

# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN: POLICY AND ADVICE TO SCHOOLS (updated)



## Introduction

This paper updates EIS policy and advice on School Development Planning originally approved by EIS Executive Council in 2001. It now has a particular focus in relation to the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, both in relation to the delivery of the curriculum itself and appropriate assessment arrangements.

## The School Improvement Plan and Teacher Workload

- The School Improvement Plan is one method which offers teachers a protection against unacceptable increases in workload. It offers some control over the pace of change within schools as well as the potential for staff within the school to ensure that the Plan can be implemented within the framework set by the SNCT Handbook of Conditions of Service in respect of the working day, week and year.
- The School Improvement Plan needs to be linked to school working time agreements, which determine, through negotiation, the balance of time available for collegiate work, including development work, in relation to a 35 hour working week.
- Additional time may be available for the implementation of the School Improvement Plan through Inset days and for some aspects of funded CPD arrangements. Teachers may also agree to use some of their own annual 35 hours of CPD time to take forward an element of the plan.
- However, the School Improvement Plan cannot in itself resolve all issues of workload. Teachers must have regard to the protections afforded in terms of their own contracts.
- Teachers at all levels of the school must also have regard to issues of collegiality and seek to enhance teacher empowerment and professionalism throughout the education process. Genuine collegial processes in schools have the potential to raise levels of professionalism, while at the same time managing working time and controlling workload burdens.

## Current Practice in Relation to the School Improvement Plans

- Since the planning process began in schools, practice in relation to the School Improvement Plan has developed in different ways within different schools: in some schools there are workload committees; some schools have set up school planning consultative groups; and in many schools, large secondary schools in particular, the process of improvement planning is in part devolved within the school, e.g. to secondary subject departments. Many schools and authorities have moved, also, to 3-year cycles for improvement planning.
- However, it is apparent that in many schools practice is unsatisfactory. In particular in many schools teachers are not fully involved in the process.

- The impact of the Authority's Improvement Plan on schools and also the existence of cluster improvement plans have added to the difficulty of managing workload.

### **The School Improvement Plan: General Principles**

The School Improvement Plan, which is a statutory requirement, is central to the way in which the school operates and therefore should be informed by a number of agreed principles.

- The Plan must be realistic and achievable both in terms of the timeframes for its contents to come on stream and the time resource made available for Plan-related work to be undertaken in the course of the teachers' contractual working day, week and year.
- Whilst the Plan should have regard to government policy (especially the context of Curriculum for Excellence and the four capacities) and to the local authority plan, schools should be able to determine their own priorities within this framework. In particular, a balance needs to be maintained between authority/cluster priorities and the capacity and needs of individual establishments. This is especially relevant to smaller schools.
- The School Improvement Plan is an important element in addressing issues of teacher workload, in particular through the management of teachers' working time. The Plan should be sufficiently detailed and costed to allow for an evaluation of its feasibility when measured against the available resources, including teacher time for familiarisation with key documents and new resources, developing materials and participation in staff development activities. The new requirements of summative assessment will need to be taken into consideration as well.
- The Plan should set out focussed priorities for establishments, relatively few in number, and avoid developing lengthy wish lists.
- The Improvement Plan could involve a certain amount of devolution of decision-making and implementation. For example, in secondary schools, subject departments should have a direct input to the process of formulating the draft Plan and a direct role in implementing specific elements within the approved Plan. A similar approach may be taken in larger primary schools, with groupings of staff from different stages providing their ideas.
- To be effective, the planning process in schools should be cognisant of all aspects of the work of the school, including ongoing maintenance and consolidation of work, resource and financial management, workload issues and staff support.

### **The School Improvement Plan: The Process of Formulating the Plan**

- The School Improvement Planning processes should reflect good collegiate practice within a school and seek to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to have an input.
- The planning process should itself be the basis of both prior and continuing consultation with all teaching staff.
- The planning process should be planned in advance to ensure that identified collegiate time is made available for all staff to have an appropriate input at an appropriate time to the planning process.

- All aspects of work and decision-making within the schools should be clearly related to the planning process, e.g. curriculum development, staff CPD, staff PRD and devolved school management.
- Workload management **must form** an integral part of discussions as part of the planning process is to ensure that the individual and collective work of teachers is capable of being undertaken within the time available.
- The School Improvement Plan – including rigorous costing of resource requirements (e.g. time, materials, staff development, and finance) and the clearly-identified resources to be provided for this purpose – should be made available to all staff prior to approval of the Plan.
- Some schools have found that the establishment of a School Planning Consultative Group (dealing with School Improvement Planning, the School's Devolved Budget and Workload management) is the most effective approach to use. The EIS considers that EIS School Representatives have an important contribution to make to such Consultative Groups or similar arrangements, either directly in that capacity, or indirectly following election to the Consultative Group by colleagues.

### **The School Improvement Plan: Implementation**

The involvement of all staff in the school (whether or not there is a consultative group or workload committee overseeing the implementation of the Plan) should be just as integral to the process of implementation of the plan as to its development. The implementation process should involve staff in a number of ways and at a number of stages.

- There should be continuing consultation about the human, material and financial resources and support needed in order to take forward the implementation of the Plan.
- There should be regular monitoring of the Improvement Plan involving all staff, through previously agreed mechanisms. Dates for undertaking the monitoring should be agreed and indicated in the annual school calendar for staff.
- Staff in the school have the right to be fully involved in discussion about any need for significant revisions to the Plan (together with their practical, resource and workload implications) in the course of the year. Such changes should not be a common occurrence. For example, action plans arising from HMIE visits should be built in to future improvement plans, normally, rather than supplanting existing proposals. The outcome of local authority reviews /quality assurance visits should not require agreed improvement plans to be altered at once.
- Workload issues, whether emanating from the plan or from any other source, should be discussed regularly and frequently, involving all staff, at staff meetings, the dates of which have been previously agreed. There must also be opportunity for direct input from all staff and EIS representatives into discussions on all issues relating to workload.

## Advice to Schools

The purpose of the EIS nationally is not to set a template for the way in which the school planning process should operate, but rather to advise its members of a framework within which the planning process can operate successfully. The key element to this success is the collegiate working of all staff within the school. This is integral to the implementation of CfE.

- EIS members in schools should meet to discuss whether the broad principles set out in this paper are being adhered to both in terms of the nature of the School Improvement Plan itself, the preparation of the Plan and its implementation, monitoring and evaluation process.
- **The litmus test for a School Improvement Plan is whether the plan has been properly costed, in all its aspects, and can therefore be regarded as achievable within the time frame envisaged.**
- Where difficulties arise in a particular school, these should be discussed at the school EIS meeting. In the first instance, the EIS Representative should convey the views of members to school management with the aim of resolving any issues in line with EIS policy. The results of these negotiations should be reported back to the school EIS membership and a decision taken on whether this should be referred by the EIS School Representative to the local association secretary.
- The local association secretary will take this forward at authority level, if appropriate, and should look for support from the EIS Area Officer where required.
- The EIS nationally will monitor the effectiveness of arrangements, in particular through contact with local association secretaries. To ensure an accurate view, it is important, therefore, that individual EIS School Representatives should discuss with secretaries not only difficulties which have arisen within the school but also examples of good practice.

## CHECK LIST

### School Improvement Plan: four key issues

- The Plan should operate in the context of implementing Curriculum for Excellence
- The Plan should be the product of collegiate activity and consultation
- The Plan should be realistic and achievable
- The Plan should support management of workload issues through rigorous costing of resource requirements, including time for staff development.