



A Guide to  
**Whole-School Evaluation -  
Management, Leadership and Learning  
in Post-Primary Schools**



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INSPECTORATE

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Evaluation Support and Research Unit

**A Guide to  
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Primary Schools**

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**Evaluation Support and Research Unit**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The role of the Inspectorate in enhancing quality in post-primary schools

Section 13 of the Education Act 1998 defines the functions of the Inspectorate and clarifies the roles of members of the Inspectorate in relation to evaluation and inspection. (See Appendix 1). The Inspectorate is committed to evaluating schools and teachers in a spirit of professional collaboration and in accordance with the highest professional standards. *The Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* (2002) outlines the aims of evaluation as follows:

- to identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
- to promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools
- to promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and staffs
- to provide an assurance of quality in the educational system as a whole, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data.

The code of practice also sets out general principles and guidelines under which members of the Inspectorate engage in the process of evaluation and reporting. The general principles of the code of practice are that inspectors will be consistent, fair and courteous and will work with members of the school community in a climate of mutual respect. Inspectors are also committed to basing their judgements on first-hand evidence and to applying evaluation criteria objectively and reliably.

Whole-school evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) is a process of external evaluation of the work of post-primary schools carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. As one of a range of evaluation models employed by the Inspectorate, WSE-MLL complements the standard WSE model which has been in place since 2003. The process aims to facilitate quality assurance of schools and to enhance quality through fostering school improvement. WSE-MLL is carried out in accordance with section 7(2) (b) and section 13(3)(a)(i) of the Education Act, 1998 (See Appendix 1). The Act places an obligation on the board and staff of a school to accord inspectors every reasonable facility and co-operation in the performance of their duties.

## 1.2 The purpose of this guide

The procedures and criteria contained in *A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning* have been determined by the Inspectorate on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills following consultation with patrons, school management organisations, recognised trade unions and staff associations representing teachers and such other persons as the Minister considered appropriate as required by section 13(8) of the Education Act, 1998.

The guide sets out the practices and procedures involved in all aspects of the WSE-MLL process. It clarifies the process for all stakeholders<sup>1</sup> and places WSE-MLL within the legislative and regulatory framework underpinning the work of the Inspectorate. An information note for teachers is provided in Appendix 3 describing the procedures for inspection visits to classrooms to observe teaching and learning.

The contents of *A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning* will be subject to review from time to time in the light of experience and in consultation with the education partners.

### 1.3 Purpose of WSE-MLL

The WSE-MLL process in a post-primary school is designed to evaluate key aspects of the work of the post-primary school and to promote school improvement. The focus is on the quality of management and leadership and the quality of learning and teaching. The WSEMLL evaluation is intended to complement the school's own development planning and provides the school with opportunities to demonstrate its own self-evaluation processes.

WSE-MLL focuses on whole-school issues relating to management, leadership, planning, teaching, learning and assessment, along with schools' progress in, and capacity for, self-evaluation. The process looks at the recommendations of previous external evaluations conducted by the Inspectorate, for example subject inspections and programme evaluations, and facilitates close examination of the development and improvement in which the school has engaged following these evaluations. WSE-MLL identifies and affirms good practice in the school while providing clear recommendations for further development and improvement. A succinct inspection report is provided to the school and the public at the end of the WSEMLL process.

The WSE-MLL model of inspection may incorporate the evaluation of a specific theme or issue from time to time; for example, the collection of specific data for a national thematic report which may be published by the Inspectorate. WSE-MLL is carried out in line with the general principles regarding evaluation and reporting outlined in the *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate*.

### 1.4 School self-evaluation

Schools contribute significantly to improving the quality of their own provision through school self-evaluation. To facilitate self-evaluation as a central component of the continuous planning process, the Inspectorate published *Looking at Our School: An aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools* (2003). This publication provides schools with a framework for supporting an internal review of school procedures and for promoting school effectiveness and improvement in the broad areas of management, planning, learning and teaching, and support for students. This publication is used by the Inspectorate as the basis for the evaluation framework in conducting whole-school evaluations and other external evaluations of the work of schools and centres for education.

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<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders, in the school context, are the board of management, in-school management, teachers, parents, students and trustee(s). In the case of a VEC school, the CEO of the VEC represents the trustees.

## **1.5 WSE-MLL evaluation teams**

The members of the evaluation team are nominated by a regional assistant chief inspector. The evaluation team consists of two inspectors: a reporting inspector and a support inspector. In larger schools, generally in excess of 700 students, a third inspector may be added to the inspection team. The reporting inspector has overall responsibility for the organisation and coordination of the evaluation. The team normally spends one advance day in the school during the pre-evaluation phase and three days in the school during the in-school phase.

## **1.6 Pre-evaluation phase**

During the pre-evaluation phase of the WSE-MLL, inspectors review school-related documentation and administer questionnaires to a cohort of students and their parents. Preevaluation meetings are also held as part of the WSE-MLL. Formal meetings take place with parents' representatives and with members of the board of management. A representative of the patron or trustees is invited to attend the pre-evaluation meeting with the members of the board. If the patron of the school is a vocational education committee, the chief executive officer of the VEC, or a representative, may attend the meeting. Additional, informal meetings may also take place with the principal and staff of the school. At various stages during the WSE-MLL process, members of the school community have opportunities to interact with the evaluation team to discuss their work, their role and their vision for the school. These interactions provide the evaluation team with insights into the structure and dynamics of the school.

## **1.7 In-school phase**

During the whole-school evaluation, the quality of management, leadership, teaching and learning in the school is evaluated. The inspection team takes due account of school context factors including socio-economic circumstances. The evaluation team also takes account of the school's self-evaluation process, its current capacity and stage of development. This enables the evaluation team to identify and affirm the strengths within the school and to make clear recommendations on areas for development and improvement.

## **1.8 Post-evaluation phase**

Following the in-school evaluation phase of the WSE-MLL, the evaluation team facilitates a meeting with the principal, deputy principal and members of the teaching staff to discuss the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. The reporting inspector also convenes a further meeting to which members of the board of management are invited. A representative of the patron or trustees (CEO of the VEC in the case of VEC schools) and a representative of the parents' association (normally the chairperson), if affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post-primary (NPCpp), are also invited to attend this meeting. During these meetings the work of the school is discussed and the findings of the evaluation are outlined. Strengths and areas for further development are presented.

## **1.9 The WSE-MLL report**

The WSE-MLL report is concerned with the work of the school as a whole. It affirms positive aspects of the school's work and suggests areas for development. The report provides an external view of the work of the school and it is intended that the findings and recommendations of the report will facilitate development and improvement in the work of the school and school self-evaluation. The report is issued to the school and is published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

## **1.10 Procedure for review**

In accordance with section 13 (9) of the Education Act 1998, the Inspectorate published a *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers* (2006). Under the review procedure a teacher or the board of a school may request the Chief Inspector to review any inspection carried out by an inspector that affects the teacher or the school. The review procedure applies to all inspections affecting schools or teachers, including all reports arising from such evaluations and inspections, other than those required under existing procedures for teachers experiencing professional difficulties.

## 2. The pre-evaluation phase

### 2.1 Formal notification

A formal written notification issues to the principal of the school three weeks prior to the commencement of the main in-school evaluation phase. A copy of the written notification is sent to the chairperson of the board of management and to the patron or trustee(s). In the case of a VEC school, a copy of the written notification is sent to the chief executive officer of the vocational education committee.

#### Contact with school principal

Following the official notification of the WSE-MLL, the reporting inspector contacts the principal to outline the format of the evaluation, to arrange dates for the administration of questionnaires, meetings and evaluation visits, and to clarify any specific issues.

### 2.2 School documentation

During WSE-MLL, the inspection team seeks only key documentation critical to the school's operation.

#### The school information form

The school principal is requested to complete a short school information form in electronic format. The completed form is returned to the reporting inspector (preferably by e-mail) within five working days of the date of issue of the school information form.

#### School documentation in advance

The WSE-MLL team examines a limited range of school-related documents in advance of the in-school phase of the evaluation. These documents, which typically include those listed below, should be provided to the reporting inspector (preferably in electronic format).

- The minutes of the five most recent meetings of the board of management
- The full school timetable and individual teacher timetables together with an explanation of codes
- The school enrolment and admissions policy / procedures, copies of application forms and related material
- The school's Code of Behaviour
- The school calendar for the current year and the previous two years with details of opening dates and closures and the schedule of meetings, staff days and major school events.

The date of return of the school documentation is agreed between the principal and the reporting inspector.

### Compliance with Child Protection Guidelines

The school principal and chairperson of the board of management are requested to complete and sign a form confirming that the school has complied with the required aspects of *Children First* and the Department's Child Protection Guidelines. The names of the school's Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person are also requested on the form. The form is returned to the reporting inspector during the in-school phase of the evaluation.

### Advance day and student/parent/teacher questionnaires

The Inspectorate greatly values the views of teachers, parents and students as key stakeholders in the school community. As part of the WSE-MLL, questionnaires are administered to a representative sample of parents and students in order to get their views on the operation of the school. The evaluation team administers the questionnaires to students in the school in the presence of the relevant teacher or teachers and arranges with the school for distribution of the questionnaires to parents. The questionnaires are anonymous and are confidential to the Inspectorate. In general, completed student questionnaires are collected by the reporting inspector on the day they are administered and completed parent questionnaires are returned in a pre-addressed envelope to the school for the attention of the reporting inspector. The Inspectorate appreciates the assistance of school management and teachers in the arrangements for student and parent questionnaires.

The completed questionnaires provide an insight into the views of parents and students on the performance and operation of the school and are a key source of evidence as part of the evaluation. Information gained from the analysis of questionnaires may be referred to in the inspection report. A copy of the aggregated data from the questionnaires is provided to the school.

The WSE-MLL process provides a valuable opportunity for teachers to reflect on the school's strengths and areas for improvement. In this context questionnaires may be used to gather the perspectives of the teaching staff about their own work and about aspects of management, leadership and learning in the school. Confidentiality is assured in respect of individual teacher responses. Where teacher questionnaires are employed, a copy of the aggregated data is provided to the school.

## 2.3 Initial meetings

**Meeting with members of the board of management and patron's representative** The inspection team meets with members of the board of management of the school by arrangement during the evaluation. A representative of the patron/trustee(s) is invited to attend this meeting. The meeting is chaired by a member of the inspection team, normally the reporting inspector. The board is invited to give a presentation to the inspectors (approximately 20 minutes) on the operation of the school under the following headings:

- The school context
- The school's self-evaluation process and its impact on school improvement

- The strengths of the school
- The areas for school improvement and development identified by the board
- Progress in the implementation of recommendations of previous evaluations
- The quality of partnership within the school community

The evaluation team asks questions and collects evidence about the work of the board and the school.

### Meeting with parents

Where a parents' association affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post-primary, (NPCpp) has been formed, the association is invited to nominate three representatives to meet with the WSE-MLL evaluation team. The selection of these representatives to meet with the inspection team is a matter for the executive committee of the parents' association. However, each representative must be the parent or legal guardian of a student enrolled in the school at the time of the inspection. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain the views of parents on matters of a whole-school nature. The meeting is chaired by a member of the inspection team, normally the reporting inspector. At the meeting, issues relating to the WSEMLL framework, and other matters agreed in advance, are included on the agenda for discussion. The work of individual teachers is not discussed at this meeting.

Where the school does not have a parents' association or the association is not affiliated to the NPCpp, the inspectors convene a meeting with the parents' nominees on the board of management.

## 3. The in-school evaluation phase

### 3.1 The evaluation phase

The in-school evaluation stage of the WSE-MLL normally takes place over three school days. Members of the evaluation team visit the school on the days notified to the school. While the team makes every effort to work within the agreed timetable for the WSE-MLL, unforeseen events may alter this period. Any changes are discussed with the school principal where possible.

### 3.2 The evaluation framework

The WSE-MLL team evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following four areas of enquiry:

- Quality of school management and leadership
- Quality of learning and teaching
- Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement.

These areas of enquiry reflect the content of *Looking at Our School: An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Second-Level Schools* (pages xii-xv). The evaluation framework for WSE-MLL is further outlined in appendix 2.

### 3.3 Evaluation activities

WSE-MLL involves a range of evaluation methodologies to gather evidence under the four areas of enquiry in the WSE-MLL framework. In the in-school evaluation phase, these methodologies normally include the following:

#### A review of school documents

The WSE-MLL team examines a selection of school-related documents in order to gain an insight into the planning, communication and management activities that are taking place in the school. The written notification informing the school that it is to have a WSE-MLL includes a list of key documentation (see 2.2 above) to be sent to the reporting inspector in advance of the in-school evaluation phase. During the in-school evaluation phase, the WSE-MLL team examines a selection of other school documents that are relevant to the WSE-MLL process. This helps to inform the evaluation team regarding the particular context of the school and to identify areas for discussion during the in-school evaluation stage. The documents requested during this phase may include the following:

- the school plan including school policies and curriculum plans and documents associated with particular curricular programmes The school may also wish to include draft policies that are under development
- school documentation relating to child protection
- documents arising out of ongoing review or self-evaluation
- the subject plans for each of the subject departments
- the minutes of the five most recently held staff meetings
- any documents or school records relating to specific issues that arise in the course of the evaluation.

The inspection team may seek further documentation, if required, during the course of the evaluation. If necessary, the inspectors may take some of this documentation from the school during the course of the evaluation but all documents are returned at the conclusion of the evaluation.

#### Meetings and interviews

During the in-school evaluation phase, meetings and interviews are held to gather information and evidence to inform the evaluation. Meetings typically take place with senior management and a group (or groups) of some of the teachers involved in management and planning activities and student support. These meetings are particularly valuable in providing the evaluation team with an insight into the leadership and management of the school. Additional meetings may be convened by the evaluation team if deemed necessary.

A meeting is also held with a focus group of students, including representatives of the student council. This meeting provides the evaluation team with an insight into the experience of day-to-day life in the school from the students' perspective. The evaluation team consults with the school's senior management in selecting students to attend this meeting to ensure that the group is representative and includes a range of students across programmes and class levels. The teacher with responsibility for liaising with the student council is invited to attend this meeting.

### **The observation of teaching and learning**

The evaluation team observes teaching and learning in a range of lessons in order to evaluate the overall quality of learning and teaching in the school and gather evidence on other whole-school matters. In this regard, the focus of the evaluation is not limited to particular subject areas and can also include a review of lessons pertaining to particular programmes provided in the school. Inspectors may also track a class group, individual students or groups of students for part of the school day. A draft schedule of lessons to be observed is provided to the school at the start of each day on which teaching and learning is evaluated in the school. Responsibility for the selection of lessons for observation rests solely with the inspector(s). The draft schedule may be subject to change or review as the evaluation team deems necessary.

When evaluating teaching and learning, the evaluation team looks at methodologies, classroom management, classroom atmosphere, learning and students' achievement. The team also evaluates evidence of planning for teaching and learning and takes account of self-evaluation relating to work in classrooms. Feedback is provided to individual teachers at the end of lessons, or at another time during the in-school evaluation. The feedback relates to the overall quality of teaching and learning and the quality of the students' experience in the lesson.

### **Interaction with students**

The inspectors interact with students in a range of settings in order to gain an understanding of the students' experience in the school. In lessons, this interaction may involve engagement with individual students, groups of students or whole class groups and may involve targeted or open questioning, the provision of appropriate tasks, or the evaluation of skills. In lessons where students are engaged in practical tasks or in group work the inspector may engage with groups or individuals as the lesson progresses. These interactions provide the inspector with first-hand insight into the level of students' learning and achievement, and an understanding of the context of the individual class and the quality of the students' experiences in the school.

### **Reviewing students' work**

The inspectors may review samples of students' work in notebooks, copybooks, folders, workbooks, portfolios or other media and displays of project work. These samples of students' work give the inspection team insights into the teaching processes in the classroom, the pattern and quality of homework and the quality of the students' learning.

### Other evaluation activity

Members of the evaluation team may also attend any school and subject-related activities they deem appropriate to the evaluation of management, leadership and learning in the school.

## 4. The post-evaluation phase

### 4.1 Post-evaluation activities

During this period the evaluation team drafts the report in accordance with the evidence collected. The reporting inspector assumes overall responsibility for the drafting of the report. As soon as possible after the conclusion of the in-school evaluation phase the reporting inspector arranges the times and dates for the post-evaluation meetings with the school principal.

During the post-evaluation phase, meetings are held with:

- the school's senior management (principal and deputy principal(s))
- members of the teaching staff
- the members of the board of management and a representative of the patron/trustee(s) and a representative of the parents' association.

These meetings, which are normally chaired by the reporting inspector, are an important part of the evaluation process. They allow for communication of the main draft findings of the evaluation and provide opportunities for clarification of any information and discussion as to how the school can develop through implementation of the main recommendations of the evaluation. Typically, all post-evaluation meetings are scheduled for the same date.

The post-evaluation phase culminates with the issuing of the WSE-MLL report to the school principal, the board of management, the trustee(s), the parents' association and student council. (See section 5.2)

### 4.2 Post-evaluation meeting with the school's senior management

At the meeting with the principal and deputy principal(s) the evaluation team presents the draft findings and recommendations of the WSE-MLL. The inspectors communicate the main findings and recommendations of the report under its component headings and sub-headings. (See section 5.4) The principal and deputy principal(s) are encouraged to discuss the outcomes of the evaluation and to clarify any information with the evaluation team. The discussion informs the preparation of the draft evaluation report.

### 4.3 Post-evaluation meeting with all members of the teaching staff

At the meeting with the teaching staff, the evaluation team presents the draft findings and recommendations of the WSE-MLL. The inspectors communicate the main findings and recommendations of the report under its component headings and sub-headings. The staff

members are encouraged to discuss the outcomes of the evaluation and to clarify any information with the evaluation team. The discussion informs the preparation of the draft evaluation report.

#### **4.4 Post-evaluation meeting with members of the board of management and a representative of the patron/trustee(s) and a representative of the parents' association.**

The following are invited to attend this post-evaluation meeting:

- the members of the board of management
- a representative of the patron/trustee(s)
- a representative (normally the chairperson) of the school's parents' association where the association is affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post-primary.

At this meeting, the evaluation team communicates the main findings and recommendations of the WSE-MLL report under its component headings and sub-headings. A brief summary of the meeting with parents which took place during the pre-evaluation phase is also provided at this meeting. The board members and representatives of the parents and patron/trustee(s) are encouraged to discuss the outcomes of the evaluation and to clarify any information with the evaluation team. The discussion informs the preparation of the draft evaluation report.

#### **4.5 Factual verification and school response**

The factual verification and school response phases proceed in accordance with the arrangements for the publication of inspection reports as described in *Publication of School Inspection Reports - Guidelines* (2006), which is available on the Department's web site. The Inspectorate's secretariat sends a draft copy of the evaluation report to the school principal, to the chairperson of the school's board of management and to the CEO of the VEC in the case of a VEC school, by e-mail. A factual verification form accompanies the draft report. Using this form, the principal and the chairperson are invited to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any errors of fact in the draft report. In verifying the factual content of the draft report the principal and chairperson should consult with other school stakeholders, including trustees, as necessary.

The factual verification form should be returned electronically to the secretariat by the principal or the chairperson of the board of management within 10 school days of the date of issue of the draft report. The factual verification form, when returned by the principal or chairperson, is referred to the reporting inspector and the appropriate assistant chief inspector. If any errors of fact have been drawn to the attention of the Inspectorate, the draft report is amended, as necessary.

The evaluation report is then issued to the chairperson and the principal. A copy of the report is also issued to the CEO of the VEC in the case of a VEC school. The chairperson is required to distribute a copy to all members of the board of management and to make the report available to all staff members (Education Act, 1998, section 13 (9)), including any staff members who may have left the school in the period between the evaluation stage and the issue of the WSE-MLL report.

The school has 20 school days from the date of issue of the report in which to submit a *school response*. This allows the school to make observations on the content of the inspection report and to identify follow-up actions, planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity, to implement the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

The Inspectorate is committed to writing high-quality reports which are finalised and edited for issue in accordance with agreed time schedules. The detailed arrangements for the publication of inspection reports are described in a separate document, *Publication of School Inspection Reports - Guidelines* (2006), which is available on the Department's web site.

## 5. The WSE-MLL Report

### 5.1 Contents and purpose of the report

The WSE-MLL report reflects the WSE-MLL evaluation framework. The primary purpose of the report is to present the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation. The text of the report provides evaluative statements identifying both strengths and areas that are recommended for development. Individual teachers are not named in a WSE-MLL report.

The report also links with the process of self-evaluation and improvement in place in the school and is a support to the school in developing and promoting its own agenda for improvement. Normally, the response of the school, if furnished by the board of management, will also be published with the WSE-MLL report.

### 5.2 Dissemination of the report

The WSE-MLL report is issued to the school principal, the chairperson of the school's board of management, the patron/trustee(s), the chairperson of the parents' association and the chairperson of the students' council. In the case of a school managed by a vocational education committee, the report is also issued to the chief executive officer of the VEC.

It is recommended that the board of management, as part of its agenda for school improvement, discuss the findings and recommendations of the report. In the case of a VEC school it is suggested that the CEO of the VEC or his/her deputed officer should be a party to such discussions.

The members of the school community should reflect upon the report and give equal consideration to the strengths identified and to the recommendations for further development. The outcomes of external evaluations such as WSE-MLL should help to inform and complement the outcomes of a school's self-evaluation and should be used by the school community to improve the quality of the school's work. The recommendations in WSE-MLL reports can provide important direction for the board of management of the school, its patron and trustee(s), and to the principal and staff as they seek to bring about ongoing improvement in the school. Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of recommendations and improvements rests mainly with the board of management and the school principal. In the case of a VEC school, the CEO of the VEC also has responsibility for supporting the implementation of recommendations and improvements. The patron or trustee(s) of the school also have a responsibility to ensure that effective follow-up action is taken. In some cases, schools may wish to access the assistance available from school support services and other sources of advice when planning and implementing improvements.

The Inspectorate and other divisions in the Department of Education and Skills will monitor the implementation of recommendations in selected schools and in the system generally.

### 5.3 Publication of the WSE-MLL report

The WSE-MLL report is published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)). As mentioned above, the detailed arrangements for the publication of inspection reports are described in a separate document, *Publication of School Inspection Reports - Guidelines* (2006), which is available on the Department's web site.

### 5.4 The structure of the WSE-MLL report

The outline presented below provides a guide to the structure of the WSE-MLL report.

#### Brief introduction outlining school context

1. **Summary of findings and recommendations for further development**
  - 1.1. Key findings
  - 1.2. Recommendations for further development
2. **Quality of school management and leadership**
  - 2.1. School ownership and management – the Board of Management Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations
    - The school's priorities for development
  - 2.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning
    - Leadership of staff
    - Leadership of students
  - 2.3. Management of facilities
3. **Quality of learning and teaching**
  - 3.1. The quality of learning and teaching
4. **Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations**
  - 4.1. Management
  - 4.2. Learning and teaching
5. **The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement**

The headings and sub-headings of WSE-MLL inspection reports may change from time to time. The current report template may be accessed on the Department's website.

## Appendix 1

### Functions of the Inspectorate and professional code of practice

## Functions of the Inspectorate in respect of WSE

Section 7(2) of the Education Act defines some of the functions of the Minister for Education and Skills. Subsection 7(2)(a) sets out the responsibilities of the Minister regarding the evaluation of schools and centres for education. The Inspectorate's WSE programme is one of the means used by the Minister to carry out this function:

*To monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided in the State by recognised schools and centres for education....and to publish, in such manner as the Minister considers appropriate, information relating to such monitoring and assessment.*

Section 13(3) of the Education Act defines the function of the Inspectorate as follows:

*To support and advise recognised schools and centres of education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education...*

This Section also sets out the functions of members of the Inspectorate in relation to inspection and evaluation as follows:

An Inspector shall visit recognised schools and centres of education on the initiative of the Inspectorate, and, following consultation with the board, parents of students and teachers as appropriate...

- *Evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools and centres....*
- *Evaluate the education standards in such schools and centres*
- *Assess the implementation of regulations made by the Minister*
- *Report to the Minister or to the board, patron, parents of students and teachers as appropriate...on these matters and any other matter relating to the activities of those school or centres and the needs of students attending those schools or centres.*

Section 13(5) states that where an Inspector has carried out an evaluation

*.... he or she may make recommendations to the Minister in respect of improvements that he or she considers appropriate.*

Section 13(7) states that

*An inspector shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of performing his or her functions and shall be accorded every reasonable facility and co-operation by the board and staff of a school or centre for education.*

### **The Inspectorate's professional code of practice**

The Inspectorate operates an ongoing system of in-school evaluation within this legislative framework. The Inspectorate is committed to evaluating schools and teachers in a spirit of professional collaboration and in accordance with the highest professional standards. The *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* (2002), developed in accordance with the provisions of section 13(8) of the Education Act (1998), sets out general principles and guidelines under which members of the Inspectorate engage in the process of evaluation and reporting. The code lays down the professional standards to which the Inspectorate works. Among the general principles of the code of practice, the Inspectorate is committed to

- fostering mutual respect, trust, positive professional relations and partnership between the Inspectorate and the school community
- consistent application of evaluation criteria in an objective and reliable manner, and reliance on first-hand evidence based on observation
- consistency and fairness, taking due account of school context factors and taking cognisance of school self-review
- engaging in dialogue with members of school staffs and the education partners and ensuring confidentiality, while having due regard to statutory provisions
- courtesy, respect and sensitivity towards both individual teachers and the school, and clarity in the manner in which findings are communicated
- acknowledging that the pupils are the ultimate beneficiaries of the evaluation process.

## **Appendix 2 – WSE-MLL Evaluation Framework**

Framework for whole-school evaluation, management, leadership and learning based on *Looking at Our School: An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Second-Level Schools*

The WSE-MLL team evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Quality of school management and leadership
- Quality of learning and teaching
- Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

### **Area 1. Quality of school management and leadership**

### **1.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management**

The WSE-MLL team examines the composition and functioning of the board of management and how, in line with *Looking at Our School*, it fulfils its statutory obligations. The team evaluates the operation of the board, the level of consultation with members of the school community and its role in policy development and review. The WSE-MLL team also examines the school's priorities for development, how these priorities have been established and the processes which the board has put in place to achieve these priorities including the board's engagement with the school self-evaluation process.

### **1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning**

The WSE-MLL team examines the extent to which the school is a learning community and the level of self-evaluation in which it engages. In this context, the team examines the in-school management of the school, including the role of the principal, the deputy principal(s), and the middle management team in leading learning in the school. The WSE-MLL team looks at the effectiveness of leadership in the school generally and does not look for, or advocate, one particular style or model of leadership. The team evaluates the instructional and personal leadership of staff in the school, the motivation of staff and the support for staff wishing to avail of continuing professional development. The team also examines school development planning, communication structures and the levels of co-operation and collaboration among the school community.

In evaluating the leadership of students, the team looks at the school's procedures for admissions, transitions, inclusion, student management and the operation of the student council. Strategies which are in place to celebrate student achievement, promote the attendance and the retention of students as well as the general level of support and guidance available to students are also reviewed. The WSE-MLL team also examines the school's curriculum and timetable with an emphasis on the breadth and balance in curriculum provision, the arrangements for students' subject choices and how the needs of all students are being met.

### **1.3 Management of facilities**

During the meetings with in-school management and during the in-school evaluation phase, the WSE-MLL team examines the physical resources and facilities that are available to support learning and teaching in a safe and educationally stimulating setting. The team also examines the school's actions in relation to its environmental responsibilities.

## **Area 2. Quality of learning and teaching**

### **2.1 Quality of learning and teaching**

The WSE-MLL team evaluates the quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed as an indicator of the overall quality of learning and teaching in the school. The team evaluates aspects of teaching methodology, classroom management, classroom atmosphere and learning within the lessons observed. The quality of planning and preparation at individual teacher, subject department and whole-school levels is also reviewed as well as the in-school assessment procedures that are in place. As part of the review of self-evaluation in the school,

the analysis and planning based on student achievement, both by individual teachers and at whole-school level, are evaluated.

### **Area 3. *Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations***

#### **3.1 Management**

The WSE-MLL team examines how successful the school has been in implementing the recommendations of previous subject, programme and whole-school evaluation reports with regard to the management of the school. Inspectors follow up on the implementation of selected recommendations made in previous evaluation reports. The team evaluates the school's level of engagement with the main recommendations regarding the management of the school, staff, students and facilities and the impact of the implementation of these recommendations.

#### **3.2 Learning and teaching**

The WSE-MLL team examines how successful the school has been in implementing the recommendations of previous subject, programme and whole-school evaluation reports with regard to learning and teaching in the school. The team examines the implementation of selected recommendations made in previous evaluation reports regarding teaching and learning and the impact of the implementation of these recommendations. The team also reviews how the recommended good practice in specific areas has been disseminated to other areas of the school.

### **Area 4. *The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement***

The WSE-MLL team assesses the self-evaluation processes currently taking place in the school, the level of engagement in these processes by the school's stakeholders and how the processes have impacted on the work of the school and the quality of learning. The WSEMLL team evaluates how targets for improvement are set and monitored within the school and the overall effectiveness of the school's strategies for the assessment and monitoring of student achievement.

The WSE-MLL team comments on the school's capacity for change and improvement and its capacity to implement the recommendations of the WSE-MLL report within an appropriate timeframe, based on the development of the school in recent years. This includes observations on the leadership of the school development planning and review process and the culture of the school in planning for and responding to the evolving needs of its student cohort.

## Appendix 3 – WSE-MLL Information Note for Teachers

Information note on the evaluation of teaching and learning in Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL)

### **Purpose of this note.**

This note is intended to outline for teachers how Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) operates in schools, particularly with regard to the evaluation of teaching and learning. Detailed explanation of all aspects of WSE-MLL can be found in *A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning*.

### **Aim of classroom visits**

The WSE-MLL team evaluates the quality of learning and teaching in a variety of lessons as an indicator of the overall quality of learning and teaching in the school. The inspectors observe teaching and learning in a broad range of lessons across subjects and programmes and at different levels throughout the school. Inspectors also use classroom visits to examine how successful the school has been in implementing the recommendations of previous subject, programme and whole-school evaluation reports with regard to learning and teaching in the school. The team examines the implementation of selected recommendations made in previous evaluation reports regarding teaching and learning and the impact of the

implementation of these recommendations. The team also reviews how recommended good practice has been disseminated, and its impact, throughout the school.

### **The lesson inspection schedule**

A lesson inspection schedule is formulated by the inspection team as part of the evaluation. In formulating this schedule, the inspection team attempts to evaluate a wide range of subjects across different year groups, programmes and levels. The lesson inspection schedule is made available by inspectors to the school principal on the morning of each day on which the evaluation of teaching and learning is taking place (i.e. normally on day 2 and day 3 of the inschool evaluation week).

### **In-class evaluation**

The team evaluates the quality of teaching and learning in a broad range of lessons. The focus of this evaluation is different from stand-alone subject inspection (or subject inspection taking place as part of a standard WSE) because there is a greater emphasis on general aspects of effective teaching and learning than on subject-specific issues. The focus of classroom inspection is on aspects of teaching methodology, classroom management, classroom atmosphere and learning within the lessons observed.

The quality of planning and preparation at individual teacher, subject department and wholeschool levels is also reviewed during WSE-MLL. It is expected that teachers are able to present their written plans or schemes of work on a termly and yearly basis and the inspector may examine individual teacher planning materials in this regard. Written lesson plans for individual lessons are not required. During the observation of individual lessons, inspectors look for evidence that lessons have been well prepared in terms of their content, structure, pacing, methodology and assessment procedures.

As part of the inspectors' review of self-evaluation in the school, the analysis and planning based on student achievement, at whole-school, programme and subject level, are evaluated, as well as the in-school assessment procedures that are in place. In this context, inspectors may review teachers' records of assessments of the class group being visited.

Inspectors may interact with students in order to gain an understanding of the students' experience in the school. This interaction may involve engagement with individual students, groups of students or whole class groups and may involve targeted or open questioning, the provision of appropriate tasks, or the evaluation of skills. In lessons where students are engaged in practical tasks or in group work the inspector may engage with groups or individuals as the lesson progresses. These interactions provide the inspector with first-hand insight into the level of students' learning and achievement, and an understanding of the context of the individual class and the quality of the students' experiences in the school. In the

course of lesson visits inspectors may look at students' journals and copybooks in order to evaluate students' progress and the quality of the feedback given to students to improve the quality of their learning.

### Feedback to teachers

Inspectors will provide brief verbal feedback to teachers on the lesson observed. The feedback will cover some or all of the evaluation areas mentioned above – i.e. general aspects of teaching methodology, classroom management, classroom atmosphere, student learning, planning and preparation and assessment. Feedback will take place at the end of the lesson or at another mutually convenient time during the in-school evaluation period.

## Appendix 4 – Quality Continuum for School Evaluation

*Looking At Our School – An aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools* (page x) refers to the quality continuum used to evaluate school performance. When considering how the school is performing under any area of enquiry a number of reference points are used representing stages of development in the improvement process. This continuum consists of four levels – significant strengths, more strengths than weaknesses, more weaknesses than strengths, significant weaknesses.

The following language, or similar, is used in reports to describe the quality of practice or provision in a school in relation to the quality continuum:

Level	Performance level	Example of descriptive terms
4	Significant strengths	Excellent, very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; of a very high quality
3	More strengths than weaknesses	Good; effective practice; competent, useful; commendable; valuable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
2	More weaknesses than strengths	Scope for development; fair in certain areas but with evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on students' learning

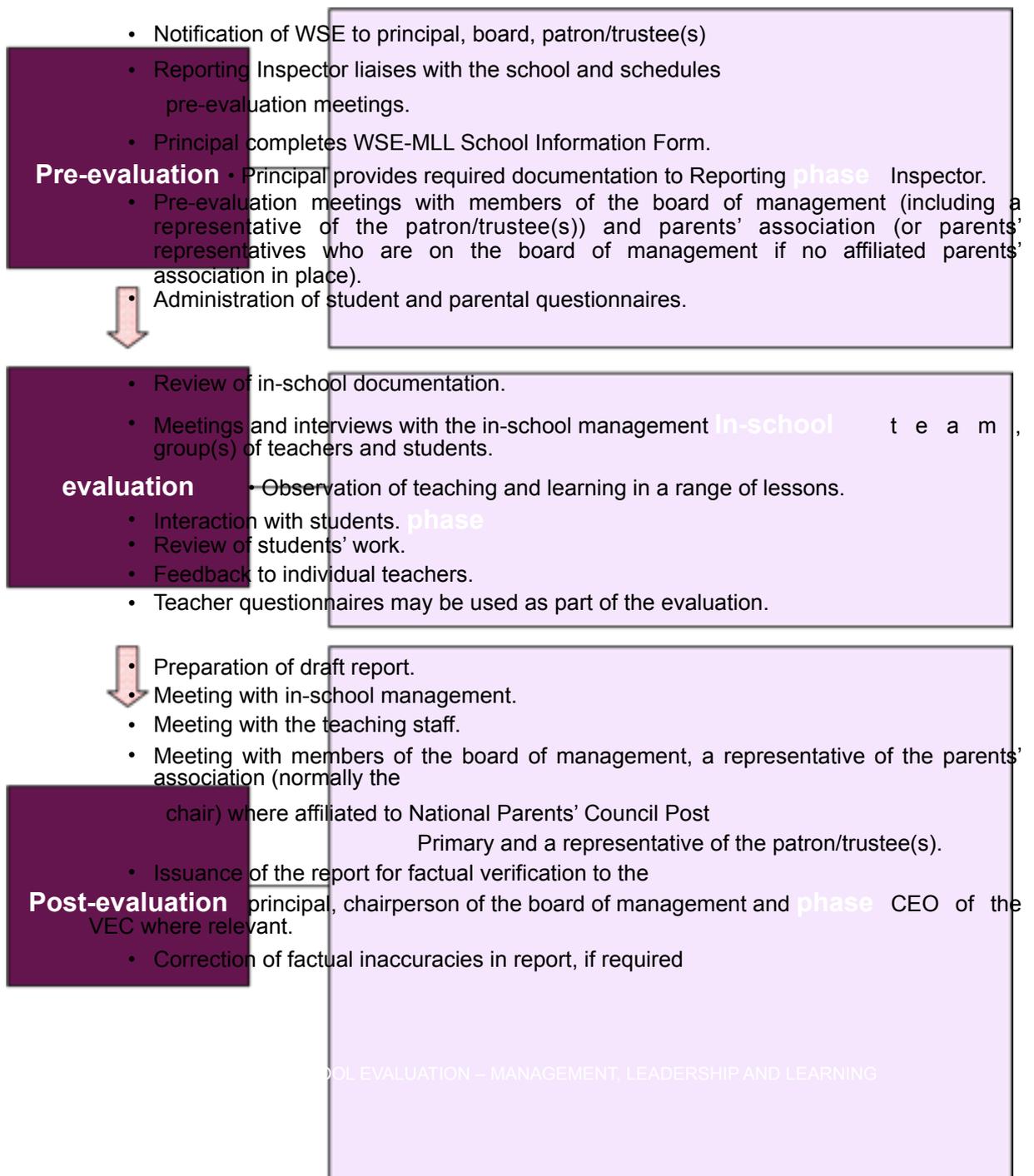
1	Significant weaknesses	Weak; poor; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties
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## Appendix 5 – WSE-MLL Overview

The WSE-MLL process is divided into three phases:

- Phase 1: the pre-evaluation phase
- Phase 2: the in-school evaluation phase
- Phase 3: the post-evaluation phase.

An outline description of the principal activities during each phase is presented hereunder.



- Issuance of the report for school response to the principal, chairperson of the board of management and CEO of the VEC where relevant.
- Issuance of the final report to the principal, chairperson of the board of management, patron/trustee(s), chairperson of the parents' association (where an association affiliated to the National Parents' Council – Post Primary exists), and chairperson of the students' council. • Publication of the report and the school's response.