



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



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCELEANNA | AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE

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1. Introduction

Quality assurance and school improvement

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE–MLL) is a process of external evaluation of the work of schools carried out by the Inspectorate in line with its duties under section 13 of the *Education Act 1998*. As the statutory definition of the Inspectorate’s function makes clear, the evaluation of the work of schools and the provision of advice and support are core elements of the Inspectorate’s work.

The WSE-MLL model of evaluation complements the standard WSE model that is currently in place in primary schools. The new model is intended to provide whole-school evaluative information, advice and support regarding the quality of learning, teaching and management in primary schools. It is focused on quality assuring the work of schools and on supporting school improvement.

The WSE-MLL model of inspection is carried out in accordance with the *Professional Code of Practice for the Inspectorate*, Department of Education and Skills, available at www.education.ie. During a WSE-MLL, a school’s board and its staff are obliged to accord the inspectors “every reasonable facility and co-operation” in the performance of their duties (section 13(7), *Education Act 1998*).

This guide sets out the practices and procedures involved in the WSE-MLL process. It clarifies the process for all stakeholders and places WSE-MLL within the legislative and regulatory framework underpinning the work of the Inspectorate. The contents of this guide are subject to review from time to time in the light of experience and in consultation with the education partners.

2. The purpose of WSE-MLL

WSE-MLL focuses on the quality of learning, teaching, management and leadership in schools. It aligns strategically with other developments in the education system, including *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 - 2020* and school self-evaluation (SSE).

WSE-MLL is being introduced in primary schools for a number of reasons:

- To enable more regular, focused evaluation of pupils’ learning and of the quality of teaching, leadership and management in schools
- To develop flexibility in the approaches to inspection in order to take account of the differing context factors of schools including:
 - the number of teachers
 - the organisation of classes (for example, single-grade or multi-grade)
 - the size of the in-school management team
 - the number and deployment of support personnel
 - the fact that the principal may have both teaching and administrative duties
- To provide regular advice and support to schools regarding particular aspects of the education they provide and, in this regard, to furnish schools with prompt reports on the evaluation of their work
- To complement and support school self-evaluation (SSE) processes in schools, as these processes develop over time, with due regard to the fact that many schools are at an early stage of engagement in SSE
- To identify schools that may require particular kinds of support or other forms of inspection
- To provide a means of gathering up-to-date quality information at a national level on pupils’ learning and the quality of aspects of education provision in primary schools

- To evaluate the effectiveness of policies, interventions or initiatives and to make available to the system up-to-date information in this regard

3. Features of the WSE-MLL model

3.1 The focus of WSE-MLL

Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning asks five key questions relating to the quality of education provision in a school. These are:

- How good are the learning achievements of pupils?
- How good is the teaching?
- How is the well-being of pupils supported?
- How effective are school leadership and management?
- How effective is school self-evaluation and how well is it being used to improve learning, teaching, leadership and management?

Teaching and learning

WSE-MLL is strongly focused on the quality of teaching and learning in the school as a whole. Accordingly, most of the time inspectors spend in a school during this evaluation is spent in classrooms and other learning settings. The evaluation is not confined to specific curriculum areas; teaching and learning may be evaluated across a range of curriculum areas. Details of the framework used to evaluate teaching and learning during a WSE-MLL are provided in *Appendix 1*.

Support for pupils' well-being

WSE-MLL enquires into how pupils are managed, and how the school supports pupils from disadvantaged circumstances and from minority groups. It examines how all pupils (including pupils with special educational needs) are included in the work in classrooms and other learning settings. Aspects of the school's compliance with the Department's *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2011)* are also examined.

Management and leadership

WSE-MLL also focuses on whole-school issues relating to management and leadership, taking into account context factors such as school size and the number of in-school management personnel.

School self-evaluation

Over time, WSE-MLL will take increased account of the self-evaluation engaged in by schools while remaining sensitive to the individual context factors of schools at varying stages of SSE development. Schools are required to engage in school self-evaluation of teaching and learning and to develop school improvement plans which focus on improving outcomes for pupils. Inspectors acknowledge that the requirement to engage in school self-evaluation is relatively new. The WSE-MLL model enables schools to report on the progress they have made in their self-evaluation and allows inspectors to take account of this.

3.2 The significance of other evaluation findings

The evidence base of a WSE-MLL in a particular school will typically include, where available, relevant evaluative data on the work of the school gathered through other inspection activity such as incidental inspection. The WSE-MLL model takes account of a school's progress in respect of recommendations made in previous inspections.

3.3 Documents reviewed during a WSE-MLL

As noted above, the observation of teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings is a central part of the WSE-MLL process. In the course of a typical WSE-MLL evaluation, relevant school documents are also reviewed. Schools are typically asked to provide the documents listed below for inspection. Any additional documents provided by the

school, other than where requested by inspectors, are reviewed at the discretion of the inspection team.

- A completed school information form, which will include the school's reflection on and description of its work in relation to key aspects of education provision
- The school's child protection policy
- The school's code of behaviour, including its anti-bullying policy
- School self-evaluation reports (where available)
- School improvement plans or action plans (including, where relevant, DEIS plan)
- Individual teachers' written plans
- Individual teachers' timetables
- Assessment records
- Roll books and registers
- Minutes of board meetings

Where the inspector considers it appropriate, he/she may request selected sections of the School Plan, including curriculum planning documents, to be made available.

3.4 Notice

Schools receive two weeks' advance written notice of a WSE-MLL.

3.5 Scheduling

A WSE-MLL evaluation typically takes place over a five-day period. The model provides that all meetings, the review of documents, the lesson observations and the provision of feedback (at which the findings and recommendations of the inspection are presented and discussed) are usually completed within five working days.

4. How are WSE-MLL inspections carried out?

4.1 The pre-evaluation phase

Notice

Notice of the WSE-MLL is provided to the principal. A hard copy of the notice is sent to the chairperson of the board, the chairperson of the parents' association and the patron. Following the official notification, the principal is contacted by an inspector conducting the evaluation to outline the format of the WSE-MLL, to arrange meetings, to arrange for distribution and completion of parent and teacher questionnaires and to clarify any specific issues.

Documents

During the pre-evaluation stage schools will be asked to provide, in electronic format, the following documents for inspection:

- The completed school information form
- The individual timetables of the teachers

Questionnaires for parents are sent to the school for distribution and completion in advance of the evaluation. The school is asked to have the completed questionnaires ready for collection on the first day of the in-school phase of the evaluation. The principal is asked to provide information regarding the on-line questionnaire for teachers to the school staff in advance of the in-school phase.

4.2 The in-school phase

The in-school evaluation work during a WSE-MLL will be conducted by one or two inspectors, depending on the size of the school. Typically, the core inspection activity takes place over two or three days and will consist of classroom visits, meetings, the administration of questionnaires, the review of documents, and the provision of feedback.

Classroom visits

- During the in-school phase of the evaluation, inspectors spend most of their time in classrooms and other learning settings observing teaching and learning, interacting with pupils and reviewing their work. Inspectors have flexibility regarding the scheduling of classroom visits and they draw on the teachers' own timetables in selecting the lessons. Typically, teachers are informed on the morning of each day of the evaluation as to which lessons are to be observed.
- The work of the teaching staff in the school, including support teachers, is evaluated. In larger schools, this can involve inspection visits to a sample of teachers.
- Teaching and learning in any learning setting in the school may be observed more than once over the course of the evaluation.
- A visit by an inspector to a classroom or other learning setting will normally last between one and one and a half hours. Alternatively, the inspector may observe teaching and learning in a particular learning setting over two or more shorter periods.
- Teachers are individually provided with brief oral feedback on their work and on the pupils' learning following the visits to classrooms or other learning settings.

Meetings

- **The principal:** A meeting with the principal regarding the key questions of quality is held during the in-school phase of the evaluation. Information provided on the completed school information form will inform the content of this meeting.
- **The board:** A meeting with the chairperson of the board (or his/her representative) is also held during the in-school phase of the evaluation. Where one or two additional members of the board are available they may also attend the meeting. This meeting also addresses the key questions of quality.
- **An affiliated parents association:** Where a parents' association affiliated to the National Parents' Council Primary (NPCp) has been formed, the association's chairperson (or his/her nominated representative) is invited to meet with the inspector(s) conducting the WSE–MLL. Where one or two other elected officers of the parents' association are available, they may attend the meeting also. The purpose of this meeting is to obtain the views of parents on matters of a whole-school nature. At the meeting, issues relating to the WSE–MLL key questions of quality, and other matters agreed in advance will be included on the agenda for discussion. The work of individual teachers will not be discussed at this meeting.
- **A non-affiliated parent body:** Where the school does not have a parents' association or the association is not affiliated to the NPCp, the inspectors will convene a meeting with the parents' nominees on the board.
- **The in-school management team:** The inspectors may also convene a meeting with the in-school management team

Questionnaires

- Parent and pupil questionnaires are used to gather the perspectives of parents and pupils on aspects of the work of the school.
- Information gained from the analysis of questionnaires may be referred to in the inspection report but detailed statistical information is not included in the report. A summary of the aggregated data from the questionnaires is provided to the school.

Documents

During the in-school phase, the inspectors typically request the following documents for review:

- The school's child protection policy
- The school's code of behaviour, including the anti-bullying policy

- School self-evaluation reports (where available)¹
- School improvement plans or action plans (for example, a DEIS plan)
- Individual teachers' written plans
- Assessment records
- Roll books and registers
- Minutes of board meetings

Selected sections of the school plan, including curriculum planning documents, may also be requested for review.

Compliance with Child Protection Procedures

The school principal and chairperson of the board are required to complete and sign a form confirming that the school has complied with the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (www.education.ie). The school is requested to demonstrate its compliance with the published procedures.

4.3 The post-evaluation phase

The post-evaluation meeting

Whole-school feedback on each of the key questions of quality is provided by the inspector at a post-evaluation meeting. That meeting is typically held shortly after the completion of the in-school phase, following the preparation of a draft written report by the inspectors.

The principal, teachers, the chairperson (or other representative) of the board of management, and the chairperson of the parents association (or his/her nominated representative) are invited to attend the post-evaluation meeting. A representative of the school's patron may also attend that meeting.

During the post-evaluation meeting, the inspectors seek to:

- acknowledge good practice in the school
- provide an evaluation of the work of the school in respect of each of the questions of quality
- identify areas for development
- gather any additional relevant information that they may need to complete the written report on the inspection

The post-evaluation meeting provides an opportunity for discussion of the outcomes of the inspection.

Discussion with principal and teachers

Following the post-evaluation meeting, a meeting attended by the inspector, the principal and a number of the teachers is held. The purpose of this meeting is to enable further professional discussion of the feedback provided at the post-evaluation meeting.

The WSE-MLL report

A draft inspection report will be finalised following the completion of the post-evaluation meeting and the discussion with the principal and teachers. The report will present the key findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It will be processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and will be issued to the school for factual verification and later for school response as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (DES, 2006). The final report and the school's response will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The structure of a WSE-MLL report and sample content within that structure is provided in *Appendix 2*.

¹ Under Circular 0039/2012 all schools are required to have developed a self-evaluation report by the end of the 2013-14 school year.

5. 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). The detailed arrangements for the publication of inspection reports are described in a separate document, *Publication of School Inspection Reports – Guidelines (2006)* (www.education.ie).

6. Acting on the WSE-MLL report

The board of management, as part of its agenda for school improvement, should discuss the findings and recommendations of the WSE-MLL report and should, along with the school principal, plan for and oversee the implementation of the actions needed to address the report's recommendations. The WSE-MLL report should also be used by the school, along with other types of evidence gathered by it, to inform its school self-evaluation processes and its planning for improvement and development.

While responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations and improvements in a WSE-MLL report rests mainly with the board and principal (or the CEO of the ETB in the case of an ETB school), the patron or trustees 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 of the Department of Education and Skills will monitor the implementation of recommendations in selected schools and in the system generally. The degree to which progress has been made on the implementation of recommendations in a WSE-MLL report may be evaluated at a later date by the Inspectorate through a follow-through inspection.

7. Review of Inspections

A teacher or a board of management affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act (1998) (Revised 2006)*. (www.education.ie).

8. Publication and Revision of this Guide

This Guide has been prepared following consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) of the *Education Act, 1998*.

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in schools and the provisions of this Guide will be reviewed periodically.

Appendix 1

The Evaluation Framework for WSE-MLL

The WSE-MLL model provides for the evaluation and reporting on the work of a school with regard to five key questions of quality:

1. How good are the learning achievements of pupils?
2. How good is the teaching?
3. How is the well-being of pupils supported?
4. How effective are leadership and management?
5. How effective is school self-evaluation and how well is it being used to improve learning, teaching, leadership and management?

Learning and Teaching

In their evaluation of learning and teaching during WSE-MLL, inspectors draw on the quality framework set out in *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Primary Schools*, Chapter 3, available at www.education.ie. This, in summary, involves an evaluation of:

- *The quality of learner outcomes*
 - The attainment of curriculum objectives (with regard to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the pupils)
 - The progress made by all pupils (including pupils with low achievement or other special educational needs) in their learning
- *The quality of pupils' learning experiences*
 - The learning environment provided
 - The pupils' engagement in their learning
 - The extent to which the pupils are being equipped with the tools and skills to learn now and into the future
- *The quality of teachers' practice*
 - The teachers' preparation for teaching (including, for example, their planning for gainful learning activities and for differentiated learning)
 - The teaching approaches used in the lessons
 - The management of the pupils
 - Assessment practices (including assessment for learning)

Support for pupils' well-being

In evaluating the quality of the support for pupils' well-being, inspectors enquire into:

- School culture (including the management of pupils and the school's anti-bullying policy)
- The support provided for and the inclusion of pupils with special needs
- The support provided for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (including, where applicable, School Completion programmes or initiatives in operation in the school)
- The inclusion of pupils from minority groups
- Home-school communication and relationships (including, where applicable, the role of the home-school-community liaison coordinator)
- The school's compliance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (DES 2011)

School Leadership and Management

In evaluating the quality of school leadership and management, inspectors enquire into:

- *The work of the board of management*
 - The constitution and functioning of the board
 - The board's communication with members of the school community

- The board's role in policy development and review (including, as relevant, its involvement in SSE)
 - The school's Child Protection policy
 - The management of resources
 - Priorities for school development and improvement
- *The work of the principal and in-school management team*
- The leadership of learning in the school
 - The effectiveness of leadership in the school generally
 - School planning and review processes (including, as relevant, SSE processes; school improvement plans or DEIS action plans, with due regard to the individual context factors of schools at varying stages of SSE development)
 - Communication and co-operation within the school and with the wider school community
 - Priorities for school development and improvement
-

In analysing and reporting on their findings in respect of all five key questions of quality, inspectors use a quality continuum with the following four levels:

- *significant strengths*
- *more strengths than weaknesses*
- *more weaknesses than strengths*
- *significant weaknesses*

Examples of the language used in reports to describe the quality of practice in a school with regard to the quality continuum are provided at *Table 1* below.

The Quality Continuum

Level	Performance Level	Example of descriptive terms
4	Significant strengths	Excellent; of a very high quality; very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; few areas for improvement
3	Strengths outweigh weaknesses	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
2	Weaknesses outweigh strengths	Fair in certain areas but with evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on pupils' learning; scope for development; experiencing difficulty
1	Significant weaknesses	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

Appendix 2

WSE-MLL Report Structure and Sample Content

Introduction

- School name and date of evaluation
- Context factors
- Reference to evidence base of report (for example, observation of lessons, meetings)

The school has **strengths** in the following areas:

- *Strengths listed*

The following **recommendations** are made:

- *Recommendations are listed*

Findings

1. The learning achievements of pupils

- Overall learning achievements
- Learning outcomes in numeracy and literacy (including Gaeilge)
- Progress of pupils (including pupils with special educational needs)

2. Quality of teaching

- The overall quality of teaching in the school
- The quality of teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs

3. Support for pupils' well-being

- How pupils are managed
- How pupils from disadvantaged and/or minority groups are supported
- How all pupils (including pupils with special educational needs) are included in the work in classrooms/other learning settings
- The school's compliance with child protection requirements

4. Leadership and Management

- Board of management
- In-school management team

5. School Self-evaluation

- How the school evaluates and reports on the learning of its pupils and the quality of pupils' learning experiences and of teaching
- How the school uses evidence and sets targets for improvement
- How the school implements its school improvement plan

Conclusion

The school's capacity to **develop** further / **engage in school improvement** is ...

Appendix 3

Information Note for Teachers

What is a WSE – MLL?

A WSE –MLL is an evaluation of the overall work of a school with regard to the following five key questions of quality:

- How good are the learning achievements of pupils?
- How good is the teaching?
- How is the well-being of pupils supported?
- How effective are leadership and management?
- How effective is school self-evaluation and how well is it being used to improve learning, teaching, leadership and management?

The evaluation of teaching and learning in classrooms

- To evaluate the quality of teaching and learning during the WSE –MLL process in your school, the inspector(s) will visit classrooms and other learning settings, including special education settings, to observe teaching processes, to interact with pupils, and to examine aspects of the pupils' work.
- The inspector(s) will take a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject-specific approach to the evaluation of teaching and learning. This means that, rather than focusing on specific curriculum areas, the inspector(s) will look at teaching and learning across a range of curriculum areas, drawing on the teachers' normal weekly timetables
- Typically, at the start of each day of the evaluation, the inspector(s), drawing on the teachers' timetables, will indicate to the teachers the lessons that will be observed during that day and when the classroom visits will take place. Visits to classrooms by an inspector will generally last between one and one and half hours each. However, the inspector(s) may also decide that, in the context of a particular school or learning setting, observation of teaching and learning during a number of shorter periods is more appropriate.
- In order to enable the inspector(s) to gather evaluative information about particular aspects of teaching and learning in the school, one or more teachers may be visited more than once in the course of a WSE-MLL.
- Based on their observations and interactions in classrooms, the inspector(s) will record information about the learning achievements of the pupils, the teaching approaches used, how teachers prepare for the learning activities observed, how pupils are supported and challenged in their learning, and how the pupils' learning is assessed and monitored. Relevant information regarding matters such as the classroom learning environment and how pupils are managed during lessons will also be noted.
- Following each classroom visit, the inspectors will generally provide brief verbal feedback to the teacher on the learning and teaching observed. Good practice will be acknowledged and suggestions for improvements may be made.

Documents

Typically, the focus of a WSE-MLL is on evaluating the quality of observed teaching and learning processes and management and leadership in the school. There is a reduced emphasis on documentation in WSE-MLL. The inspector(s) may review the following documents devised by teachers: their timetables, written plans and assessment records. Documents are reviewed from the perspective of the insight they give into the quality of education provision in classrooms and other learning settings and in the school as a whole.