ESRI/DEY Consultation: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for DEIS

Part A: Defining quantitative success and evaluating progress

1. *In terms of hard, quantitative metrics, what does 'success' look like for the DEIS programme?*

Perhaps the central question is whether the evaluation framework is intended simply to measure outcomes or also to support improvement. If it is to do both, schools need to experience the process as both formative and developmental, with sufficient space for professional judgment, context and reflection, rather than as an accountability exercise.

DEIS can be evaluated under the themes of DEIS action planning:

i. Attendance
ii. Retention
iii. Transitions
iv. Literacy outcomes
v. Numeracy outcomes
vi. Parental and community engagement

As well as the three integrated themes:

i. Leadership
ii. Professional Learning
iii. Wellbeing

The evidence should come from the school's DEIS Action Plan, which is based on the specific needs and context of each individual school. Each school sets targets, which are monitored over the course of the action plan and then evaluated at the end of the cycle. Success for the DEIS programme should be viewed through the lens of each school's specified targets.

2. *Which specific data points are the most critical for the Department to track?*

While the DEY would presumably wish to track aggregated data, this does not tell the story of individual school's achievements regarding their DEIS Action Planning. When it comes to evaluation, items can be norm-referenced, criterion-referenced or ipsative.

1. Norm-referenced means that evaluation is standardised against a typical school-going population (eg standardised tests in literacy and numeracy).

2. Criterion-referenced means that evaluation is set against a set of national criteria (eg curriculum learning outcomes and experiences)
3. Ipsative means that evaluation is set against the school's prior data set. Ipsative evaluation demonstrates a school's development in comparison with itself and celebrates their successes, which may be unacknowledged if set against a standardised approach.

4. ***What are the main challenges to collecting and using data effectively for monitoring and evaluation at both the school and system levels?***

The main challenge in relation to school leadership is leadership capacity and leadership time. Reports from the Inspectorate indicate that there the area of data collection and analysis in schools needs to be developed. The only way that this can be coherently developed is by providing initial systemic professional development for school leaders in this area, that is complimented by additional leadership time and capacity to enact fully in school. A particular point to note here is the difference between data and evidence, and that not all data should be used as evidence. Schools have huge amounts of data that can be used and it is unrealistic for school leaders to be expected to process this with maximum competency without adequate time, support and professional development.

Part B: Defining qualitative success and the 'Distance Travelled'

1. ***Beyond attendance and grades, what does 'success' look like for a student's lived experience?***

Recent departmental documentation (Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, Bí Cineálta) highlights the importance of **belonging** as a key indicator for success. This is an area that schools put considerable emphasis on and would inform any discussion about a student's lived experience.

This could include agency, participation and relationships - does the pupil feel known, listened to and able to influence their experience of school? For some pupils experiencing disadvantage, these may represent very significant educational gains which are invisible in attainment data.

2. ***If implementing a 'Distance Travelled' tool to capture soft metrics, which specific indicators are the most essential to measure, and for which priority vulnerable groups?***

A 'Distance Travelled' tool returns to the idea of ipsative evaluation. Any such tool such be able to demonstrate progress for that individual based on their current level. The key

to the success of such a tool is how it is used in a formative sense to inform the individual of their progress to date and the next steps to continue this journey. With this in mind, the specific indicators would be different for each priority vulnerable group, and most probably for each individual with these groups.

The key challenge will be avoiding another standardised metric for outcomes which are, by their nature, highly contextual and individual. The value of distance travelled lies precisely in different starting points. Any tool should then support professional judgement, rather than try to replace it.

Care should also be taken not to frame distance travelled solely in terms of deficits within the child or the family. Progress may also reflect changes within the school in terms of relationships, inclusion, pedagogy, attendance supports, parental engagement or access to services. Evaluation should therefore consider what the system has done differently, rather than simply what has changed in the child.

3. ***How can we adapt existing reports to capture the 'why' behind the numbers?***

The 'why' is entirely related to each individual school's context. Each school will reflect on factors such as their pupil cohort, staffing, leadership capacity, parental/community involvement when preparing their targets. These highly contextualised goals can be lost in aggregated numbers, which is why the celebration of successes at the level of the school is so important. These successes mean a huge amount to these school communities and are indicative of a longer-term school improvement journey over the course of many DEIS Action Plan cycles, which is not captured in reports.

4. ***How can these reports be designed to effectively capture the localised realities of school-level processes and provide a systematic overview of system-level progress across all schools?***

Any report that is based on a quantitative basis would be augmented by a qualitative aspect. This could be a vignette (text, video, etc) from a pupil, parent, teacher or school leader that demonstrates what one story looks like in comparison to the aggregated data. These should not become isolated 'success stories'. Pupil, parent and practitioner perspectives could complement quantitative data, allow national themes to be identified, while keeping the local context where change occurred.