Subject: Self-Assessment Audit Tool for Schools

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Target Audience:
- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools
- Education Authority
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Governing Bodies Association
- Controlled Schools' Support Council

Summary of Contents:
Launch of a new self-assessment audit tool for schools to support school development planning in the area of emotional health and wellbeing

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Guidance for Schools

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SELF-ASSESSMENT AUDIT TOOL FOR SCHOOLS

There is considerable national and international research about the benefits of supporting emotional health and wellbeing (EHWB) in children and young people in school and the resulting positive impact it has on performance, attainment and behaviours.

Under its 'I-Matter', emotional health and wellbeing programme, the Department has now developed a self-assessment audit tool for use by schools. It will support schools in assessing how their current processes support the development, implementation and ongoing refinement of a whole school approach to the promotion of emotional health and wellbeing (EHWB).

This audit tool was developed under the auspices of an I-Matter working group whose membership was comprised of representatives from both the voluntary and statutory sectors and included teachers.

Detailed guidance on the development and application of the audit tool is contained in the attached Annex A. Fundamentally however, it is about assisting schools to:

- Audit school performance to assess how well the school is meeting the EHWB of its pupils;
- Build actions into school development planning to promote EHWB and;
- Regularly review progress.

As the guidance explains, schools are not expected to evaluate every area each year but can decide to consider issues such as previously identified strengths, or areas for improvement identified during inspection. The overall aim is to improve performance where weaknesses are identified and to continue to sustain good practice. It is also worth noting that schools are not expected to share the results with the Department.

Schools can access the audit tool via the Wholeschool School Development Planning Service. Further information on how schools can sign up for this service is shown in the attached Information sheet EN110.

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Head of Pupil Support Team
This guidance provides an overview of the self-assessment audit tool and how schools may utilize it in order to promote and maintain the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Background

The school setting is a key environment to promote the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. Promoting positive emotional health and wellbeing helps pupils understand and express their feelings, build their confidence and emotional resilience and ultimately their capacity to learn.

Research has shown that good emotional health and wellbeing helps protect children against emotional and behavioural problems, violence and crime, teenage pregnancy and the misuse of drugs and alcohol. While children and young peoples’ emotional health is important in its own right, evidence demonstrates that healthy children and young people are better able to take advantage of opportunities to learn and develop, thus maximizing their educational achievement. It is therefore vital that schools view the promotion of emotional health and wellbeing as integral to their role in educating children and removing barriers to learning.

By adopting a “whole school” approach schools can, through the curriculum and the provision of a safe supportive environment, facilitate children and young people to develop the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills they need to enhance their emotional health and wellbeing. Teaching pupils about emotional health has also the potential to enhance their awareness and understanding of the issue and its relevance to them and decrease the stigma associated with mental health and mental illness.

What is Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB)?

The following definition of pupils’ emotional health and wellbeing was developed in consultation with health and education professionals, teachers, parents and pupils and endorsed by the I-Matter Project Board:

*Being mentally and emotionally healthy means that we believe in ourselves and know our own worth. We set ourselves goals that we can achieve and can find support to do this. We are aware of our emotions and what we are feeling and can understand why. We can cope with our changing emotions and we can speak about and manage our feelings. We understand what others may be feeling and know how to deal with their feelings. We also understand when to let go and not overreact. We know how to make friendships and relationships and how to cope with changes in them. We understand that everyone can be anxious, worried or sad sometimes. We know how to cope with, and bounce back from, changes or problems and can talk about them to someone we trust.*
The Self-Assessment Audit Tool

The main aim of the tool is to assist schools to:

- audit their practice across the full range of activities within the school and identify those which can contribute to the development of a school environment where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful and therefore their emotional health and wellbeing is promoted;

- Evaluate their practice and identify how they might improve and what further practice could/should be introduced. Schools can consider how they develop social and emotional skills to enhance resilience, resourcefulness, respect, and a sense of connectedness with others, how they embed promotion, prevention and early intervention for emotional health and wellbeing and how they can collaborate better with families, communities and external agencies;

- Prepare a plan, as part of school development planning, in partnership with the school community – staff, pupils and parents - which sets out how pupils' emotional health and wellbeing will be promoted and how the effectiveness of the plan will be evaluated and;

- Consider the progress they are making to implement their plan.

In practical terms the audit tool comprises a series of resources for schools and their wider communities to undertake this audit of performance and these can all be accessed via the Wholeschool School Development Planning Service.

The resources all flow from the ESaGS 4 key areas in school improvement and include indicators of good practice including examples of what this might look like in the school context.

- Child-centred provision
- High quality teaching and learning
- Effective leadership
- A school connected to its local community

It is acknowledged that what is considered to be good practice can vary across a school’s community, which is made up of pupils, parents, staff and others involved in the life of the school. It is therefore important to provide a range of consultation opportunities throughout the process of self-evaluation to consider the views of pupils, parents and key members of the wider school community. The suite of questionnaires has been developed to seek the views of the whole school community. The responses received will assist schools to identify the key areas for development and then use the audit tool to focus attention on these areas as part of the school development planning process.

The audit tool is provided via Wholeschool in an online format to facilitate completion by stakeholders and analysis by schools but questionnaires can be downloaded and provided to stakeholders in paper copy, if required.
It is for each school to decide which key area(s) require priority attention and it is not expected that schools would be in a position to develop plans to address all areas within the same planning cycle. However, when selecting the aspect to evaluate, schools may wish, for example, to consider such issues as previously identified strengths or, for example, areas for improvement identified during inspection.

When piloted, some schools commented that the questionnaires are very lengthy but equally it was acknowledged that they are comprehensive and the process is likely to become more streamlined for schools and other stakeholders as they become more familiar with the process. Schools can, of course, set their own timetable for the completion of the questionnaires to facilitate stakeholders.

The audit tool should be viewed as complementary to the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) resources which were developed to support evaluation of the Quality of Leadership and Management; the Quality of Provision; and the Outcomes for Learners. The guidance about the approach to self-evaluation contained in those documents would equally apply to this audit tool. Further information about the ISEF resources can be viewed at: https://www.etini.gov.uk/articles/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef