. The telephone numbers are 028 9127 9252 or 028 9127 9379.
17. Enquiries about any other aspects of this Circular should be addressed to **Mr Chris Hutchinson, Standards and Improvement Team**, telephone number 028 9127 9415.



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