

**Implementing school self-evaluation:
The experience of one school in making the process meaningful.**

by

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Abbreviations

SSE	School Self-Evaluation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
DES	Department of Education and Skills
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ERSU	Evaluation Support and Research Unit
LAOS	Looking At Our School
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
NPC	National Parents Council
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
ERO	Education Review Office
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
PAR	Participatory Action Research
AR	Action Research
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals Network
CARN	Collaborative Action Research Network
NEARI	Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate in Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____ (Vincent Thorpe)

Student No: 60129999

Date: 14th February 2022

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Sonia and my two sons Harry and Seán. You are and always will be, the most special and best of friends I will ever be lucky enough to have in this whole wide world. Your firm faith in me has sustained me through this project and your unwavering support and love made completing this thesis possible. *Míle buíochas. Tá grá agam daoibh.*

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Abstract

Implementing school self-evaluation:

The experience of one school in making the process meaningful.

Vincent Thorpe

This study aimed to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school and how I, as principal, in collaboration with staff, could create the optimal conditions necessary. The study investigated school self-evaluation in practice. From this perspective it describes the characteristics which promote good quality implementation. The research used an action research design, putting school staff at the centre of all efforts to improve the school self-evaluation process.

I worked through two cycles of action research, based on Elliot's (1991) action research for educational change model using a range of predominantly qualitative tools including surveys, interviews, a reflective journal, field notes and interaction with a critical friend. The data was analysed using thematic analysis techniques. The constructs of complexity theory and school improvement theory were used as the basis for coding the data and examining the generated themes for key findings.

From a school evaluation perspective, the work provides the reader with a deeper understanding of school self-evaluation in practice. The study also examines the impact of values and reflective practice on a school principal's ability to lead the school self-evaluation process successfully.

The study concluded that when school leaders resource school self-evaluation, in terms of professional and personal supports, the process can be implemented successfully. The study showed a positive change in staff members' attitudes, commitment and capacity to implement school self-evaluation when the school leadership itself was reflexive and positive towards the process and provided opportunities for staff members to take ownership of the process in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

School self-evaluation became mandatory in Ireland in 2012. At that time, I was a teaching principal in a small rural country school. However, I felt school self-evaluation was just another job to be added on to what was becoming an already hard and growing workload. So, I despised it. In the two days ‘Continuous Professional Development’ (hereafter cited as CPD) I received from the ‘Professional Development Service for Teachers’ (hereafter cited as PDST) as leader of school self-evaluation in my school, I felt the process was never fully explained to me or maybe I never fully understood the reasoning behind it. In fact, my first CPD as school leader happened before I even got copies of the actual guidelines. Not a positive start.

I now work as an administrative principal in a medium-sized rural school of two-hundred and sixteen pupils, with a staff of ten teachers, two special needs assistants and four support staff. However, after nine years of school self-evaluation, I was still unsure of ‘how’ to do it, let alone ‘lead’ it. I put work into it, but it seems like a box ticking exercise and the creation of a paper trail in case ‘*someone from the department*’ comes looking for it. I lack confidence in my own ability to lead evaluation effectively. Although trying my best, I feel ill-equipped, unskilled, un-trained, and apathetic for school self-evaluation due to a lack of results and very little progress, despite the work and effort involved. I do not enjoy the process. School leaders and school staff can organise and attend continuous professional development in school self-evaluation through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Schools can also book advisory visits on the process from the Inspectorate. However, competing curricula and legislative demands have forced schools to prioritise and make productive choices (O’Day, 2002, Coolahan et al., 2017).

My feelings regarding school self-evaluation, affect my overt behaviour and this has knock-on and consequential effects on how my staff engage with school self-evaluation and any possible learning benefits it may have for our organisation. Staff members are involved in the process, but at a very low level, as I lead school self-evaluation with a quick fix approach, doing most of the work on it myself, so as not to burden my staff with the extra workload. This is limiting any possibility of collaborative benefit or meaningful organisational change, limiting the school’s capacity to develop and learn. However, my practice as school principal, is guided by my values of authenticity and collaboration and my current approach to leading school self-

evaluation negates those values. With a renewed focus on my leadership, I believe we as a school can do self-evaluation better. By leading the school to engage with the school self-evaluation process in more collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist way, my hope is that the process can become more meaningful, with genuine school improvement possible.

This is important, as school self-evaluation has become a key mechanism, in many educational systems, for school improvement and accountability, and a mechanism to manage change in a school organisation (Hopkins, 2005; MacBeath, 2006; McNamara and O’Hara, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2011; DES, 2012). Many education systems have applied newly developed evaluation methods at school level in the form of self-evaluation (Nevo, 2010), evident by the fact that it is now compulsory in two thirds of European education systems (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). School self-evaluation is a form of internal evaluation, counterbalancing a tendency in many educational systems to rely exclusively on external evaluations as a measure of educational quality (OECD, 2013).

According to McNamara et al. (2021a) however, there has been limited research to date exploring how school self-evaluation is being received in schools both as a policy and a concept and how successfully or otherwise it takes place. This study adds to the body of literature available on school self-evaluation by giving an account from the viewpoint of school staff in an Irish primary school as they implement the process. From this perspective it describes the characteristics which promote good quality implementation.

This research study investigated school self-evaluation in practice, examining its implementation by school staff in a primary school. The focus of the research was on how to improve the implementation process. A qualitative action research design was used based on a ‘bottom-up’ approach to change, putting school staff at the centre of all efforts to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation. The overall aim of this action research study therefore, was to improve the school self-evaluation process in my school and how I, as school leader, in collaboration with my school staff, could create the optimal conditions necessary for its successful implementation, whilst also addressing any barriers which may have existed.

1.2 Research question / aims

The research and development of new models of evaluation, such as school self-evaluation and their successful implementation to ensure quality in schools, is gaining increased interest at international level (Nevo, 2010; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Hamzah, 2013; Ladden, 2015).

Whilst there is growing recognition of the important role school self-evaluation can play in improving schools and ensuring quality (MacBeath, 1999, 2006; Hopkins, 2005; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2011; DES, 2012; Hamzah, 2013), Meuret and Morlaix, (2003) suggest it is more praised by policymakers than schools themselves. The evidence that exists regarding school self-evaluation in Irish schools suggests similar findings (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2015). However, as school self-evaluation is now on a formal footing in Ireland, research at implementation level is important to aid its success. This thesis seeks to augment the growing body of research relating to school self-evaluation in Ireland (Brown et al., 2020; McNamara and O'Hara, 2005; McNamara and O'Hara, 2006; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2014; Nayir and McNamara, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2015; Ladden, 2015; Brown et al., 2016; O'Hara et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2019; McNamara et al., 2021a; McNamara et al. 2021b; Skerrit et al., 2021) especially within the context of an Irish primary school. The key question driving this qualitative study therefore is how we can improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school.

In order to address this question, I worked through two cycles of Elliot's (1991) action research model (described in detail in chapters five to eight).

1.3 Theoretical framework

In this section, I will briefly outline the origins and principles of complexity theory and school improvement theory and their application to school self-evaluation. I discuss briefly the potential and the limitations of both theories for this study and school leadership in general.

A review of the literature reveals an ongoing debate into the nature of evaluation and how it should be carried out (Ladden, 2015). It shows the implementation of school self-evaluation to be complex and sensitive due to a number of tensions and dilemmas which form the basis of four key debates surrounding the topic, namely (i) what is the purpose of school self-evaluation? (ii) should it be internally or externally driven? (iii) should it be seen from the 'bottom-up' or the 'top-down'? (iv) what is the appropriate blend of these elements? (Faubert, 2009; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). In my experience, Government pass education policies and expect school management to implement those policies with absolutely fidelity to the goals that were initially established, but the reality is that this rarely happens. The policies get adapted to local contexts and often times are not exactly what was intended (Howlett and Raynor, 2006; Terhart, 2013; Brown et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2019; Skerritt et al. 2021). This research

project draws upon insights from complexity theory and school improvement theory as a conceptual framework to better understand why this happens and how a school leader could use that knowledge in a positive way to introduce, implement and sustain a process of school self-evaluation within their own school context.

Complexity theory challenges any analysis which sees organisations in linear terms as mechanistic and predictable, performing as they are programmed to do (Morrison, 2002; Mennin, 2010) based on simple rules of cause and effect. Complexity theorists believe that the human environment is non-linear, dynamic and complex, continuously changing in unpredictable ways. Similarly, school improvement theory too sees human environments as dynamic social organisations engaged in the implementation of change to improve teaching and learning. A school leader can use both theories to analyse staff members responses about their experiences with school self-evaluation and gain a better understanding of how, why and when school staff implement school self-evaluation. This gives school leaders more of an awareness of the optimal conditions and potential barriers to successfully implementing school self-evaluation in their own school.

1.4 Overview of the research process

The methodology adopted to complete this research was based on Elliot's (1991) action research for educational change model and was completed over a number of cycles to allow for implementation and evaluation at different stages of the study. Data was gathered using a range of predominantly qualitative tools including surveys, interviews, a reflective journal, field notes and interaction with a critical friend. The data was analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019) which facilitated themes being generated from the data collected during each cycle of study.

In order to describe the complex systemic factors that work together to create the conditions that foster or inhibit any successful implementation of school self-evaluation, the constructs of complexity theory and school improvement theory were used as the basis for coding the data and examining the generated themes for key findings. These constructs, as well as action research and the method of thematic analysis used, are explained in detail in sections 2.2, 3.2, 4.6 and 4.7.2

1.5 Contributions to knowledge

This study will be of interest to researchers from the fields of school evaluation and school leadership. This work provides the reader with a deeper understanding of school self-evaluation in practice. The various cycles of study which are presented, address a gap in the literature by demonstrating and analysing the implementation of school self-evaluation in practice by school staff in an Irish primary school (McNamara et al., 2021a). The study expands our knowledge and understanding of the conditions which enable school staff to implement the process of school self-evaluation in a successful and meaningful way.

While the context of this study focused on one cohort of school staff implementing school self-evaluation in a specific school and the strategies employed to enable this, learning from this research may have implications for the use of such strategies in other areas of study. The successful implementation of school self-evaluation to ensure quality education in schools is of particular interest at both international and national level. As school self-evaluation is being developed and formally introduced around the world, including Ireland, it is pertinent to conduct this research at grass roots implementation level. What these research participants have to say can inform the future direction of school self-evaluation in Ireland.

This research has shown that the implementation of school self-evaluation at local level is a complex problem and one that deserves study. It also indicates that a complexity theory approach to analysing how, why and when school staff change their practices maybe a useful theoretical construct for understanding the myriad of complex factors involved and how they interact with each other. This study contributes to change by providing knowledge to school leaders that will lead to a better understanding of how to create the optimal conditions necessary to support the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in their school.

1.6 Key terms and concepts

Throughout this dissertation, the reader may encounter terms and concepts with which they are unfamiliar or which have a different meaning in the context of this study. For this reason, it is important at this stage of the study to define the key terms and concepts which will be used throughout.

School self-evaluation (SSE): In the Irish education system, school self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive and reflective process of internal self-review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD): Ongoing training in the content, pedagogy and skills necessary for school staff to stay current in their field (Jaquith et al., 2010).

Capacity: The ability of school staff to grow in leadership, content, knowledge and skills (Kaniuka, 2012).

Meaningful organisational change: The process of moving from the present or current operational phase of an organisation, such as a school, into more advanced functional operations, where the quality of the interactions and relationships among the people involved, not the people themselves, determine if the change is meaningful and a success (Fullan, 2001).

Agent of change: Anyone in their area of responsibility who is skilled in initiating, facilitating and implementing organisational change and enables others to deal with these change efforts (Gerwing, 2016).

School Improvement (SI): A process by which schools become more effective both in terms of academic outcomes as well as in developing the social and cultural wellbeing of the children and adults within the school. It describes conscious efforts both inside and outside the school to raise school achievements by modifying classroom practices and adapting management arrangements to improve both teaching and learning (Baines, 2019).

Quality education: An education that enables pupils to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society, and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development (Government of Ireland: National Development Plan, 2018).

New Public Management (NPM): A term coined by Hood (1991) to describe the policy to modernise the public sector and render it more effective. The basic idea of new public management is that market-orientated management of the public sector will lead to greater cost-efficiency for governments. Ferlie et al. (1996) describe it as introducing the 'three Ms' of markets, managers and measurement into public services.

Neoliberalism: A political approach that favours free-market capitalism, deregulation and reductions in government spending (Stevenson, 2010).

Core values: For this study, core values were defined as personal ethics or ideals that guide a person when making decisions, building relationships and solving problems. Identifying the values that are meaningful in your life can help a person to develop and achieve both personal and professional goals.

Classroom practices: For this study, classroom practices were defined as any practices used by teachers that were related to curriculum, instructional methods and classroom management techniques because changes in these practices often have impact on pupil learning.

Learning community: A term used in education circles to mean a learning organisation (Williams et al., 2012).

Learning organisation: An organisation that explicitly seeks to enhance the capacity of its members to learn and change through their adherence to the disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team building and system thinking (Senge et al., 2012).

Professional Development: Ongoing training in the content, pedagogy and skills necessary for teachers to stay current in their field (Jaquith et al., 2010).

Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST): The government funded body tasked with delivering professional development to teachers in Ireland.

Professional Learning Community (PLC): Teams of teachers working collaboratively to reflect upon and improve educational practices (Johnson et al., 2010).

Systems thinking: An approach to understanding individuals, groups and organisations through the concepts of interdependency, interaction, feedback, stability and change (Senge et al., 1999).

1.7 Overview of this thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the overall background and context for the study. It summarises the key motivations, objectives and research questions that drive the research. This chapter also explains the theoretical framework used and the methodological approach taken.

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a review of the key international literature, reports and other documentation related to school self-evaluation. It outlines the context and purpose of school self-evaluation, examining its accountability and improvement function. To do this it examines what is meant by the term ‘quality’ in education, highlighting the competition for

primacy over what counts as educational quality and how this should be measured. It explores the meaning of school self-evaluation and what's involved in the process. It then conducts a review of the literature relevant to the research question, relating to the introduction and implementation of school self-evaluation in the Irish context and what has been learned so far. The literature review concludes by examining the key role school leaders play in embracing school self-evaluation and building the evaluative capacity of their schools.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical aspects of the project. It begins by presenting the origins and principles of complexity theory and its application to human organisation systems. It then explores these principles when applied to school self-evaluation. The chapter concludes by examining both the potential and the limitations of complexity theory for this study and school leadership in general.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology used in the research. It describes the aims of the research, the research setting and the participants involved. The philosophical paradigms that underpin the research are explained. The rationale for selecting a pragmatic, mixed method approach to the research is presented. The chapter explains and justifies action research as the most appropriate design for this study. It describes the predominantly qualitative research methods employed throughout this study and the data analysis procedures used. The chapter concludes by addressing both the reliability and validity of the research and its ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 presents the first phase of reconnaissance. It describes the qualitative research methods employed to collect data and the data analysis procedures used to examine the process of school self-evaluation in our school. The findings are presented. They are then analysed, compared and contrasted in the light of findings from the literature review. The salient issues regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school are outlined. Based on these findings the chapter concludes by presenting the solutions generated to address the identified issues.

Chapter 6 outlines cycle one of this research. This cycle involved the creation and implementation of action steps to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Taking into account the cyclical nature of action research, the chapter traces the various stages of planning, implementing and monitoring. This cycle examined the creation of school self-evaluation resources by school staff, a discussion by staff regarding Department of Education SSE guidelines and the initiation of a school self-evaluation cycle, whilst also describing staff members' experiences of using SSE as a method for school improvement.

Chapter 7 presents the second phase of reconnaissance. It describes the qualitative research methods employed to collect data and the data analysis procedures used to examine the implementation of our action plan. The findings from a survey and two semi-structured interviews are presented. They are then analysed, compared and contrasted in the light of findings from both the literature review and the first phase of reconnaissance. The salient issues regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation and the lived experience of staff members tasked with implementing the process in our school are outlined. The chapter concludes by presenting the solutions and action strategies generated to address issues identified in the findings.

Chapter 8 details cycle two of the study. This cycle involved developing a cohesive whole school definition of school self-evaluation by consensus and a clear understanding of where it fits within our school evaluative practice. Taking into account the cyclical nature of action research, the chapter traces the various stages of planning, implementing and monitoring. This cycle examined the creation of an agreed definition of school self-evaluation and a diagram to list and explain all the activities undertaken in our school for accountability and improvement, whilst also describing staff members' attitude towards and knowledge of school self-evaluation as a tool for school improvement. The chapter concludes by presenting the solutions and action strategies generated to address issues identified in the findings.

Chapter 9 concludes the research. It details the key contributions to knowledge which enabled the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, whilst also addressing the limitations of the study. The chapter draws together findings from all cycles of the study. From these findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the research are drawn and suggestions for further research are made.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the reader to the themes of this research which are relevant to the implementation of school self-evaluation in my school. This review draws together published literature, reports and other documentation which provide a theoretical and practical background to the study. The themes discussed are: (1) Quality and education, which examines what is meant by the term ‘quality’ and its relationship to education. There is varied opinion on how quality in education should be measured and the unit of analysis to be used. I discuss how such diverse views bring tension and competition for primacy over what counts as educational quality even within each individual school. This had major implications for the implementation of school self-evaluation in my school. (2) School self-evaluation as a method to improve quality in education. In a complex setting such as a school, school self-evaluation can mean many different things to many different people. I discuss the meaning of school self-evaluation, what is involved in the process and its implementation in Ireland to date. (3) Leading school self-evaluation for school improvement, which examines the leadership of school self-evaluation. I discuss the key role leadership plays in embracing school self-evaluation and building the evaluative capacity of their school.

2.2 Quality and education

Understanding what quality means in terms of education varies between countries. However, most tend to agree on three broad principles: the need for relevance, for equity of access and outcome, and for proper observance of individual rights (UNESCO, 2004). According to UNESCO (2004), education quality is based on five variables (i) Learner characteristics (ii) Context (iii) Enabling inputs (iv) Teaching and Learning and (v) Outcomes. They describe education as a production process, whereby *input*, by means of a *process*, results in *output*. However, all are influenced by context. The context gives input, provides resources for the process and sets requirements to the output. All are interconnected to each other (Scheerens, 1990).

Schools are coming under increased external pressure and heightened levels of scrutiny and regulation (Murphy, 2019) to improve quality outcomes by being (i) accountable for what they do and (ii) continuously striving for quality improvement (MacGilchrist, 2000; Simons, 2013; Klenowski and Woods, 2013; Day and Sammons, 2014). For educational quality and learning

outcomes to improve however, policy makers and educators need access to evidence-based analyses of the current situation, trends over time and information on the strengths and weaknesses of a system, and their causes. Using relevant indicators, a strong monitoring and evaluation system such as inspection or school self-evaluation, can provide that evidence (UNESCO, 2004).¹

How best to determine the quality of schools however, is contentious, as is the unit of analysis (Simons, 2013). Quality can be multifaceted, contested and never fully representable (Stake and Schwandt, 2006; Brown et al., 2016) and therefore difficult to define. Evaluating quality is not a neutral process (Klenowski and Woods, 2013). According to Stake and Schwandt (2006), how we assess quality depends on whether we see quality as something measured, or quality as something experienced. Tension and competition can arise for primacy over what counts as educational quality (Lai and Kushner, 2013). The politics, economics and prevailing logic of the time tend to dictate the area of focus (Simons, 2013). In Ireland for example, public service inspection policy and practice have aligned with the philosophy of new public management drawn from theories of neo-liberal economics. New public management takes the school as the unit of accountability and seeks to improve pupil learning by improving the functioning of the school organisation. It puts the focus on outputs over inputs, measured in terms of performance indicators, where schools are both accountable and responsible for the delivery and improvement of all its services (Lynch et al., 2015).

Most schools tend to operate within two governance philosophies, namely accountability and continuous improvement (Van Bruggen, 2010; Smith and Benavot, 2019). Within these two philosophies, there are different innovative ways of improving schools ranging from quality assurance, inspection and the implementation of school improvement/effectiveness initiatives such as school self-evaluation (MacBeath, 2006; Vanhoof et al., 2009; Demetriou and

¹ In Ireland, the Department of Education is tasked with regulating this process (Government of Ireland, 1998; Government of Ireland: National Development Plan, 2018). To do this it is given a large budget. In the year 2019, 10.763 billion euro in public revenue was allocated to education, representing the highest ever expenditure on education and skills (DES, 2018). It is reasonable that the public and its politically elected representatives want to know how that money is spent and whether it is producing quality outcomes (Demetriou and Kyriakides, 2012).

Kyriakides, 2012; Simons, 2013). According to Simons (2013) however, externally inspired innovations such as these can fail if they do not allow for the cultural and local differences which can exist in specific school contexts. Some believe that parents, local communities and schools are best placed to improve pupil learning, because context matters (O'Day, 2002; Fancy, 2007; Lai, 2013). From this debate on context emerged the school effectiveness and school improvement movement, both focused on the school as the major unit of change (Simons, 2013).

School effectiveness is strongly focused on pupil learning outcomes as a measurement of school quality. It examines the characteristics (factors) of classrooms, schools and systems associated with these outcomes. It does not however, examine the processes that maybe needed to change the situation in classes, schools or systems (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2010). The emergence of the school effectiveness movement has provided growing evidence that schools can, and do, make a difference to academic outcomes for pupils (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). School effectiveness researchers (Tymms, 1992; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Hendriks et al., 2002; Kyriakides and Campbell, 2004; Creemers and Reezigt, 2005; Bollen et al., 2005) have tended to focus on exploring differences between more or less effective schools from a quantitative perspective i.e., quality can be measured (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). The research methodology has often involved quantitative measurement of a range of parameters associated with educational quality and performance such as academic achievement, teacher behaviour, curriculum, class grouping, school organisation and education policy in an attempt to (i) assess the size of school effects (Tymms, 1992) (ii) identify characteristics exhibited by more effective schools (Sammons et al., 1995) (iii) quantify school effects for different groups of pupils and (iv) explore the stability of school effects over time (Nuttall et al., 1989).

In contrast, the school improvement movement believes such a narrow focus on academic achievement only captures but a fragment of what counts in schooling, both in terms of processes and outcomes (Carney, 2003). For example, the role of ethos, community relations, values, beliefs, attitudes to school, flexibility, health, productivity and lifelong learning, to name but a few (Davies, 2001; Carney, 2003). School improvement is mainly concerned with the process of change in classes and to a larger extent in schools, as the measure of school quality. It does not look too much at the consequences for pupil outcomes. The main interest of this movement is in establishing a process of improvement in schools and to keep it going by emphasising the importance of the process, rather than being critical of its impact on learning outcomes (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2010). The school improvement movement has

tended to consider schools as social organisations engaged in the implementation of change to improve teaching and learning. In contrast to school effectiveness research, this has usually involved a ‘bottom-up’ rather than a ‘top-down’ approach to change. It locates power and control with those actually tasked with securing improvements (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). Improvement and the capacity to improve comes from within the school. To address achievement problems, it is considered important to allow contextually driven approaches that encourage flexibility and local ownership (Parr and Timperley, 2013). The methodologies relied upon to achieve these aims are largely qualitative i.e., quality is experienced (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). School improvement research and practice is concerned with making schools ‘better’ places for all in the school community (Bollen et al., 2005). This approach draws upon the principals of inquiry, reflection and self-evaluation to initiate improvement (Hopkins et al., 1994).

Whilst school effectiveness and school improvement are two distinct movements within the field of educational research, both are influential in how quality outcomes are measured in many education systems. Various governments from around the world, including Ireland, have listened to the findings and arguments of academics and researchers from both movements, drawing on the research findings to develop a range of quality assurance policies to intervene in schools to raise educational standards (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). In both movements educational quality is taken to mean the delivery of effective learning which is evidence-based and can be measured. In addition, any issues which arise can be identified by those held accountable and solved, using proven strategies and methods to improve quality (Anderson and Boyle, 2020). School self-evaluation is one such method of improvement used in both. To get a balanced view of the quality of education provision therefore, educational systems in many countries, including Ireland, now conduct various evaluation type formats (Hamzah and Tahir, 2013). Typical components can include (i) *pupil assessment (e.g., standardised assessments, summative assessment)*, (ii) *teacher or school leader appraisal (e.g., self-assessment, informal/formal feedback on practice, performance management processes such as probation)*, (iii) *school evaluation (e.g., external validation, school self-evaluation)* and (iv) *system evaluation (e.g., policy or programme evaluation)* (OECD, 2013, pg.87).

School evaluation can be external or internal (MacBeath, 2006) and can play a very influential part in determining the ‘quality’ of education in schools. Both external and internal evaluation are interrelated and can form an important part of school improvement and reform policies (Jaffer, 2010). School self-evaluation serves as internal evaluation, whilst school inspection

functions as external evaluation. Internal evaluation is conducted by schools themselves (Hamzah and Tahir, 2013) and is often described as self-evaluation (O'Brien et al., 2019). External evaluation on the other hand, is usually done by an appointed inspection or supervision body (Janssens and Amelsvoort, 2008; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2010). It is possible for a primary school and an external quality assurance agency such as an inspectorate, to base its evaluations on a negotiated and collaborative approach to whole school evaluation (Simons, 2013). This would be a form of increased cooperation and partnership between schools and the inspectorate in a dual system of internal/external quality assurance (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; Brown et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2021b). Such an approach is perceived as having a developmental and improvement focus and a role in equipping schools to analyse performance and drive change (Brown et al., 2016; Coolahan et al., 2017). In the Irish education system for example, external and internal evaluation are both seen as complementary contributors to school improvement. It maintains that the most powerful agent of improved quality is a well-integrated system of evaluation that combines the external perspective of the inspectorate with the reflective and collective insights of school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils (DES, 2016).

2.3 School self-evaluation

School self-evaluation is an important concept related to school improvement plans and forms an integral part of the whole-school evaluation process (Van der Westhuizen, 2014). In many educational systems, school self-evaluation has become a key mechanism for school improvement and accountability and a necessary mechanism to manage changes in the school organisation (Hopkins, 2005; MacBeath, 2006; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2011; DES, 2012). Many education systems have applied newly developed evaluation methods at school level in the form of self-evaluation (Nevo, 2010), evident by the fact that it is now compulsory in two thirds of European education systems (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). The overarching goals for school self-evaluation are twofold according to Kyriakides and Campbell (2004). First, to improve the quality of the organisation and secondly, to improve teaching and learning. Improving the quality of the organisation includes social relations between members of the organisation, organisational climate and culture (Freiberg, 2005), the nature of decision making (Hoy et al., 2012) and the responsiveness of the school as an organisation to external and internal change forces (Fullan, 2016). Improving teaching and learning involves the concepts of teacher effectiveness (Muijs

and Reynolds, 2002), school effectiveness (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000) and decisions about how these concepts are measured within the school setting (Goldstein, 2011). It stresses the schools' own responsibility for quality (Hofman et al., 2010), creating space for the school to evaluate its policies and practices (Simons, 2013). It has gained a prominent position as an important leverage for quality assurance and school improvement (Faddar et al., 2018). Countries are developing this evaluative expertise and building evaluative capacity (O'Brien et al., 2015; Mcnamara et al., 2021a), resulting in a greater variety of evaluation activities and research data. Studies into the effects of self-evaluation have shown that it can improve school quality in terms of improved pupil achievement levels (Campbell and Levin, 2009; McNaughton et al., 2012). Not mentioned by these advocates however, is the broader emphasis on attitudes and practices which are also significant when evaluating school improvement measures (Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Hara et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2019). Nonetheless, school self-evaluation is expanding in school systems and has gained a lot of supporters worldwide claiming it to be vital in ensuring quality education (Hamzah, 2013).

School self-evaluation is an internal process in large part initiated by a school itself (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011) to ensure quality and to improve the teaching-learning process and school performance (Hofman et al., 2009). When a school community engages and participates with school self-evaluation, they get an opportunity to commit to speaking for themselves, to develop and change from within (MacBeath, 1999). The school self-evaluation process has been described as a process for helping schools improve, which should be shaped by themselves, and integrated into their routine management systems (Chapman, 2008). It aims to assess the functioning of the school in a systematic way, with a view to taking decisions or adopting initiatives within the framework of overall school development and policy (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011). School self-evaluation works as a reflection process which will identify and analyse the school's strengths and weaknesses (Hamzah, 2013). It involves the systematic collection and analysis of data to form value judgements based on firm evidence (Neil and Johnston, 2005). In undertaking school self-evaluation, stakeholders can understand the current situation, including the strengths and area for development (weaknesses) and the opportunities and threats to their organisation. This enables them to determine the goals needed and develop the strategies for achieving those goals (Setlalentoa, 2014). From that analysis, school improvement strategies are constructed (Hamzah, 2013).

Barber (1997) argues that the essence of a successful organisation is the search for improvement and that effective self-evaluation is the key to it. He describes school self-

evaluation as restless in its quest for evidence in a schools' transparent sense of purpose, behaviour, relationships and classroom performance (cited in Demetris and Kyriakides, 2012). It is both a process (gathering data to make claims) and a product (the summary statement of what the evidence shows) to inform the goal setting, the implementation of strategies and the measuring of their success (Mutch, 2013).

2.4 Implementing school self-evaluation

In a complex adaptive system such as a school, school self-evaluation can mean many different things to many different people (Skerritt et al., 2021). According to Klenowski and Woods (2013), evaluation involves the processes of description, analysis and judgement of educational programmes, practices, institutions and policies for a range of purposes. Evaluation can serve the purpose of accountability (measurement of results or efficiency), development (to develop or improve) and knowledge (deeper understanding of practice or policy). Any evaluation will involve key questions about

(i) What is the purpose of the evaluation itself?

- *Why is this evaluation being undertaken?*

(ii) Who is sponsoring the evaluation?

- *Who is conducting the evaluation?*

(iii) Ethical issues

- *Whose judgement counts here?*
- *What rights do those being evaluated have?*
- *What rights and responsibilities do the evaluators have?*

(iv) Political stance

- *Who is the audience?*
- *How is the evaluation to be reported?*
- *Who will take action as a result of the evaluation?*

(v) Procedural choices

- *How is the evaluation to be carried out?*
- *Whose criterion of value is being applied?*

(Klenowski and Woods, 2013, pg.204).

Implementing school self-evaluation is therefore a complex activity for any school community (Skerritt et al., 2021) where issues can arise in terms of knowledge, skills, workload and leadership (McNamara and O’Hara, 2012; O’Brien et al., 2015; McNamara et al., 2021a). I will now discuss these potential problems in more detail and their relevance to this research.

2.4.1 Quality criteria and local knowledge

There are a myriad of models, frameworks, and definitions associated with the process of school self-evaluation, as well as a range of commonly used terms. Definitions and understanding of the process can vary from country to country and region to region (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). A review of the salient literature, reveals many definitions of school self-evaluation (Appendix 1). They contain many common aspects. Most of the definitions (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005; MacBeath, 2005; Hopkins, 2005; Schildkamp, 2007; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2010) see school self-evaluation as an internal process which uses reflection and judgement to develop pupils, teachers and the school as a whole. In terms of new public management and its neo-liberal agenda, development here is taken to mean being accountable for increased efficiency and effectiveness in reaching set targets and delivering improved quality outcomes (Tolofari, 2005). What is also interesting is that reference to the word ‘quality’ is often absent. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this could be evidence that quality can be multi-faceted, contested and never fully representable (Stake and Schwandt, 2006) and therefore difficult to define. Also of note is the lack of reference to the technical aspects of school self-evaluation i.e., the cyclical process of systematically collecting evidence, then planning and setting targets and implementing them. This is significant and an important issue in terms of school self-evaluation practice. School staff must be clear on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and what is expected of them (McNamara and O’Hara, 2005; Ryan et al., 2007; McNamara and O’Hara, 2012; O’Brien et al., 2015).

Stake (2004) argues that educational instruments and standards, used to measure or make judgements about performance, derive quality criteria from ‘somewhere else’ and import them into another educational setting ‘out of context’, thereby displacing ‘local’ judgements.

However, Brown (2013) suggests it is possible to use such a criterion-based approach, whilst at the same time taking into consideration more local, experiential and contextual criteria.

To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school therefore, it was imperative that any engagement with the process was underpinned by an unambiguous definition of school self-evaluation. It needed to be meaningful, free of confusion, easy to work with and both agreeable and understood by all staff members. Published research shows how necessary such understandings are in helping school staff assume ownership of the process and engage more effectively with it (MacBeath, 1999; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2009; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015).

2.4.2 Capability and capacity

Schools are increasingly being asked to shoulder a greater proportion of the responsibility for developing and guaranteeing educational quality (Vanhoof et al., 2009; Faddar et al., 2017). To do this, school management and staff are being asked to make professional judgements regarding the operation of their school through school self-evaluation. This increased responsibility has implications for school leaders and staff members in terms of training and implementation. It requires schools to have the necessary capability and capacity to evaluate their practices, processes and outcomes (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011; McNamara et al., 2021a).²

A review of the literature shows how external evaluations become effective and meaningful only when schools have well developed self-evaluation processes in place. In other words, to carry out a full and proper evaluation of a school, the school itself must have the capacity to tell its own story in a reliable and accurate way (MacBeath, 1999). Both external and internal evaluations are important, but neither can exist by itself (DES, 2012) As pointed to earlier, schools need a view from outside to protect themselves from self-delusions (MacBeath, 2006; Setalentoa, 2013). However, external evaluation on its own, has the potential to become a

² For the first time in our careers, my staff and I were being asked to use a new quality indicator framework to systematically gather and analyse various types of data, devise improvement plans and implement improvements on an annual basis, feeding the results into a school improvement plan, which we would then implement and monitor (Westraad, 2011; O'Brien et al. 2019).

meaningless ‘once-off’ event. A challenge therefore, is how to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both internal and external perspectives, within a school evaluation process (MacBeath, 2006; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2007; McNamara and O’Hara, 2008; Blok et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2016). According to Janssens and van Amelsvoort (2008), accountability demands imposed on school self-evaluation generate accountability-oriented self-evaluations, while improvement demands generate improvement-oriented self-evaluations. Respondents can behave in different ways depending on whether the school self-evaluation is performed in a context strongly characterised by accountability or in a context more orientated towards development (Van Petegem, 1998; Faddar et al., 2018). Mutch (2013) describes how school stakeholders in New Zealand and their inspectorate improved the success of school self-evaluation in their schools by coming together to build a shared conceptual framework of evaluation which portrayed an internal-external continuum, whilst also showing an accountability and improvement focus.

Gathering and interpreting data is a key part of school self-evaluation procedure and forms the basis for school development plans and policy decisions (Schildkamp et al., 2013; Faddar et al., 2018). In terms of school self-evaluation, data can be defined as information that is gathered and organised to represent some aspect of schools (Schildkamp et al., 2013). Data is the raw material of school self-evaluation. Therefore, an understanding of data in terms of definition, usage, problems, solutions and guidelines is essential when implementing a school self-evaluation process (Chapman and Sammons, 2013).

The literature points to many problems in the gathering and interpreting of data, pointing to different kinds of errors that can occur, resulting in distorted data (Groves et al., 2009; Faddar et al., 2017). For example, an interesting study by Faddar et al. (2017), argues that a survey demands a lot of cognitive effort from respondents, suggesting that problems in cognitive processes can lead to cognitively invalid results, particularly in the context of school self-evaluation surveys. All of this is concerning, particularly when schools rely on the conclusions drawn from such data as the source of information for policy decisions and actions, which in turn can have a large impact on school processes and their outcomes (Hofman et al., 2005).

With all these activities Timperley (2013) asks the question of whether it is more in the form of busy work or in the form of the kinds of deep change needed to address real priorities. She argues that schools use a lot of energy engaged in activities that involve reporting to a range of external agencies, all in an attempt to develop capability (pg.39). For example, she questions

the belief that teachers who continuously assess and report on their pupils in terms of an ‘end product’, will somehow develop a capability to make complex overall judgements about pupil achievement or initiate any real improvement in teaching and learning. Other examples of these busy reporting activities and their questionable outcomes are provided by Timperley (2013) in *Table 2.1*

Table 2.1 Evaluation activities and the capability required

Reporting activity	Capability
Pupil assessment	<i>Teachers are being asked to make complex overall judgments about pupil achievement</i>
Teacher appraisal	<i>Principals and Droihead teams are being asked to improve teacher performance</i>
School self-evaluation	<i>Schools are being asked to have high quality self-evaluation processes in place³</i>

Timperley (2013) contends that these reporting activities are actually taking away from the more educationally relevant but highly demanding task of using this information to improve

³Taking school self-evaluation in my own school for example, we have a school self-evaluation policy in place. Each year our school surveys different people about the education service we provide (e.g., parents, pupils, staff). Pupil work samples are examined as are their standardised test results. From an analysis of these various sources of data, the school produces a school improvement plan. For accountability purposes this plan is reported to the school board of management and placed on the school website for all parents, pupils and staff to read. A copy of the plan is also kept onsite at the school in a folder in a filing cabinet for inspection. The report is consulted a year later to assess if targets have been reached and progress made. This information is then reported in the next improvement plan. This process is repeated each year. For all intent and purposes, by engaging in these activities our school is meeting its mandated regulatory school self-evaluation requirements.

teaching and learning. Reporting accountabilities are mostly just that, providing an account. Timperley (2013) believes however, there is little accountability for making real improvement.

This view is echoed by Sjøbakken (2013) who states that “ ‘quality’ when self-defined is less a question of ‘summing up’ in terms of the quick achievement of instrumental goals and is more realistically understood as a complex process where different forms of self-evaluation are at play” (pg.184).

This action research project is a recognition of this complexity and a genuine attempt to make the school self-evaluation process more collaborative and meaningful for everyone in an attempt to improve our school. To do this, Timperley (2013) makes a very strong case to move away from this focus on capability and instead put more emphasis on a school’s capacity. For example, in reference to the previous example of pupil assessment, Timperley (2013) believes this would involve teachers shifting from a role of judging and reporting on pupils in a summative way, to one of enabling pupils to develop their own capacity for self and peer assessment. This, she believes, leads to real change and improvement. Timperley (2013) provides other similar examples of this shift from capability to capacity and its consequences (including for school self-evaluation) in *Table 2.2*

Table 2.2 Evaluation activities and the capability, capacity required

Activity	Capability	Capacity
Pupil assessment	<i>Teachers are being asked to make complex overall judgments about pupil achievement</i>	<i>Pupils developing their own capacity for self and peer assessment</i>
Teacher appraisal	<i>Principals and Droichead teams are being asked to improve teacher performance</i>	<i>Continuous professional development and self-evaluation, rather than compliance and accountability</i>
School self-evaluation	<i>Schools are being asked to have high quality self-evaluation processes in place</i>	<i>Continuous organisational learning rather than just reporting</i>

This capacity is evident in classrooms on a daily basis where teachers display a capacity to engage in evaluation and improvement. Simons (2013) observes that teachers on a daily basis theorise their own practice, are keen observers and questioners in their classrooms and skilfully interpret documents and curriculum materials. Whilst the context is different, she believes that the potential for using these skills at an institutional whole school level are there. Maybe all that is needed is some leadership?

To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school therefore, it is imperative that I, as school leader, facilitate plenty of opportunities for staff members to realise this potential at whole school level. Every action must be encouraged to allow staff discover that school self-evaluation is basically the same in operation as the self-evaluation they do in their classrooms every day.

2.5 Leading school self-evaluation

Mulford (2003) asks the question, how can a school leader build the capacity of their school and add value, especially when faced with the busyness of new national policies and school-based interventions. Increased expectations of the education system in many countries, including greater accountability pressures and emphasis on raising standards has put growing demands on school leaders (Day and Sammons, 2014). Enacting reform, implementing school self-evaluation and embedding effective professional learning places leadership of learning and school improvement at the heart of modern school leadership (Mulford, 2003). Whilst school self-evaluation maybe a necessary ingredient to stimulate school improvement, and raise standards, Chapman and Sammons (2013) believe it is insufficient without the key change agent of school leadership. Bubb and Early (2008) highlight strong leadership as a ‘consistent ingredient’ to school improvement, while Roby (2011) discusses the positive effect of a leader’s efforts towards a culture of continuous learning (cited in Karagiorgi et al., 2015). The school leader is vital, according to Vanhoof and Van Petegem (2012), in creating a culture of school self-evaluation with an emphasis on school improvement, where all teachers can communicate openly and honestly about their own experiences, opinions and expectations to generate success. This sentiment is shared by Karagiorgi et al. (2015) who state that the potential impact of a school leader on the development of a culture receptive to school self-evaluation should not be underestimated. How the process of school self-evaluation is led and managed is vital to its success in promoting school improvement (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). The literature shows leadership to be a consistent positive factor in self-evaluation

activities which have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes (Bubb and Earley, 2008).

School principals have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture including the proactive school mindset needed to foster improvement and promote success for schools (Day and Sammons, 2014). Improving school performance often comes without any guaranteed solution, ready-made blueprint or failsafe model of improving organisational performance, according to Jones and Harris (2014). However, the research evidence shows, that collective professional learning generates the shared leadership and the social capital needed for positive, and lasting organisational change and improved pupil achievement (Jones and Harris, 2014).

According to Day and Sammons (2014) however, school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. They contend that this is a key task for leadership as staff performance is a function of staff members' motivations, commitments, capacities (skills and knowledge) and the culture and conditions in which they work. How school staff perceive the process of school self-evaluation and how they engage with it is therefore determined by a leader's actions (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). A principal who understands the context of their own school environment, is essential to the successful implementation of school self-evaluation. Miller (2018) argues that leadership is situated, and both enabled and constrained by context. Each school has unique characteristics which the school principal must take into consideration when fulfilling their role. Chapman (2008) points out that a principal not understanding context, makes it difficult to develop school self-evaluation that would make a difference to the work of those involved in educating children and their experiences and outcomes. School leaders, he contends, must have a detailed understanding of their context, if school self-evaluation is to fit with those involved in the process. This involves establishing a strong, professional collaborative community, built on trust, that is receptive to critical review and improvement.

In the past, the responsibility for educational quality seemed to rest with the school principal and the middle management team. Sometimes school self-evaluation was carried out with little or no consultation of the school community (MacBeath, 2005). However, the Department of Education (hereafter cited as DES) school self-evaluation guidelines (2016) actively seek a wider range of perspectives, encouraging the participation and input of all school community stakeholders (such as staff, parents, pupils, local community members), thereby offering more

detailed and complex insights into the depths of the organisation. All members of a school community may now be subjects of and participants in a school self-evaluation process. Leaders have come to understand how to do things ‘with’ rather than ‘to’ participants (Parr and Timperley, 2013). The research indicates the necessary move away from more traditional school relationships, and a hierarchal autocratic type of leadership, where knowledge is handed down to participants (Parr and Timperley, 2013). If evaluation processes are done in such an imposed and rigid way, a meaningful process of evaluation can become school self-inspection, with the school principal becoming the primary inspector. Chapman and Sammons (2013) argue therefore that school leaders need to maintain a healthy balance between robust structures and room for localised organic growth. One way to do this, according to Parr and Timperley (2013), is for a school leader to co-construct the knowledge with school self-evaluation participants. In such an approach, the leadership is more dispersed throughout the school, resulting in a more bottom-up process of self-evaluation owned by school staff, which the literature shows to contribute to high levels of achievement for the vast majority of pupils (Harris, 2002).

So, whilst school self-evaluation has an important role in supporting pupils learning, at the same time school self-evaluation also supports professional learning too. As teachers improve their own assessment and evaluation standards, they directly support pupils’ learning too. This highlights the importance of understanding context and securing strong leadership to stimulate a ‘bottom-up’ approach to self-evaluation for school improvement, which is internally driven and owned by school staff (National Union of Teachers, 2005).

2.6 Conclusion

The meaning of ‘quality’ in terms of education varies between countries. What’s deemed to be of ‘quality’ can often be multifaceted and contested. According to UNESCO (2004), education quality is based on the five variables of (i) learner characteristics (ii) context (iii) enabling inputs (iv) teaching and learning and (v) outcomes. In this approach, education is seen as a production process, whereby *input* by means of a *process*, results in *output*. However, all are influenced by context. The context not only gives input, but also provides resources for the process and sets requirements to the output. All are interconnected to each other (Scheerens, 1990). For educational quality and learning outcomes to improve therefore, policy makers and educators need access to evidence-based analyses of the entire process from beginning to end.

Using relevant indicators, a strong monitoring and evaluation system can provide that evidence (UNESCO, 2004).

In Ireland, DES policy and practice have aligned with the philosophy of new public management drawn from theories of neo-liberal economics. Schools are accountable and responsible for the delivery and improvement of all its services, measured in terms of performance indicators (Lynch et al., 2015). As a result, schools operate within two governance philosophies, namely accountability and continuous improvement (Van Bruggen, 2010; Smith and Benavot, 2019). In order to know how to improve and develop, a school must be able to evaluate where it is, what it needs to improve and use indicators to ascertain if it has achieved its aims.

There are different ways of improving schools stemming from quality assurance, inspection and the implementation of school improvement/effectiveness initiatives such as school self-evaluation (MacBeath, 2006; Vanhoof et al., 2009; Demetriou and Kyriakides, 2012; Simons, 2013). From this debate emerged the school effectiveness and school improvement movement. School effectiveness is strongly focused on pupil outcomes as a measurement of school quality, whilst school improvement is mainly concerned with the process of change in classes and to a larger extent in schools, as the measure of school quality. However, in both, a quality education is taken to mean the delivery of effective learning to learners which is evidence based and can be measured. Any issues which arise can be identified by those held accountable and solved using proven strategies and methods to improve quality (Anderson and Boyle, 2020). School self-evaluation is one such method of improvement used in both.

In an effort to get a balanced view of the quality of education provision, educational systems now conduct various evaluation type formats (Hamzah and Tahir, 2013). In the Irish education system external and internal evaluation are both seen as complementary contributors to school improvement. School self-evaluation has become central to school improvement plans and forms an integral part of the whole-school evaluation process (Van der Westhuizen, 2014). Studies into the effects of self-evaluation have shown that it can improve school quality in terms of improved pupil achievement levels (Campbell and Levin, 2009; McNaughton et al., 2012). As a result, school self-evaluation is expanding in school systems and has gained a lot of supporters worldwide claiming it to be vital in ensuring quality education (Hamzah, 2013). There are a myriad of models, frameworks and definitions associated with school self-

evaluation, as well as a range of commonly used terms. Definitions and understanding of the process also vary from country to country and region to region (Chapman and Sammons, 2013).

In 2003, the Irish inspectorate published “Looking At Our Schools” (LAOS) (DES, 2003), a framework for school inspection and self-evaluation to monitor and evaluate the work of schools (McNamara and O’Hara, 2012; Brady, 2016). It was a model of quality assurance that emphasised school development planning through internal school review and self-evaluation, with the support of external validation carried out by the inspectorate (DES, 2003). In 2012 the DES put school self-evaluation on a formal footing, making it a mandatory process for all primary schools (DES, 2012), and reaffirmed LAOS as the key framework for school self-evaluation.

Whilst school self-evaluation maybe a necessary ingredient to stimulate school improvement, and raise standards however, Chapman and Sammons (2013) believe it is insufficient without the key change agent of school leadership. How school staff perceive the process of school self-evaluation and how they engage with it is determined by a leader’s actions (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). Strong leadership is vital in stimulating a ‘bottom-up’ approach to self-evaluation for school improvement. An approach which is internally driven and owned by staff members, helping them to improve their own assessment and evaluation standards and support learning.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

In this section I will outline the theoretical aspects of the project. Governments pass education policies and expect school management to implement those policies with absolutely fidelity to the goals that were initially established, but the reality is that this rarely happens (Howlett and Raynor, 2006; Terhart, 2013; Hudson et al., 2019). The policies get adapted to local contexts and often times are not exactly what was intended. This research project draws upon insights from complexity theory as a framework to better understand why this happens and how a school leader could use that knowledge in a positive way to introduce, implement and sustain a process of school self-evaluation within their own school context. I will firstly discuss the origins and principles of complexity theory and their application to human organisation systems. I will then explore these principles in the implementation of school self-evaluation. To conclude, I discuss both the potential and the limitations of complexity theory for this study.

3.2 Complexity theory

Complexity theory first began and emerged from the work of natural science to develop models for understanding things like weather systems, which are highly complex systems. Complexity science is really the application of the language of mathematics to try model and explain how smaller systems can work together interdependently to create larger systems. Investigators from many different disciplines began to explore phenomena in similar ways and a new theory emerged known as ‘complexity theory’. Complexity theory suggests that the universe is full of systems and that these systems are complex and constantly adapting to their environment (Morrison, 2002; Osberg, 2008; Fenwick, 2012). The most widely used definition of complexity is the one developed by the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico. According to this definition, complexity refers to the integrated, rich and varied condition of the universe which we cannot comprehend in a usual mechanical way or in a linear fashion (Fidan and Balci, 2017). Marion (1999) provides this useful definition “*A complex system is one whose component parts interact with sufficient intricacy that they cannot be predicted by standard linear equations; so many variables are at work in the system that its overall behaviour can only be understood as an emergent consequence of the holistic sum of all the myriad behaviours embedded within*” (pg.27-28).

These same principles can be applied to the systems that we work with in the human world to form complex systems theory. This theory challenges any analysis which sees organisations in linear terms as mechanistic and predictable, performing as they are programmed to do (Morrison, 2002; Mennin, 2010) based on simple rules of cause and effect. In contrast, proponents of complex systems theory believe that the human environment is non-linear, dynamic and complex, continuously changing in unpredictable ways. This research draws upon insights from complexity theory as a framework that a school leader can use in a positive way to introduce, implement and sustain a process of school self-evaluation for school improvement within their own school context. I will now describe the main principles and characteristics of a complex system and how they are related to the aims of this study.

Complex systems are considered adaptive because they are constantly adapting to their environment. This adaptiveness helps define the complexity of the system. Complex adaptive systems theory is only one of a number of theories of complexity, but it is well regarded for unifying the notion of complexity (Chu et al., 2003). The most common definition of a complex adaptive system, is a dynamic network of agents acting in parallel, constantly reacting to what the other agents are doing, which in turn influences behaviour and the network as a whole (Holland, 1992, 1999, 2006; Alhadeff-Jones, 2008). Complex adaptive systems thinking provides a way to understand educational processes (Biesta and Osberg, 2010) and has become prominent in educational studies (Fenwick, 2012). The language of complexity makes it possible to see the interdependency between people within those systems, as their roles constantly adapt, self-organise, emerge and evolve overtime (Biesta and Osberg, 2010). This would be in terms of how they are connected to one another, how they negotiate varying pressures from outside forces (like the economy and state policy), as well as the internal pressures (from pupils and school staff). Fullan (2001) believes that all schools, if they are to survive, must understand complexity theory.

Figure 3.1 below, provides a visual representation of a complex adaptive system (Morrison, 2002, pg.10). A school can be described as a complex adaptive system as it is comprised of a population of diverse people (elements). These people are numerous, dynamic, autonomous and highly interactive, with the ability to learn and adapt. The school is characterised by their individual behaviour. They are interconnected through networks nested at various levels within the school system. Within this nested networked system, they interact and adapt to each other based on a combination of elements such as their knowledge, experience, feedback from their environment, local values and formal system rules. These elements can also change over time,

therefore leading to continuously changing interactions that are often novel and hard to predict. Complexity theory contends that from these interactions, people within a school system self-organise and emerge with structures and patterns, which then feed back into the school and further influence the interactions of the people within it (Morrison, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010).

My School as a complex adaptive system

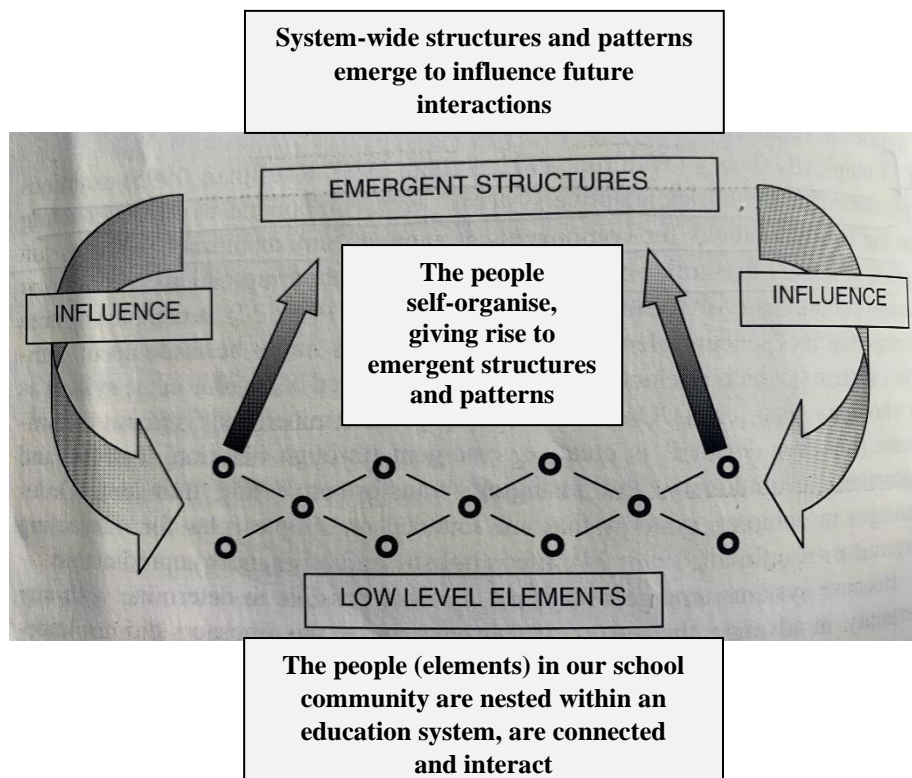


Figure 3.1 My school as a complex adaptive system

Fenwick (2012), Keshavarz et al., (2010), Fidan & Balci (2017) and Morrison (2002), list and describe the key concepts of a complex adaptive system and how they are exhibited in schools. When these are applied to the implementation of school self-evaluation, they are useful in understanding the potential and limitations of the process and the implications for this study. I will now discuss these key concepts in more detail and their relevance to this research.

3.2.1 The diversity and dynamic nature of agents

Schools exhibit diversity in terms of size, resources, and context. Schools also have a diverse range of members. These include teachers, principals and support staff, as well as pupils, parents and families. Each person is living their own life journey, each with its own unique

history. Each person also possesses their own unique inherent qualities such as likes, dislikes, skills and opinion. Each individual follows their own agenda (*goals*) and selects their own way of achieving it (*strategies*) (Stacey, 2005). Complexity theory suggests that such diversity and dynamism among members enables the system to continually generate new possibilities and the resilience needed to sustain itself throughout both challenges and losses (Fenwick, 2012). I would argue that it also has implications for the implementation of school self-evaluation. The scope of self-evaluation can vary from individual teacher reflective practice to school-wide analysis of data to inform planning and resource allocation (Dyson, 2018). Each member is going to have very diverse views on all aspects of school self-evaluation and its implementation in their school. This is problematic, as the model of school self-evaluation mandated by the DES is a one-size-fits all approach that seeks input from all school stakeholders as a collective process. The whole school in its entirety is seen as the unit of intervention (Simons, 2013; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). Of course, this is nothing new in Irish education policy, with most schools having policies, rules and procedures in place for a variety of things. However, this is at odds with complexity theory which would suggest that schools are a collection of individuals. Each member in a school community is the unit of intervention and action. Schools are fundamentally characterised by the behaviour of individuals such as teachers, principals, and pupils who base and adapt their everyday actions on their interpretation of such policies, rules and procedures. The success of the system is very dependent on the capacity of individuals, in a variety of settings with differing skills, knowledge and ability levels (Ryan and Timmer, 2013). On this basis, a big question for this study was, how could we reach beyond the collective level of a school, to mobilise the change needed at individual level, to implement school self-evaluation successfully? The variety of people involved in a school makes any schoolwork complex (Keshavarz et al. 2010; Fidan and Balci, 2017). The involvement of dynamic and diverse individuals such as teachers, parents, principals, special needs assistants, pupils, deputy principals, board of management members, patron body members, post holders, community members and special education teachers in decision making can add complex layers to the implementation of any school process, such as school self-evaluation. This may explain the gap between policy and practice which McNamara and O'Hara (2012) describe in relation to the implementation of school self-evaluation in Ireland. Whenever a particular set of policy goals are put into place by state agencies, often times the realisation of those policy goals gets lost in implementation challenges. This refers to the people that are actually responsible for enacting those policies, having different understandings of what they mean and how they fit within their particular role,

within the institutional context in which they work (McNamara and O’Hara, 2006; McNamara and O’Hara, 2012).

Complexity theory provides a helpful framework to describe, characterise and better understand the dynamics of this implementation gap, in the hope of avoiding it (Biesta and Osberg, 2010). Schools are dependent on external agencies, like the government, parent groups and management bodies for the provision of supports such as finance and human resources. However, they are also autonomous having the freedom to act within a relatively fixed set of possibilities. School decision making is influenced by school “culture”, formal policies, expressed local community needs, the resources available and time. Policies get adapted to local contexts by the diverse people within them and often times they are not exactly what was intended (McNamara et al., 2002; Meuret and Morlaix, 2003; Howlett and Raynor, 2006; Fullan et al., 2006; Ngan et al., 2010; Terhart, 2013; McNamara and Nayir, 2015; Hudson et al., 2019). However, for policies to be implemented successfully acknowledging diversity alone is not sufficient. According to Fenwick (2012), there must also be interaction.

3.2.2 Nested systems, connectedness and patterns of interaction

Most social systems are nested within other systems, co-implicating and co-habiting, yet each retaining its own distinct identity, organising logic and emerging patterns. Within these nested networks, people are interconnected (Holland, 1998; Cilliers, 2001; Keshavarz, 2010; Fenwick, 2012). Schools for example have observable subsystems such as individuals, classes, year groups, and disciplines, all with complex relationship networks and different traits. They are also part of parallel systems such as families, community and friends. In addition, schools are part of larger supra systems. For example, the OECD, the Government of Ireland, the DES, Inspectoral regions and Patron management bodies, each with their own complex relationship networks and diverse traits. Within the structures of these nested systems, diverse interactions are observable between schools and within schools, as well as with families and the local community. For example, teachers interact with pupils, with other teachers, with special needs assistants, with school management and with parents, through interactive processes such as conversation and dialogue. These interactions range from being compulsory (e.g., parent teacher meetings or engagement with the Inspectorate) to voluntary (e.g., being part of a committee or joining a teaching union) and formal (e.g., being called for a job interview) to informal (e.g., having a quick chat at the school gate). As each person is diverse and dynamic and different from the other individuals they meet, information and resources are usually

exchanged during these various types of interactions. This relationship between people, as they connect and relate to one another, is critical to a school's success, as the more frequent and powerful these interactions are, the more influence they are likely to have on the behaviour of school members (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012), for example learning new ideas, trying new tools, reaching consensus or making sense of new concepts or information. These processes provide an important link between the individual and the collective. Within masses of interaction, the system as a whole can become energised and be sensitive to fluctuation. This puts the system in a state of uncertainty, continually operating with unfolding configurations and a multiplicity of possibilities (Osberg, 2008). This has implications for school self-evaluation. For it to be implemented successfully as a whole school process, members must be allowed to connect with each other and build relationships. To connect with each other, individuals need the resources to do so, for example frequently scheduled meeting time, a meeting place and a meeting plan. To build powerful relationships, individuals need opportunities to share information and knowledge as a collective, with protocols for doing so, such as rules.

Complexity theory contends that in the right conditions, these interactions have the power to alter behaviour patterns at individual level and in turn collective behaviour patterns at whole-school level (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). This would suggest that for school self-evaluation to be implemented successfully it needs to begin with a 'bottom-up' community approach. This however can be problematic. School self-evaluation, as envisaged by the DES is externally mandated (Brown et al., 2016), received by schools as a 'top-down' transmission of information through the education network. This serves to maintain an interaction pattern that fosters compliance and hierarchy (O'Day, 2002). This pattern of interaction caused me to see the school self-evaluation process as little more than a symbolic exercise in response to a formulaic requirement, with an emphasis on compliance, rather than a self-reflective and inclusive learning experience for school members. These inner beliefs affected my behaviour towards school self-evaluation and therefore my leadership practice, hence the significance of this action research study.

Inferences from complexity theory highlighted this as a problem for the school as an organisation and posed certain questions about my management and planning skills as a school leader (Fidan and Balci, 2017). I did not know exactly what to do, or the right process to follow, to allow me make the significant changes needed. Using complexity theory as a framework to understand my school as a complex adaptive system, helped me to adopt a more sophisticated

approach to account for the diverse, complex and context specific nature of my school (Keshavarz et al., 2010) and as such, the challenges and the methods by which an intervention could be structured, introduced and sustained (Cunningham, 2001). Complexity theory provided me with a powerful way to think about how to negotiate the day-to-day challenges involved in identifying and addressing my school's changing needs (Ladd, 2009). In an environment of unpredictability such as a school, complexity theory contends that leaders must try not to manage change, as I was doing, but instead support their school on its change journey, releasing school members to adapt as the school moves forward (Morrison, 2002).

3.2.3 Information flow and feedback loops

Most schools have well organised systems to support the flow of information relating to educational issues. Schools can send and receive information using a variety of communication channels such as text, email, letter, phone call or in-person. Through these channels of reciprocal communication, information can flow back and forth between various networked systems of diverse individual people such as, the DES, a board of management, a school principal, families, staff and pupils. Schools also receive information from many diverse individuals outside the realm of education such as the Health Service Executive, various state departments or local community groups. Schools in turn, can transfer this information to families, staff members or the DES. All schools have systems for feedback, including systems for both internal and external performance reporting. This feedback can be both formal and informal and is usually about educational issues and performance reporting. Schools utilise this feedback to reorganise their plans and practices. Examples can include pupil school reports, parent teacher meetings, assessment portfolios, evaluations, assessment for learning and staff meetings.

According to complexity theorists (Cilliers, 1998) however, this information is not a static entity that is disseminated and unchanged. Rather this information is dynamic and is constantly changing, being interpreted by each individual based on their prior experience and recombined with other information and knowledge they have passed on, through interaction with other people. This movement of information, through the interaction of people, lies at the heart of any learning and change process within a complex system, such as a school (Morrison, 2002; Stacey, 2005). When information is freely provided, and structures support use of that information, people engage more productively in their work (Bower, 2006).

However, O'Day (2002) points out that not all information leads to learning and change in a school and not all learning and change leads to improvement. She describes five conditions which must be in place for information to be useful in any learning or change process. The first condition sets out that in a process such as school self-evaluation, participants must be given access to information, be it from other school members or the school's environment. However, it must not be of such quantity that they become overloaded with it. O'Day (2002) argues that schools are constantly bombarded with information and by demands to do something about that information. She describes schools moving chaotically from one demand or source of information to another, with insufficient focus and time to digest it or learn from it. She describes some schools literally closing their door to new information as a coping strategy to allow them focus. Principals and teachers take protection by isolating themselves in the sanctity of their classrooms, a form of walled buffer from change. This prevents school members from encountering variation and the information it engenders, thus limiting any opportunity to learn and grow from one another and select more successful ways of doing things (Morrison, 2002). Working in isolation such as this, devoid of any meaningful communication or rich feedback, can make it difficult to know how you are doing and how your work fits within the larger school picture (Bower, 2006). This resonates with a study of health promotion programs in Australian primary school by Keshavarz et al. (2010). Using a complex adaptive system framework, it found that information quantity and quality is not always productive in its impact on a school system. They found that in general, schools receive too much formal and informal information. This they contend, causes schools to prioritise communication and information within their network. Information from the DES tended to have a much higher priority to be followed up, than communication from entities outside the education system, such as the local health authority. This information overload has implications for the school self-evaluation process externally mandated by the DES. In the event of information overload and the deployment of coping strategies, school members may resent having no choice but to prioritise such communication and information from the DES at the expense of more local issues. This could affect their motivation to engage with school self-evaluation.

The second condition outlined by O'Day (2002) states that school members must be given the opportunity to attend to information, if it is to prove useful. School members must be given the adequate time and resources needed to deal with information regarding school self-evaluation. Of course, attending to this information may not be enough. The third condition sets out that school members must also have the necessary knowledge and skillset to process this

information. This raises many important questions for any study on the implementation of school self-evaluation, such as, do individuals interpret school self-evaluation the same way? Is there a chance of misinterpretation therefore leading to inadequate information, ineffective learning, unreliable results and maladaptive declining outcomes?

Lastly and most crucially of all for O'Day (2002) however, are the final two conditions of motivation and resources. Both must be in place to act on information. These in particular are critical to the implementation of any school self-evaluation process, for example, are school members individually motivated and resourced enough to engage with and implement school self-evaluation in a meaningful way? (MacBeath, 1999; Schildkamp, 2007; Bubb and Earley, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015).

A breakdown in any of the conditions described above – *access, attention, knowledge, motivation* and *resources* – can disrupt the connection between information and change (O'Day, 2002, pg.7), thus limiting the potential of any school self-evaluation process.

3.2.4 Change, adaptability, co-evolution, self-organisation and emergence

Complex systems, such as a school, are part of a broader complex open education system and a wider complex community system. These systems are always in a state of dynamic interaction ad infinitum where change is constant in almost all aspects of school life, occurring with different frequency and intensity (Morrison, 2002; Osberg, 2008; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). Changes in one part of the education system can lead to unpredictable outcomes, just as easy as predictable outcomes, in another part of the education system. Changes maybe planned, for example, a school setting their own internal educational planning priorities. Others however, may be introduced by an external source with no control or pre-plan, such as the government's mandated policy of school self-evaluation. When there is a change in conditions or new information, schools can choose to make adaptive changes and evolve to ensure a best fit. Through multiple interactions among diverse school members, a unity and coherence can emerge without any imposition or planning (Fenwick, 2012). School members as a diverse, but yet dependent collective, can randomly organise themselves and emerge with a best fit for their context, with the freedom to develop along undetermined alternative trajectories (Osberg, 2008). The informal human architecture of a school can be self-organising, as school leadership structures tend to be flat and flexible, thereby allowing the space needed for any necessary innovation.

These adaptations can be radically indeterminate and open-ended despite any previous incarnations of the school, with the potential to feedback into and influence the evolution and emergence of the system (Osberg, 2008), for example through evaluation studies, audits or practitioner action research. Schools can also undergo internal changes, such as a change in its membership. Here schools can respond and adapt by setting criteria and holding interviews to seek the best fit and most suitable candidate for their school. Schools who are compelled to try new and different things move away from the status quo (or what's called 'equilibrium') to a place of change (or what's called 'the edge of chaos'). It is here that new relationships and new structures are forged causing the school to evolve (Morrison, 2002). However, in the true spirit of complexity theory, the outcome of this evolution is hard to predict. For example, in the case of a newly appointed staff member one possible outcome could see the new member bringing change to school practices. This could happen through the selection, recombination and adaptation of information derived from interaction with other school staff members and the school's environment. On the other hand, another possible outcome could see the new staff member gradually learn and become socialised into the strong and stable language, beliefs and routines that make up the dominant behaviour of the school, thereby keeping the school system stable. A schools' general behaviour therefore, is the result of the interplay of multiple factors, and is accordingly an emergent phenomenon that is not easily or fully predictable (Osberg, 2008). A schools' collective behaviour is dependent on the behaviour of its components, rules, interactions, information, values, context, time, and other systems' action, as well as the availability of resources.

3.3 The potential limitations of complexity theory

As outlined above, central concepts from complexity theory, when applied to an organisation such as a school, are particularly instructive in understanding the dilemmas of practice in implementing school self-evaluation. Governments cannot govern and implement policy by themselves, they need partners (Morçöl and Wackhaus, 2009). My school works in partnership with the DES to deliver quality education to young people. To do this, my school is connected to the government through a relatively stable and structured networked system of multiple, interdependent and self-organising representative groups and bodies, for example, the NCSE, NCCA, teaching council, inspectorate, NPC and teacher unions, to name but a few. Whilst my school may be an interdependent part of this structured network and dependent on the government, it has a high degree of autonomy. This has implications for the implementation of

government policy. Policies get adapted to local contexts and often times are not exactly what was intended (Hudson et al., 2019).

There are numerous organisational or social theories I could have used to explore this phenomenon (Haque, 2015; Jones and Bradbury, 2018). Actor network theory for example, is conceptually useful in helping to understand organisational reality. It too believes that systems are complex, composed of multiple interdependent members (actors) with the ability to self-organise (Morçöl and Wackhaus, 2009). It provides fundamentals for understanding uncertainties that are created by human relations and organisational arrangements, in an attempt to study them and bring about stability. It is an approach to understanding humans and their interactions with inanimate objects. For example, it would describe school self-evaluation as a process in which human 'actors' (e.g., teachers, pupils, care staff, school leaders) interact with each other and with aspects of their environment considered to have agentic roles (e.g., inanimate objects such as guidance documents, classrooms, online spaces), to form structured networks which embody change and improvement (Carroll, 2018). Actor network theory sees reality as the stability of these structures. In contrast, complexity theory sees reality as a dynamic and ever-changing series of events. It is more concerned with the dynamic interactions and processes between people within that structure (Morçöl and Wackhaus, 2009). Complexity theory suggests that improvement (adaption) is based on the information (feedback) that school members receive from one another as they interact in a process of school self-evaluation. The interpretation and dispersal of this information leads to the invention, selection and combination of strategies to produce improvement (O'Day, 2002). For that very reason, complexity theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study.

However, that is not to say that complexity theory is not without its limitations. Bush (2011) believes that on its own, it is not sufficiently comprehensive to explain behaviour and events in education. He references significant weaknesses in researching schools using a complexity theory approach. To begin, he believes it is difficult to reconcile such a perspective of reality with the customary structures and processes of schools. School members generally understand and accept the broad aims of education. Whilst school members may move in and out of decision-making situations, the broad aims and policy framework of a school remain intact, continually influencing the outcome of any discussions. Secondly, Bush (2011) argues that complexity theory can exaggerate the degree of unpredictability. Schools have many predictable features in terms of professional conduct, expected behaviour, standard rules and procedures. All school members are accountable to someone. Timetables regulate the location

and movement of all school members on a daily basis. There are also generally plans to guide classroom activities. Thirdly, complexity theory according to Bush (2011), seems irrelevant and less appropriate for schools during periods of stability. Levels of predictability can vary from school to school depending on their context.

In its defence however, Cunningham (2001) believes that complexity theory makes a valuable contribution to educational research, as conditions in schools may be too uncertain to allow an informed choice among alternatives. Its emphasis on the unpredictability of organisations is a significant counter to the view that problems can be solved through a rational process (Bush, 2011).

3.4 Conclusion

An ever changing and complex environment poses certain questions about the strategic management and strategic planning skills of school principals (Fidan & Balci, 2017). Complexity theory provides guidance and a framework for a school leader to think about their role in leading school self-evaluation in a complex system such as a school. Complexity theory provides a powerful way to think about the interaction needed between various components in a school system in order to implement school self-evaluation successfully (Morrison, 2002). I used the following key concepts from complexity theory as my lens in this study.

Each member of school staff is going to have their own unique interpretation of school self-evaluation and its implementation in our school. The process mandated by the DES is a one-size-fits all collective approach where the school as a whole is seen as the unit of intervention. In contrast however, complexity theory describes each individual member of staff as the unit of action. Careful consideration and acknowledgment were therefore given to the diversity between school members regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation in this study.

Within a nested system structure, such as a school, diverse interactions can occur between the diverse people within it. If these interactions are frequent and meaningful, they have the power and potential, according to complexity theorists, to influence individual and collective behaviour (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012) regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation. The movement of information through interaction such as this, lies at the heart of any learning and change process within a complex system such as a school and allows staff members to engage more productively with their work. In this study therefore, careful consideration was given to facilitate, in as much as possible, effective

interaction between school members, in an attempt to encourage the flow of information between them, regarding their experiences of implementing school self-evaluation.

From this process, school members as a diverse, but yet dependent collective can, according to complexity theorists, randomly self-organise, forging new relationships and new structures, and emerge with the best fit for their school context. Any approach to school self-evaluation is an emergent product of many factors over time. This study was very cognisant therefore of the complexity of our school, and its functioning as a complex adaptive system.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This action research study is focused on how to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in my school. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the design of this research and the approach taken. I discuss the methodological choices made and their implications for the research methodology, research methods and data analysis techniques adopted. To begin I will discuss the aims of the research and provide details of the research questions, as well as a description of the setting and the participants involved. This is followed by a discussion of the key data collection and analysis techniques used. To conclude, ethical issues and how these were dealt with are then discussed.

4.2 Research aims

The overall aim of this action research study was to improve the school self-evaluation process in our school based on a ‘*bottom-up*’ approach to change, putting school stakeholders at the centre of all efforts to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school (Chapman and Sammons, 2013, pg.6). In our school self-evaluation process, we must learn to identify our weaknesses and embrace our strengths for the betterment of all. We need to learn how to gather information and feedback from all the stakeholders in our school community and negotiate realistic solutions and decisions through agreed consensus. This action research was an opportunity to engage in such activity and document our experiences. However, in such a ‘bottom-up’ approach, Smith (2012) cautions against the simple ‘*replication*’ of imported school self-evaluation models (pg.150-152). Evidence suggests the need for approaches to school improvement that are more suitably adjusted to the setting (Harris and Chrispeels, 2009). This study therefore reflected on our school context and the appropriate blend of elements to optimise the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school community.

4.3 Research setting

The setting for this research project is a co-ed, vertical, single stream, rural school, under Catholic patronage. The school is made up of two hundred and sixteen pupils, four school support staff, eight classroom teachers, two special education teachers (one of whom is the deputy principal), one shared resource teacher, two special needs assistants and an administrative principal. I, the author of the research, am the administrative principal.

4.4 Research participants

The school is a close-knit community of eighteen colleagues (teachers, special needs assistants and school support staff) who work hard every day supporting each other, our pupils and their school community. Part of my daily lived experience, as school principal, involves working within that team. I see myself as part of that team. Having worked with these staff colleagues over the past nine years, I was very aware of how knowledgeable and talented they were. Their input to this research project was seen as positive, as they brought a wealth of in-depth experience, skills and insight. Such a mixture of staff offered a broad range of views and experiences. Each colleague was different in terms of their focus, their daily activities and their life experience. The entire fourteen members of the teaching and care needs staff gave consent to take part in this research. Out of these fourteen staff members, eight were classroom teachers, three were special education teachers (of which one is deputy principal), one was an administrative principal and two were special needs assistants. Twelve were female and two were male. Three of the teaching staff had over twenty years teaching experience, five teachers had ten years' experience or more, whilst the remaining four had less than 10 years' experience. The two special needs assistants also had less than 10 years' experience. For six members of the teaching staff, this was their first school, and for the two special needs assistants, this was also their first school. Such diversity and range of views helped to triangulate the data gathered, open up questions for further research and ensure the research was rooted in a community approach.

4.5 Research Paradigm

In this section I describe in general terms the assumptions, beliefs, norms and values of research paradigms and the implications of these on the positionings, values and judgements of researchers (Creswell, 1994). I then discuss and present the rationale for selecting the pragmatic paradigm applied in this action research study.

A research paradigm is a model of research that reflects a general agreement on the nature of the world and how to investigate it (Bassey, 1990). It is a set of beliefs and principles that shape how a researcher sees the world (MacKenzie and Knipe, 2006) and how they interpret and act within that world. It helps a researcher to consider the fundamental beliefs underpinning their research process and how these frame the ways in which they understand the world around them (Burton and Bartlett, 2009). Paradigms can clarify and organise a researcher's thinking

about their work (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a paradigm comprises four elements, namely, ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things); these, in turn, give rise to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection. Added to ontology and epistemology is axiology (the values and beliefs that we hold), which Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) describe as being concerned with understanding the world, by how we view our world(s), what we take understandings to be, what we see as the purposes of understanding and what is deemed valuable (cited in Cohen et al., 2018, pg.3). A researcher's work is upheld and guided by the ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological perspectives of their chosen paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Keeves, 1997; Benton and Craib, 2001; Burton and Bartlett, 2009; Cooksey and McDonald, 2011; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

I will now outline the research paradigm which underpinned the assumptions, beliefs, norms and values of this work, before addressing the research methodology used in this study.

4.5.1 Pragmatic paradigm

The aim of this study was to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. The problem as leader of the process was to stay true to my core values of authenticity and collaboration. It was important to me that any approach to school self-evaluation in our school adopted a practitioner-based and collaborative approach. Having considered interpretivism, criticality and constructivism, the position I eventually adopted was pragmatism because it acknowledges that reality, truth and objectivity can be viewed from multiple perspectives.

Pragmatists argue that it is not possible to access 'truth' in the real world by using the single scientific method as championed by the positivist paradigm. Equally however, they also argue that it is not possible to determine social reality constructed under an interpretivist paradigm (Patton, 2002; Alise and Teddlie, 2010; Biesta, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2014). Instead, pragmatism advocates the use of multiple methods as a pragmatic way to understand human behaviour. It therefore focuses on using a combination of research tools to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, but more importantly, data that is useful (Greenwood and Levin, 2006) to achieve what Dewey (1998, 1938) calls '*warranted assertability*' (pg.161).

That is, strong data which is meaningful to us and to those who share our context (Lofthouse et al., 2012). This evidence gives us the support and confidence we need to guide future practice (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012), choosing whether to continue with current practice, to scrap something that no longer works or to introduce something new (Dewey, 1922, 1938). According to Powell (2001) such an approach can help organisations such as schools to solve problems and implement education initiatives, such as school self-evaluation, in their own context. For that reason, the pragmatic paradigm was applied in this study. Research conducted within this paradigm advocates the use of multiple research methods according to need. One such methodology is action research, which through a focus on qualitative data and improvement in practice, has the potential to “*professionalise the work of educators...by reducing the gap between theory and practice*” (Ary et al., 2010, pg.516).

4.6 Action research

In this section I discuss the methodological commonalities between action research and school self-evaluation. I outline how action research has influenced the model of school self-evaluation in Ireland, a model of active internal review within local settings based on collaboration, inclusion and continuous reflection. I describe the action research method and its application to education. I then explain my decision not to use participatory action research (PAR), but instead an action research approach (AR) to study the implementation of school self-evaluation in my school, and the importance of interaction and collaboration in the process amongst school members.

4.6.1 Action research and school self-evaluation

It is often argued that the scope of school self-evaluation can be wide and embrace several activities, ranging from the process evaluation of classroom practices to organisational change (Blok et al., 2008). Policies designed to support improvement, such as school self-evaluation, can often be traced back to traditions associated with Kurt Lewin i.e., action research (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). To further conceptualise school self-evaluation Sjøbakken and Dobson (2013) draw parallels with action research as defined by Carr and Kemmis (1986) i.e., a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations, in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. The inspectorate in Ireland similarly draws on the principles of action research in its model of school self-evaluation. The inspectorate describes it as a collaborative, inclusive and reflective iterative process of internal review

which involves gathering evidence from a range of sources, analysing it, interpreting it and acting on it with a view to bringing about improvements in pupils' learning (DES, 2016). Sjøbakken et al. (2013) claim that both action research and school self-evaluation seek to move beyond a technical and practical interest. The goal instead they argue, is to increase the level of reflection by stakeholders and institute forms of change to school practice that are more inclusionary, democratic and emancipatory. Practitioners in this instance assume ownership of the improvement process through professional enquiry (Walters, 2014). Such a participatory approach is vital because action research, like school self-evaluation, is something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005). Similarly, school self-evaluation, like action research, is often viewed as a '*cyclical process*' whereby a school itself, describes and assesses aspects of its own functioning in a systematic manner (Vanhof & Van Petegem, 2012 pg.50). The similarities do not end there. In both school self-evaluation and action research, school teachers shift from a role of passiveness and compliance, to an active role, developing their own agenda, focusing on areas of relevance to their own context using self-developed evaluation and improvement strategies to initiate a process of change (MacBeath, 2008). Evaluations need to be custom fit to the situation, with the interventions being systematically and deliberately designed with partnerships at their core (McNaughton et al., 2013). According to McNaughton et al. (2013), effective research-school partnerships cannot be left to chance, but rather must be developed systematically from the start of any intervention. This is important, as initiatives such as action research and school self-evaluation can contribute in efforts to turn schools into effective learning environments (Karagiorgi et al., 2018).

Using an action research approach was therefore an obvious choice in this study of change due to its methodological parallels with school self-evaluation. This study of school self-evaluation in our school presented us with a prime opportunity to engage in a methodology and change process at a substantively deep level. One that was well grounded in both theory and practice and supported by our vision for change in our own school.

Action research has been defined as "*a participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes*" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, pg. 1). Within action-oriented research processes, Auemanekul (2010) describes three broad types: *Action Research (AR)*, *Participatory Action Research (PAR)* and *Community Based Participation Research (CBPR)* (pg.86). The methods on this continuum share many similarities, such as active participation, open-ended objectives and high levels of

commitment from the researcher and the participants to the research problem and active learning (Bell et al., 2004). They differ however, in their specific end goal and the methods used to get there. Each has a different purpose reflecting a different level of commitment and influence.

In AR, it is the researcher who initiates change based on a feeling that something needs to change to create a better situation. The researcher may act as an individual or with a team of colleagues as the facilitator. Although the researcher can be studying themselves in the context of working with an organisation, it can be a collaborative effort when the organisation is being supported by the action research process. In this scenario, the researcher and the group identify actions to take and jointly analyse the results. They then reflect on these actions and results and propose new courses of action. Here, the researcher and the clients are acting together to create or actualise satisfying results for change. But at all times it is the researcher who leads the process of identifying the problem, drawing facts and opinions from colleagues, and leading the group to identify any gaps in understanding.

In contrast however, PAR is initiated by the organisation itself. Here the research approach is jointly designed through discussions with professional researchers and active participation by some members of the organisation. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is similar in approach to PAR but instead, it takes place in community settings and involves community members as full and equal partners in all phases of the research, from design to implementation. Unlike AR, participants carry out the data collection and analyse the results.

Educational Action Research (EAR) can be placed within this broad continuum of action research. It applies the concepts and practices of action research to the context of education (Rauch et al., 2019) in an attempt to improve educational outcomes for pupils, address educational inequality, and create more critical and innovative educational practice (Brydon-Miller et al., 2017). An action-oriented research process is a potent methodology for educational reform, because of its core principle of combining action with research to challenge the routines of the status quo. It gives those who carry it out, a means to develop agency to bring about changes which are locally appropriate, within the globalised world they live in (Somekh et al., 2009). It is applied research using a cyclical, action-reflection model, carried out by practitioners who have themselves identified a need for change or improvement in an organisation (Bell, 2005; Noffke & Somekh, 2009).

It can be carried out by individual teachers in their own classrooms, by groups of teachers working in collaboration or at school, community, regional or national level to address a common question or concern (Brydon-Miller et al., 2017). Examples include classroom-based action research, teacher as researcher and practitioner inquiry. Educational action researchers are aware of the many diverse conceptions of value which may exist within a school setting and the uncertainty this can bring to any possible action. Within a school setting therefore, they must engage in ongoing cycles of reflection on their actions and thoughts to inform further planning, future actions and understandings. Through this cyclical process, they contribute to the conceptual and practical knowledge of education (Rauch et al., 2019).

The fundamental aim of action research according to Elliot (1991) is to improve practice. It is a way for people to take action in their personal and social situations with a view to improving them (McNiff, 2017). The focus of action research is to empower people to change their social situation and to raise awareness on a particular issue (Van Der Voort and Wood, 2014). This resonates with Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) definition of action research as a form of collective self-enquiry by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social and educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (cited in Cohen et al., 2007, pg.298). Action research can therefore, according to McNiff (2017), be a powerfully liberating form of professional enquiry where practitioners investigate their practices through a process of action and reflection, finding ways to live more fully in the direction of their personal and social values.

Leitch and Day (2000) argue however, that there are three different modes of action research, which according to purpose, will have different kinds of benefits. The first, '*technical action research*', is related to solving issues as a means of increasing efficiency in delivering the curriculum. It is likely to be orientated towards the development of pedagogical strategies, skills and tactics (pg. 183). The second, '*practical action research*', aims to improve practice through the application of practical judgement and the accumulated personal wisdom of the teacher. It is as concerned with building problem-solving skills and self-evaluation capacities, as with the end product of enquiry (Leitch and Day, 2000, pg. 182). Elliot's (1991) action research cycle with its recurrent feature of '*reconnaissance*' to analyse and reflect on a situation, provides an approach for undertaking practical action research of this kind (pgs.73-75; Leitch and Day, 2000, pg.184). In keeping with this orientation towards practical problem-

solving, self-evaluation and improved practice, this study adopted Elliot's (1991) action research design.

The third mode '*emancipatory action research*', is concerned with understanding the broader social and policy effects on teaching and learning. Within emancipatory action research, Leitch and Day (2000) distinguish two separate camps. The first camp is focused upon individual practice, typified by the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006). Here researchers systematically relate their work to their values and draw on these values as standards of judgement for their work (Karagiorgi et al., 2018). This requires engaging in a process of explaining your present practice in terms of an evaluation of your past, with a view to creating improvements in present and future contexts. Through such processes, researchers construct their own 'living educational theory' (Leitch and Day., 2000). This project drew upon the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006) to explore and describe how my values of authenticity and collaboration guided my school leadership practice. This allowed me to reflect on my practice and see how my hierarchal leadership of an unauthentic school self-evaluation process, negated those values. By leading the school self-evaluation process in a more collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist way, there was opportunity for the process to become more meaningful, therein achieving genuine school improvement.

The second camp is outwardly focused on the social or educational system, seeing action research as a critical activity not only to increase the level of reflection by stakeholders, but also to increase participation by bringing change to school practices that are more inclusionary, democratic and emancipatory (cited in Sjøbakken et al., 2013, pg.171). Anything else, they claim, is not true action research (cited in Karagiorgi et al. 2018, pg.240).

This focus on increased participation is endorsed by Klenowski and Woods (2013). They believe there is much to be gained by utilising a participatory and democratic action research methodology for school self-evaluation. An action research methodology which operates within a participatory enquiry paradigm with a democratic ethic they argue, attempts to represent a wide range of perspectives and involve more stakeholders in the school self-evaluation process, with increased opportunities for dialogue and deliberation. Upholding the principles of such a participatory and democratic approach to evaluation they believe, will make the practice of school self-evaluation for improvement more ethical and respectful. The involvement of pupils, teachers, parents and the wider school community is seen as a crucial factor in determining the success of participatory modes of evaluation (Hopkins, 2001).

However, regardless of whatever model of action research is used to underpin a school self-evaluation process, Vanhoof et al. (2011), argue that *“the way in which school self-evaluation is conducted is not something which can be considered in isolation from the broader functioning of the school”* (pg. 284). That is because context matters, where local variations of a national problem require local solutions created by local communities (Lai, 2013). It is important to allow contextually driven approaches to deliver improvement with flexibility and local ownership being encouraged (Parr and Timperley, 2013). As Bana (2010) suggests, participatory action research allows for mutual consensus at all levels of research and provides the opportunity to stakeholders *“to initiate the process of improvement in their own context, by close examination of the effects of their own practices”* (pg.218). Continuous improvement occurs when individuals within a working environment collaborate with one another to understand and explain action (Van Der Voort and Wood, 2014). The methods used should be interactive and iterative, requiring an engagement with critical questioning, reflection and an action learning process (Klenowski and Woods, 2013). Indeed, the contribution of action research to school improvement is well documented. Various studies point towards the employment of action research as a powerful tool for school improvement (Karagiorgi et al., 2018). However, to make this a reality, it is critical to have buy in to the process from school staff. Research shows both teachers and more importantly for this study, school leaders to be the key change agents for improvement (MacBeath, 1999; Hopkins et al., 2001; Leithwood et al., 2006; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Fullan, 2015).

4.6.2 Action research and school leadership

In this section, I discuss the positive impact that engagement with action research can have on my role as a school leader. I describe the transformative impact that critical reflection and values-based action research can have on school leaders and their school. I then discuss briefly the work of Jack Whitehead (2006) and Jean McNiff (2017), two leading scholars in the field of values-based action research.

According to McNaughton et al. (2013), leadership plays a key role in overseeing the use of evidence to define problems, designing solutions and evaluating those solutions through successive iterations. Various guides (Elliot, 1991; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Mertler, 2013; McNiff, 2017) describe and discuss the knowledge and skills participants need to apply such a problem-solving action research approach within their own context (Karagiorgi et al., 2018). The strategies and techniques proposed for school leaders are not different from those

of teachers (Glanz, 2014). Various studies have tried to document the impact of a leader's engagement with action research on a personal level, as well as a school level (Karagiorgi et al., 2018). Karagiorgi et al. (2018) contend that a leader's involvement in action research impacts positively on their role and approach to improving instruction and learning. Other studies describe changes in beliefs and values for school leaders involved in action research and the positive impacts this can have for their schools. For example, Wood and Govender (2013) highlight the contribution of systematic engagement with critical reflection and action to the development of leaders' epistemological and ontological shifts and changes in their perceptions and leadership practices. Wood and Damons (2013) also describe the energising power of values-based action research in helping school principals to lead in transformative ways and the positive impact on their school environment (cited in Karagiorgi et al., 2018, pg.241).

The work of school principals, regardless of context, is informed and driven by their strong, clearly articulated moral and ethical values (Day and Sammons, 2014). I have been inspired by the writings of Jack Whitehead (2006) and Jean McNiff (2017) who provide numerous examples of education practitioners (e.g., Boshier, 2001; DeLong, 2002; McDonagh, 2007; Cahill, 2007; Sullivan, 2007) engaging in a process of personal learning in their day-to-day professional life using insights from the paradigm of action research. These practitioners share written accounts of their attempts to improve their practice. In the research process they begin with an exploration of their core values and question how these are being lived in their daily practice and what improvements could be made to realise them. This is in an attempt to improve the teaching and learning experiences of those they encounter. To do this, they develop their critical reflective judgement and learn how to integrate any new learning into their daily lived practice. This project drew upon the work of Whitehead and McNiff (2006) to explore my values of authenticity and collaboration and how they were being lived in my leadership of school self-evaluation.

4.6.3 Action research in this project

In this section I describe the action research approach used in this project with a brief description of each action research cycle. To conclude, I present a pictorial diagram of the research design.

This project adopted an AR approach to reflect on and examine in a systematic and careful way my own values towards the improvement of my leadership practice. At the same time, it

focused on a collaborative intervention under my leadership, designed to meet the identified needs of staff members in their implementation of school self-evaluation. This was in keeping with the suggestion by Swaffield and MacBeath (2005) that school self-evaluation is something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves. Through the active involvement of staff members in the research process, the aim was to empower our school to implement school self-evaluation in a more effective, authentic and meaningful way. To do this, the project adopted a practitioner-based approach with the expectation that any improvement strategies were to be developed by the school members themselves (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Bana 2010; Klenowski and Woods, 2013; Walters, 2014; Jacobs, 2016). A self-evaluating school describes and assesses aspects of its own functioning in a systematic manner, developing its own agenda, focusing on areas of relevance to its own context (Davies & Rudd, 2001). In this regard, the project assumed that the school self-evaluation mechanisms, as well as the improvement strategies, would be developed by the school itself.

The project was oriented towards school improvement (SI), rather than school effectiveness (SE). This approach was in line with evaluation schemes at national level. An emphasis on school improvement also safeguarded against instrumentalist, rationalistic and managerial approaches to educational change (De Crauwe & Naidoo, 2004; Mulford, 2005; Blok et al., 2008). It is often argued that the scope of SSE can be wide and embrace several activities, ranging from the evaluation of classroom practices (action-research), school-focused in-service education for teachers and continuous organisational change to more mechanistic modes of accountability such as cost-benefit analysis and performance-based education (De Crauwe & Naidoo, 2004; Blok et al., 2008). In consideration of the breadth of emphasis within school self-evaluation, the teaching and learning of handwriting was chosen as the area of focus in this action research project.

In keeping with the orientation towards school improvement, the project adopted an action research design. Following Elliot's (1991) model of action research (*Figure 4.1*) as a guide, each research cycle used varying methods of data collection and involved a number of staged activities as follows:

1. General idea

For Elliot, the general idea is essentially a statement which links an idea to action, informing the reader of the situation to be improved, highlighting the central question to be addressed in each cycle. The situation should involve something that the researcher can impact or effect and measure.

2. Reconnaissance

This involves outlining the situation and describing the nature of the issue that the researcher wants to change or improve upon. This includes linking what is already known and what has already been uncovered through research.

3. General planning

The general plan outlines what is going to be changed during this cycle of research in order to improve the situation, clearly stating what is being attempted.

4. Developing and implementing action steps

Here, the researcher outlines exactly what course of action is going to be taken and how it will be implemented in practice. This stage gives details about how the plans will be put into operation, noting any challenges that may be useful for planning future cycles of research.

5. Monitoring the implementation of action steps and their impact

During this stage, the researcher shifts from planning and implementation, to gathering and analysing data to understand the effects of actions implemented.

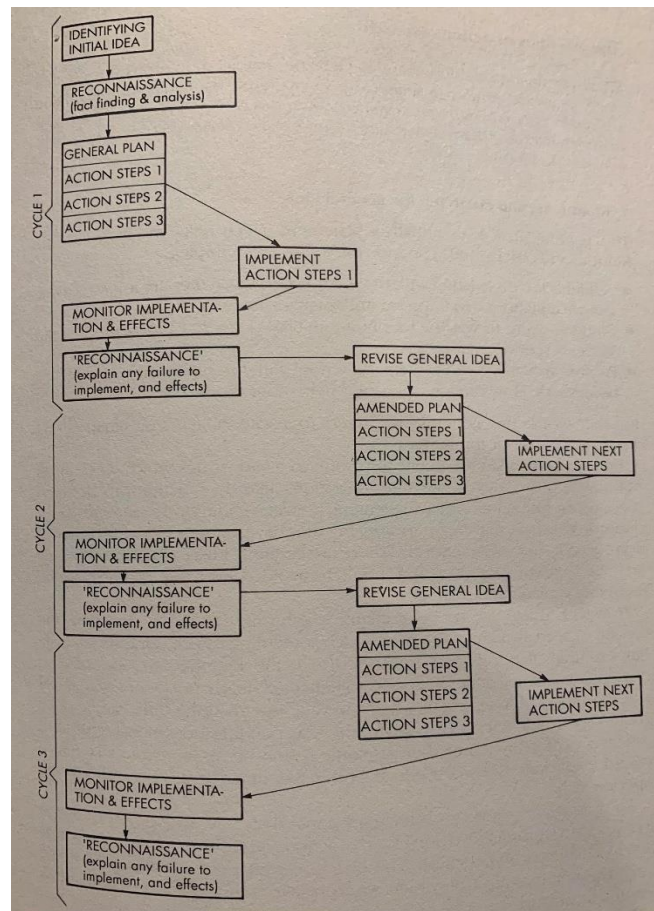


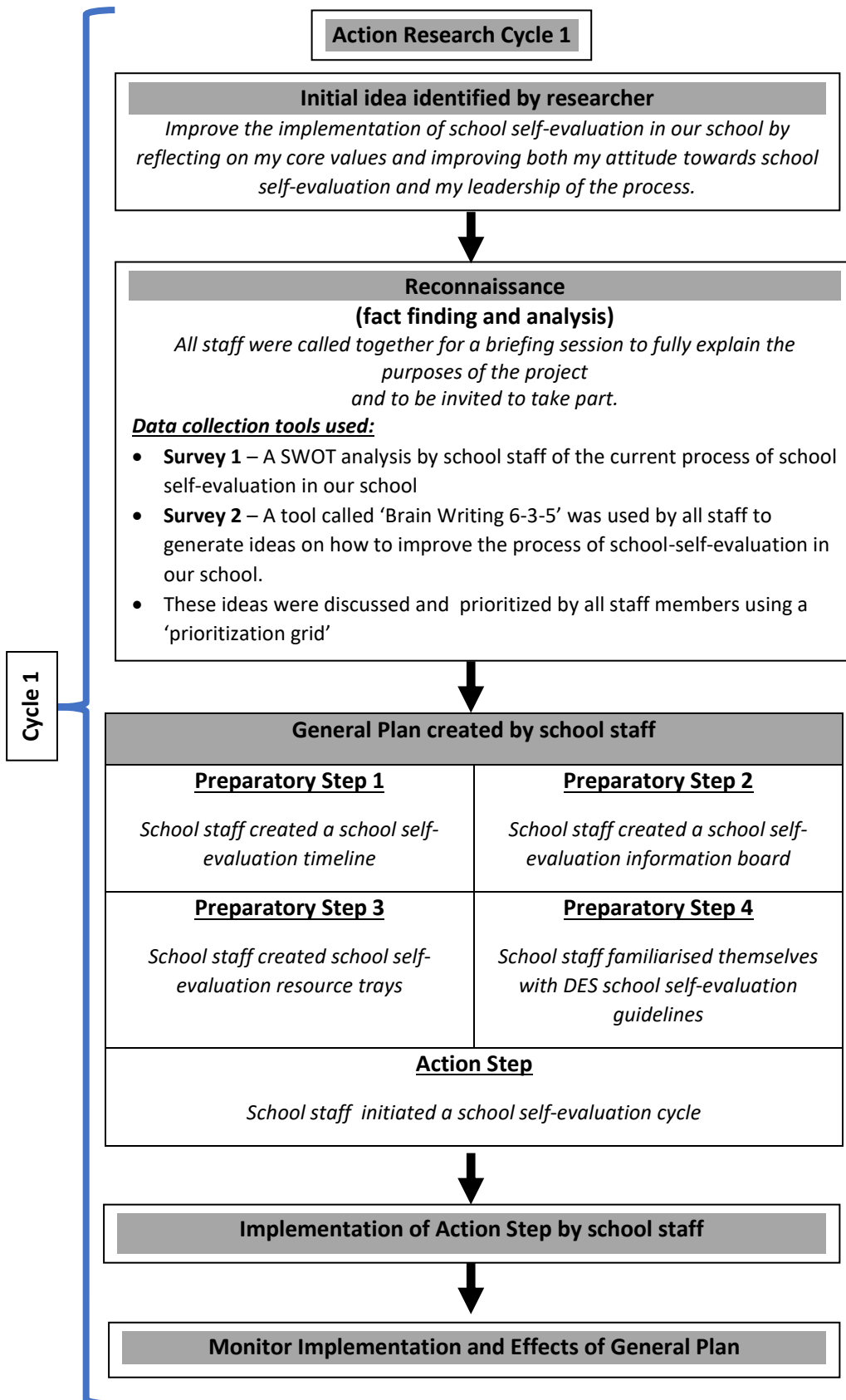
Figure 4.1 Elliot's (1991) model of action research (pg.71)

Elliot's (1991) model of action research provided opportunities for both myself and school staff to participate in reflective processes, decision-making and actions, and take ownership of the interventions for improved school self-evaluation in our school. Hence, the study involved much collaboration and joint effort between school staff members.

All staff were called together at a meeting to explain fully the purposes of the project and invited to take part. The first cycle of action research began in January 2020 and involved fourteen staff members. Our aim in this first phase of action research was to raise our awareness of school self-evaluation for school improvement and to help us acquire the knowledge, skills and will to conduct such an evaluation successfully. Our reflection during and after this first cycle of action research resulted in significant learning on our part that guided our next phase of action research. The second cycle began in September 2020 and involved fourteen staff members. In each cycle, staff were supported to engage with school self-evaluation, but in all cases, they chose the focus of the evaluation and decided on the data to be collected and how.

My Research Design

based on Elliot's (1991) model of action research



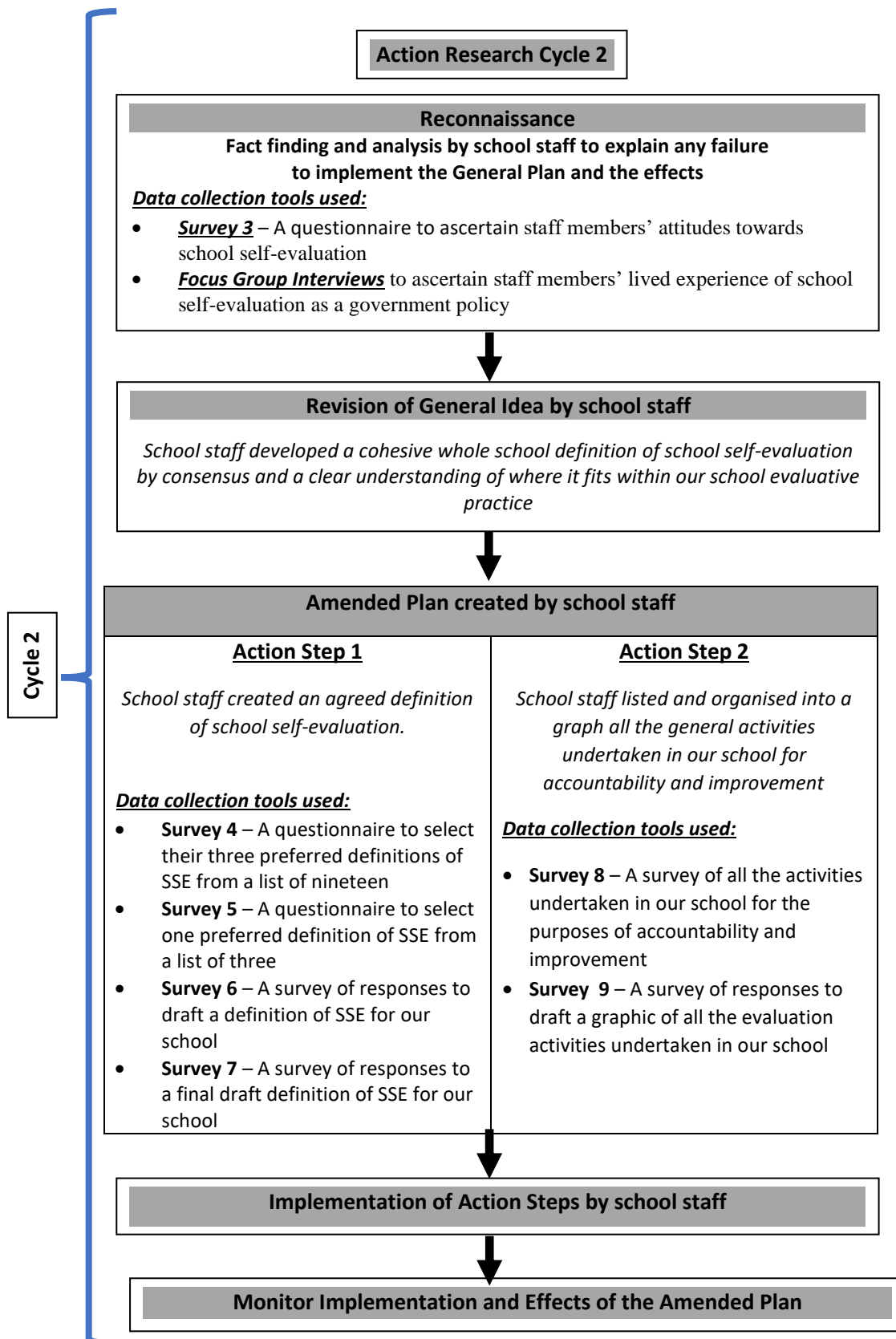


Figure 4.2 My research design

4.7 Data collection and analysis

In this section, I discuss the multiple sources of data in this action research study. I describe in detail the methods used in terms of data collection and analysis and at what stages the methods were used in the project. To help the reader *Table 4.1* below outlines the overall population for each data gathering process in terms of the number invited to participate, the criteria for inclusion, the level of response and the profile of those who participated.

Table 4.1 Sample of participants for each data gathering process within the study

Sample of participants for each data gathering process within this study					
Overall population in this study for data gathering purposes:			14		
Data collection tool and [identification Code]	Description	Number of participants invited to the process	Criteria for inclusion	Number of participants who attended the process	Profile of those that responded
Survey 1 [N/A]	SWOT analysis	14	Member of school staff	14	12 Teachers and 2 SNAs
Survey 2 [N/A]	A tool to generate ideas called 'Brain Writing 6-3-5'	14	Member of school staff	14	12 Teachers and 2 SNAs
Survey 3 [S3 respondent 1 etc.]	25 Likert-scale and 3 yes/no questions	14	Member of school staff	12	10 Teachers and 2 SNAs
Survey 4 [N/A]	Questionnaire to select their three preferred definitions of SSE from a list of nineteen	14	Member of school staff	14	12 Teachers and 2 SNAs
Survey 5 [N/A]	Questionnaire to select one preferred definitions of SSE from a list of three	14	Member of school staff	14	12 Teachers and 2 SNAs

Survey 6 [S6 respondent 1 etc.]	Survey of responses to draft a definition of SSE for our school	14	Member of school staff	7	7 Teachers
Survey 7 [S7 respondent 1 etc.]	Survey of responses to a final draft definition of SSE for our school	14	Member of school staff	9	9 Teachers
Survey 8 [S8 respondent 1 etc.]	List all the activities undertaken in our school for the purposes of accountability and improvement	14	Member of school staff	9	9 Teachers
Survey 9 [S9 respondent 1 etc.]	Survey of responses to draft a graphic of all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school	14	Member of staff	4	4 Teachers
Focus group Interviews [interviewee A etc.]	Semi-structured interviews	14	Member of staff	4	4 Teachers

4.7.1 Data collection

Surveys

Surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions (Cohen et al. 2018). Check and Schutt (2012) define survey research as *"the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions"* (pg.160). Surveys are often used in social research to describe and explore human behaviour (Singleton and Straits,2010). A survey probes for respondents' perceptions and is particularly suited to monitor any change in opinions and attitudes regarding school processes (Muijs,

2012). Their use is referenced in the literature on school effectiveness (Hendriks et al., 2002). It can range from asking a few targeted questions of individuals in a school to obtain information related to their behaviours and preferences, to larger studies such as public political opinion on a national scale. Survey research can use a variety of data collection methods, the most common being questionnaires and interviews. Survey research can use quantitative research strategies (e.g., using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research strategies (e.g., using open-ended questions), or both strategies (i.e., mixed methods) (Singleton and Straits,2010). Dillman et al. (2014) advocate the use of multiple methods for survey research, if no one method is adequate enough to address the planned research aims. For example, a multiple methods survey research approach may begin with distributing a questionnaire and then following it up with interviews to clarify any unclear survey responses (Singleton and Straits,2010). Using a variety of methods such as this in a study gives a more comprehensive picture than one which does not (De Vos et al., 2007; Babbie, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018). In this action research study, surveys and interviews were both used to collect enough information to allow me begin the next phases of action research in terms of interpretation and implementation. In this study, nine survey instruments were administered to staff members in both paper format and online.

The first survey was used in the initial reconnaissance phase to ascertain where we were as a school, regarding the school self-evaluation process. The method of survey used was a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. This qualitative research tool is used to assess the internal and external factors that influence and impact an organisation. It gives a snap shot of the 'current reality'. It is a vital step in both strategic planning and organisational design or redesign. The objective is to look at what's working well and what should be changed or improved. The SWOT analysis was completed by staff members collectively with broad input and discussion. The outcomes from it informed our decisions about action planning and setting priorities (Hart, 2007). Participants in this survey were not coded to identify the source of the data.

The second survey 'Brain Writing 6-3-5' was used in the initial reconnaissance phase to identify new ideas or solutions to improve the school self-evaluation process in our school. Brain Writing 6-3-5 is a silent brainstorming process developed by King and Schlicksupp (1998) to create ideas. The goal is to generate as many creative ideas as possible. As an approach, Brain Writing 6-3-5 (Hart, 2007) effectively lessens power differentials to create a richer dialogic and inclusive community, ensuring that highly verbal people do not overwhelm

quieter members. It enables individuals to see what others have written, allowing creative ideas to be shared for mutual benefit, but in a silent way. The process is conducted in five minutes or less using worksheets which teachers work on individually and privately at first but then publicly share their thoughts. The question in this case was 'how can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?'. Participants in this survey were not coded to identify the source of the data.

The third survey was administered to monitor the implementation and effects of action steps taken in action research cycle 1 (Appendix 2). The survey consisted of two sections. Section 'A' comprised twenty-five Likert-scale questions and three yes/no questions regarding staff members' attitudes towards school self-evaluation in terms of input, process, output, outcomes and unintended consequences. In this section we used questions asked by the 'Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection' in their national survey of principals' attitudes towards school self-evaluation in 2014/15 (O'Hara et al., 2016). This structure allowed us to get a quick snapshot of the current reality regarding staff members' attitudes towards school self-evaluation. In addition, in section 'B', I asked staff members six open-ended questions about their understanding of school self-evaluation and its implementation. This was an attempt to ascertain staff member's lived experience of school self-evaluation as a government policy. These additional questions were influenced by my ongoing reading of the literature regarding school self-evaluation, especially the work of Vanhoof et al. (2009) who explore the influence of teacher attitudes on school self-evaluation implementation, Mutch (2013) who explores the strengths and weaknesses of internal and external perspectives within the school evaluation process and in an Irish context, the work of O'Brien et al. (2019), who explore Irish teacher attitudes to school self-evaluation and the gaps which can occur between school self-evaluation policy and its implementation at local level.

For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'S3 respondent' and a unique number e.g., S3 respondent 1, S3 respondent 2 etc. This same coding process was carried out in all subsequent surveys. However, this unique number was not assigned to the same individual across the different data collection processes in this study.

The fourth survey was administered to staff members as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 3). Nineteen definitions of school self-evaluation from the literature (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005; MacBeath, 2005; Hopkins, 2005; Schildkamp, 2007; Vanhoof

and Petegem, 2010) were compiled into an online questionnaire. Staff members were requested to select from this list, the three definitions of school self-evaluation they most agreed with. The aim was to reach consensus as a staff on a definition of school self-evaluation which would be the most suitable for our school context. Participants responses in this survey were not coded to identify the source of the data.

The fifth survey was administered as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 4). The top three definitions of school self-evaluation chosen by staff members were compiled into a multiple-choice questionnaire. Staff were asked to select the one definition of school self-evaluation they most agreed with. The aim was to reach consensus as a staff on a definition of school self-evaluation suitable for our school context. The participants' responses in this survey were not coded to identify the source of the data.

The sixth survey was administered to school staff as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 5). A draft definition of school self-evaluation was distributed to all staff members. They were told that this definition came from a process of reducing nineteen definitions down to five definitions using their votes, with key words and phrases from the final five being interwoven into one definition. The survey asked staff members for their thoughts on the draft definition of school self-evaluation and if they agreed with it. The survey also asked staff members had they any comments, thoughts or ideas on the way we reached the definition. to respond to the draft definition using a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The aim was to reach consensus as a staff on a definition of school self-evaluation for our school context. For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'S6 respondent' and a unique number e.g., S6 respondent 1, S6 respondent 2 etc.

The seventh survey was administered to school staff as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 6). A final draft definition of school self-evaluation was distributed to all staff members. Staff were asked to respond to the draft definition using a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The aim was to reach consensus as a staff on a final definition of school self-evaluation for our school context. For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'S7 respondent' and a unique number e.g., S7 respondent 1, S7 respondent 2 etc.

The eighth survey was administered as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 7). Staff were requested to list all the activities that are undertaken in our school for

accountability and improvement, why are they being done and for whom? This was in an effort to see if staff members deemed them to be for either accountability or improvement purposes. The intention was to see was there a diversity of opinion in relation to school self-evaluation, as this could have implications for its implementation in our school. As an aid, they were given a prompt in the form of open-ended questions. If they could not think of anything to contribute, they had the option to write the word 'pass'. For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'S8 respondent' and a unique number e.g., S8 respondent 1, S8 respondent 2 etc.

The ninth and final survey was administered as part of an agreed action step in action research cycle 2 (Appendix 8). Staff were asked to respond, through a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions, to the final draft of a graphic diagram which communicates and explains all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school. For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'S9 respondent' and a unique number e.g., S9 respondent 1, S9 respondent 2 etc.

Interview

Conducting interviews is another approach to data collection used in survey research (Cohen et al., 2018). An interviewer can use probing comments to obtain more information about a question or topic and can request clarification of an unclear response (Singleton and Straits, 2009). My choice of interview as a research tool was motivated by my interest in understanding the lived experience of my staff and the meaning they made of that experience (Seidman, 2006).

I employed a focus group interview format with four staff members in two groups of two, to monitor the implementation and effects of action steps taken in the first cycle of action research and to clarify data collected from the second survey instrument administered in the reconnaissance phase of the second action research cycle. According to Vaughan et al. (1996), focus groups are helpful in the interpretation of findings and in the generation of ideas for follow up studies. Focus groups are a form of group interview in which reliance is placed on interaction within the group to yield a collective rather than an individual view (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups have the attraction of synergy, with people simultaneously stimulating discussion and working together on the issues in hand (Cohen et al., 2018). This fosters interactivity and dialogue among participants, allowing for an increased richness of response (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). It is from this interaction that the views of group members emerge, leading to data and outcomes (Smithson, 2000; Hydén and Bülow, 2003). Focus groups (Morgan, 1988;

Bailey, 1994; Robson, 2002; Krueger, 2009; Gibbs, 2012) are useful for gathering data on attitudes, values, perceptions. Focus groups are also useful to triangulate with other data collection methods such as questionnaires or observation, and in the interpretation of findings (Cohen et al. 2018; Vaughn et al., 1996).

To this end, semi-structured focus group interviews between myself and school staff were conducted. This was to clarify and extend findings yielded from survey data collected during the reconnaissance phase of action research cycle 2, when staff were asked about their understanding and attitude towards school self-evaluation and its implementation (Goddard and Melville, 2011; Babbie, 2012; Coleman, 2012; Almalki, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). An interview schedule was prepared to ensure consistency across all focus groups (Breen, 2006). In an enthusiastic discussion, my critical friend and I agreed that the interview should probe more deeply into staff members' experiences of and relationship with school self-evaluation to date, particularly what they felt both enabled and disabled the implementation of school self-evaluation. To do this, we formulated and constructed a set of eleven interview questions (Appendix 9) to ensure consistency between groups, to enable more efficient analysis and to bring greater precision to the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Questions one to five were much the same as the first two questions asked in section 'B' of the survey. They were an attempt to clarify in greater depth and find reason for the attitude of staff members to school self-evaluation as expressed in the survey. Questions six to eleven were an attempt to extend the survey data gathered, regarding both the positive and negative aspects of school self-evaluation as a government policy.

The sequencing of the questions also received attention. We wanted each staff member to be able to give their general view of school self-evaluation, listen to other views and then build from there. The questions moved from their general opinion regarding school self-evaluation at the start to the specifics of their own practice at the end. Each interview lasted one hour. For audit trail purposes, participants responses to this survey were coded systematically with the identification code 'interviewee' and a unique letter e.g., interviewee A, interviewee B etc.

As part of the signing up process to take part in the research, staff members were offered the opportunity to opt in and opt out of being interviewed. At a meeting with school staff, I explained that the interview would be audio recorded. I also explained that anyone interviewed would be given a full transcript of the interview for their approval. From the full complement of staff, four agreed to be interviewed and audio recorded in two groups of two. One was a

special education teacher; one was a junior infant teacher and the other two were classroom teachers from 1st to 6th class. I gave the four participants the proposed set of interview questions. I also arranged to check in with them a couple of days before the interview to see if they had any queries or concerns about the questions to be asked. However, they did not have any concerns. As the facilitator, I led the discussion, steering the group as necessary, keeping them focused on the discussion. When the interviews were completed, I transcribed the two focus group interviews into written form, checking the transcripts back against the original audio recordings for accuracy. Transcripts were then returned to the participants for individual checking.

Reflective journal and field notes

A core criteria of practitioner research is critical self-reflection. Reflection is necessary in becoming a reflective practitioner and to enhance the validity and quality of the research (Somekh, 2006). To this end, I created and maintained a reflective journal with fieldnotes throughout the entire project. This was mainly employed to reflect on and document how my values, positionings, choices and research practices influenced and shaped this study and the final analysis of the data. The recorded accounts related to ethical issues, tensions, problems and dilemmas and lines of further inquiry. I also used it to record impressions of the school improvement plans, as well as reflections of the activities that were designed and implemented. The field notes initially took the form of jotted notes (i.e., short, temporary memory triggers written in situ) (Neuman 2006). However, these were then developed systematically, usually after school hours each day, into reflection notes of short analytical memos. To do this, I drew on suggestions from the literature (McNiff, 2017; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Schein; cited in Coghlan, 2019, pg.43-50) to create a reflective journal template (Appendix 10). It provided me with prompt questions which were simple and easy to use, as can be seen below in *Table 4.2*.

I found this reflective journal template extremely helpful in critically self-reflecting on my actions in a systematic way throughout the duration of this action research project. Some worked examples can be found at Appendix 11.

Table 4.2 Reflective journal template

Author	Vinny's Reflective Journal				
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken form Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)

Critical Friend

Critical friendship is a versatile form of support for school colleagues engaged in leadership activities. Critical friends are significant because leadership is clearly linked to improving schools (Day and Sammons, 2014), and critical friends have been shown to support the work of school leaders (Gurr and Huerta, 2013). Critical friends have been widely used in a school context to promote individual and professional learning and reflection on practice (Bambino, 2002; Butler, 2011). According to Senge (2006), critical friends are key agents for organisations that see themselves as learning organisations because of their ability to foster reflection and improvement. Swaffield (2004) argues that the role of critical friend as a facilitator of change has become a significant component in school improvement initiatives such as school self-evaluation. They are able to listen, step back from the process, and assist through providing another perspective (Kember et al., 1997). Costa and Kallick (1993) define a critical friend as *“a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work”* (pg.49-51). The benefits of using a critical friend as a methodology in terms of scholarly

rigour and validity are well documented (McNiff, 2007; Lofthouse et al., 2012). As part of our normal leadership practice, my deputy principal and I would meet once every week for an hour to discuss school issues. During this scheduled time and all times during the project, my deputy principal fulfilled the role of a critical friend as described in MacBeath (1999, 2006), offering both critical and supportive feedback in relation to my own leadership journey and the approaches taken in this project. She listened to my ideas, critiqued them and assisted in refining them. Field notes were taken during these meetings in the form of jotted notes. Throughout the study, the data and findings were also subjected to rigorous critique from a community forum of critical friends, made up of all research participants. Throughout each action research cycle, I checked the data and findings with all participants by publishing reports at each stage of the process and meeting with them in the school as a validation group to seek their feedback to ensure that the findings and decision-making process were both rigorous and transparent. These meetings were held as a collective in a round table and open forum format. However, with the arrival of Covid-19 in March 2020 and the national emergency measures which followed, these meetings were moved online. Presentations were given via a mixture of Zoom and PowerPoint, with feedback facilitated via both Zoom and email. I will now discuss each methodology in terms of data collection and where relevant coding and analysis.

4.7.2 Analysis of data

As a result of staff members sharing their insight in eight surveys, two focus group interviews and field notes, key data was available to help us improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. In order to ensure that the analysis of this data was systematic, a deliberate, sequential process was followed at all times (Krueger and Casey, 2015). One approach to analysing narrative data is to reduce the data by using coding and thematic analysis techniques (Floyd, 2012). I adopted a thematic analysis approach to the qualitative data, which was the substantial kind of data in this research. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis technique to identify and analyse themes linked to a data set. It organises and describes data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis goes beyond counting phrases or words in a text and explores explicit and implicit meanings within the data (Guest et al., 2012). Coding is the primary process for developing themes by identifying items of analytic interest in the data and tagging these with a coding label (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes are then built from the codes (Braun and Clarke, 2019). To establish the most important themes, noteworthy quotes and any unexpected findings in this research (Breen, 2006), the recently revised and amended six-phase guide to performing thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019), was

used as the principal approach to all data analysis in this study. The six phases are (1) Data familiarisation (2) Data coding (3) Generating initial themes (4) Reviewing and developing themes (5) Refining, defining and naming themes (6) Writing the report. It provides a vocabulary and ‘*recipe*’ to undertake thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pg.78), where themes are conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning across data items, underpinned or united by a central concept, which are important to the understanding of phenomena and the research questions being explored (Braun and Clarke, 2019). In the final phase of writing the report, Braun and Clarke (2006) say we must identify the essence of what the recognised themes are about and determine what aspect of the data set each theme captures. They contend it is important to identify the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to each other, and how it fits into the overall story of the research question. I describe below my engagement with this six-phase process, giving a worked example of the coding process being applied to data collected as part of the second round of reconnaissance in this action research study. The data was collected from a survey comprised of twenty-five Likert-scale questions and three yes/no questions regarding staff members’ attitudes towards school self-evaluation in terms of input, process, output, outcomes and unintended consequences. It was also collected from six open-ended questions about staff members’ understanding of school self-evaluation and its implementation. In addition, it includes data collected from focus group interviews with four members of staff. For full worked examples of thematic analysis being applied to all the surveys and interviews conducted in this project please refer to Appendix 12.

Phase 1 – Becoming familiar with the data

The data gathered from the twenty-five Likert-scale questions and three yes/no questions was illustrated in numerical graph format (bar chart) for analysis (Dixon and Woolner, 2012) for example:

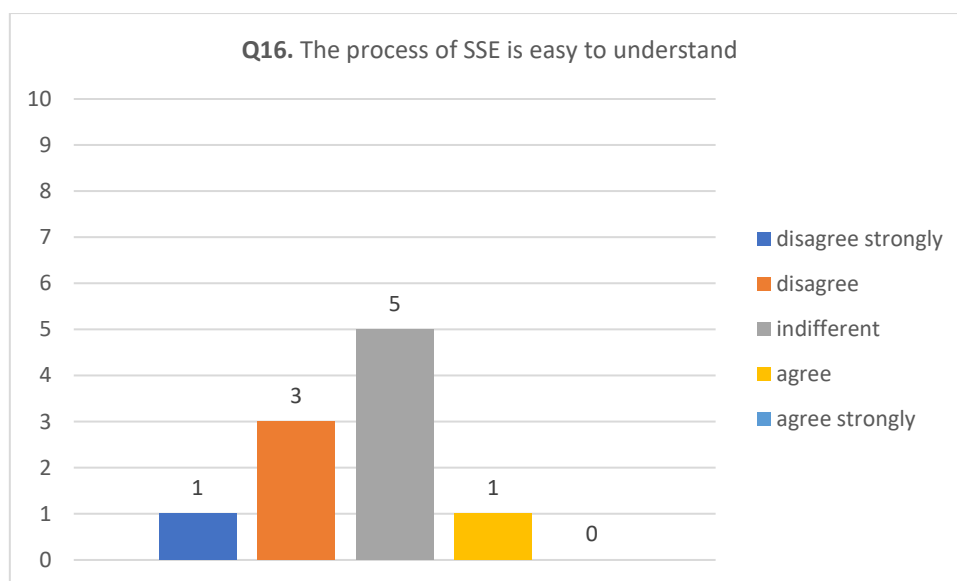


Figure 4.3 The process of SSE is easy to understand – bar chart results

I immersed myself in these numerical graphs to make myself familiar with the depth and breadth of their content. This involved reading the numerical graphs in an active way searching for meanings and patterns and making notes of same.

I then combined and organised, for analysis, all the answers from the open-ended questions into one master document showing each respondent’s response, for example:

Table 4.3 What are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy? – sample answers

Question 31: What are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 1	Allows schools to make practical changes
S3 Respondent 2	Allows time for staff to reflect and be objective and professional as we review all aspects of subject/strand in question
S3 Respondent 4	As an SNA I don’t really know the positive aspects of SSE, as my role and SSE have no relevance to each other
S3 Respondent 8	Improvement of learning methodologies and strategies. Identify areas for development. Taking ownership of curriculum
S3 Respondent 9	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 12	All schools in the country are expected to partake. It allows schools the autonomy to choose areas of most concern to them and their organisation. It acknowledges the inbuilt desire of the vast majority of teachers to improve their schools teaching and learning.

I immersed myself in this data to become familiar with the depth and breadth of its content. This involved repeated reading of the data in an active way by making notes and searching for meanings and patterns.

Phase 2 – Data coding

This phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. This initial coding was undertaken by using gerunds and keeping the codes active and as close to the original statements as possible (Charmaz, 2006). To begin, I underlined what I felt was every key word and phrase in both the survey data and the interview transcripts. The table presented below is a worked example of the methodological process adopted.

Table 4.4 Survey Part 1: Likert-scale and yes/no questions – sample answers

Survey part 1 (Likert-scale and yes/no questions)	
Question 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unintended consequences: SSE places a lot of <u>stress</u> on staff (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% no)
Question 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unintended consequences: SSE increase <u>staff morale</u> (<u>no 90%</u>, 10% yes)
Question 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unintended consequences: SSE <u>takes up a lot of time</u> (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% indifferent)
Survey part 2 (open-ended questions)	
Question 29: What do you think is the purpose of SSE?	
S3 Respondent 1	Give a sense of agency to schools to work on what actually needs <u>improvement</u>
S3 Respondent 4	I think it's a <u>tick the box exercise</u> and I am not really sure to be honest
Question 31: What are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 2	<u>Very time consuming</u> ; lots of <u>abstract</u> , repetitive 'splitting of hairs'; <u>quite meaningless</u> exercise at times
S3 Respondent 3	<u>Additional paperwork</u> on <u>already stretched staff</u>
S3 Respondent 6	<u>Added workload</u> and <u>time required to do it</u>
S3 Respondent 7	<u>Time consuming</u> – takes a lot of meeting times. <u>Increased paperwork</u> equals <u>increased stress</u> which <u>affects morale</u> .

I then combined every underlined word and phrase into colour coded groups. For example, any words or phrases associated with making improvements were coloured pink, any words or phrases associated with paperwork were colour coded dark-green and words or phrases associated with being time consuming were colour coded light-orange. Words or phrases associated with attitudes were colour coded dark-purple. Words or phrases associated with being accountable were colour coded yellow and words or phrases associated with staff feeling over-stretched were colour coded light-blue. For a full list of my colour codes please refer to Appendix 13. The table presented below is a worked example of the methodological process adopted (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Focus group interviews – sample answers

Focus Group One Interview	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attitudes are one of confusion to it 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there's so much going on between new language curriculum already being talks of a maths one, different programmes being introduced the whole time, So, you're constantly running around, doing this, doing that, and then I just feel it's one extra thing being added into the equation. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I do see the benefit of it having one specific thing that the school overall has a focus on, 	
Focus Group Two Interview	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> positive without being enthusiastic 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that I think it makes sense that schools can identify their own problems and you know go from there but 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't enjoy the process I don't enjoy that kind of work in terms of policies, policies and paperwork 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any good school with a positive atmosphere, this happens, you see we've a little weakness, it's mentioned at a staff meeting and we do something to change it, the purpose of it is for if there are schools who are failing it forces them to get on board with it and I guess then you need proof in the form of paperwork 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we were trained we were ready but you know the strike then it was called..... I felt like I'd emotionally invested in it and then it was gone, then it came back, This is just another thing that will come and go 	

The colour coded words and phrases were then combined into one master document for ease of thematic analysis. They were then each assigned an alphanumeric code and description title. This removed the need for colour coding. The table presented below is a worked example of the methodological process adopted (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Coding data extracts process sample

Actual data extract quotes	Code	Description title
Reason/Purpose of school self-evaluation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accountability</i> • <i>Box ticking exercise</i> • <i>Tick the box exercise</i> 	R1	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improvement</i> • <i>Improvement in teaching and learning</i> • <i>A need to improve a school for both teachers and learners</i> • <i>To improve</i> • <i>Improve</i> • <i>Identify areas that need improvement</i> • <i>Improve the school to enhance learning</i> • <i>Improve outcomes for the better of each pupil and the whole school</i> • <i>Improvement plans based on findings</i> 	R 2	Improvement
Positive aspects of school self-evaluation?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practical changes</i> 	P1	Practical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To reflect</i> • <i>Reflection and discussion</i> 	P2	Reflect and discuss
Negative aspects of school self-evaluation?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very long term aims</i> • <i>Staff turnover is high. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year</i> 	N1	Too long term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time required to do it</i> 	N3	No time
Other comments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to be told what to do if it saves on time/discussion/meetings</i> • <i>Would like a directive from Dept. saying what to do/how and when in each subject</i> 	OC 2	Tell me what to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I find it quite tiresome in general</i> 	OC3	Tiresome process
Emotions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confused</i> • <i>Frustrated</i> • <i>Calm</i> • <i>Annoyed</i> 	E1	All references to emotions
Leadership		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve</i> 	L1	All references specific to leadership

As can be seen from the example above (*Table 4.5*), identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extract quote that demonstrate that code was an important part of phase two. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that it is important in this phase to ensure that all our actual data extract quotes are collated together within each code for scrutiny and reference. For a full list of my alphanumeric data codes and their matching actual data extract quotes please refer to Appendix 14.

Phase 3 – Generating initial themes

This phase involved sorting the different codes (and the actual data extract quotes) into potential themes. To help analyse the codes and consider how they might combine to form overarching themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the use of a visual representation. I therefore listed all the codes with their title description into a table. The table presented below (*Table 4.7*) is a worked example of the methodological process adopted.

Table 4.7 Codes and descriptions

Code	Title description	Code	Title description
R1	Accountability	N1	Too long term
R2	Improvement	N2	No momentum/No energy in process
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	N3	No time
R4	Planning	N4	Meaningless
		N5	Overworked staff
P1	Practical	N6	More paperwork
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	N7	More stress
P3	Promotes professionalism	N8	Staff overworked
P4	SNA	N9	Not realistic
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	N10	Lowers morale
P6	Focus on better outcomes	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time
P7	Focus on improvement		
P8	Autonomy	OC1	Participate yes!
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	OC2	Tell me what to do
		OC3	Tiresome
E1	Emotions	OC4	Irrelevant
L1	Leadership	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
		OC6	Involves everyone

		OC7	Once target area improves
		OC8	Pressure
		OC9	Proper sub cover
		OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why
		OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good

The next task involved thinking about the relationship between the codes. I used colour coding once again to link the codes which had something in common. I collated into their own sub-thematic box for ease of analysis and further refinement as follows:

Table 4.8 Coding and theme process

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	

R2	Improvement	
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	
OC7	Once target area improves	
R1	Accountability	
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	
N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	

N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	
N3	No time	
N5	Overworked staff	
N6	More paperwork	
N7	More stress	
N8	Staff overworked	
N10	Lowers morale	
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time	
OC3	Tiresome	
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please	
OC8	Pressure	
OC9	Proper sub cover	
E1		
L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	

The orange codes represented what school self-evaluation gives to a school, for example community involvement in a drive for improvement and better outcomes. The yellow codes were representative of the perceived reality of school self-evaluation on the ground by those implementing it. For example, staff said they had no time to do it and that it caused them additional workload and stress and lowered their morale. The purple codes represented what, according to the literature, school self-evaluation in theory gives to school staff, such as

autonomy and a focus on professionalism and accountability. The blue codes represented the attitude of staff members to school self-evaluation (finding it generally unrealistic and meaningless), whilst the green code represented the leadership of school self-evaluation and its role in motivating staff members to engage in the process.

Phase 4 – Reviewing and developing themes

This phase involved the refinement of potential themes. To do this I revisited the actual data extracts and the literature, to thus ensure, that the themes worked in relation to my data set and that I had accurate representations for the purposes of this study. This involved a process of mapping and redrafting, to develop sub-themes which represented some level of meaning within the data set. During this process a few potential themes did not have enough data to support them. Whilst some blended quite well together, others separated, with clearly identifiable distinctions between them. The outcome of this process was as follows:

Table 4.9 Developing themes process

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal accountability
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	

R2	Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate for improvement
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
OC7	Once target area improves	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school approach
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External accountability
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	
N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SNA

N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload
N3	No time	
N5	Overworked staff	
N6	More paperwork	
N8	Staff overworked	
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time	
OC3	Tiresome	
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please	
OC9	Proper sub cover	
N7	More stress	
N10	Lowers morale	
OC8	Pressure	
E1	Emotions	
L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and staff motivation

Phase 5 – Refining, defining and naming themes

In this phase Braun and Clarke (2006) say we must identify the essence of what recognised themes are about and determine what aspect of the data set each theme captures. They contend it is important to identify the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to each other and how it fits into the overall story of the research question. This required going back to the collated data

extracts for each theme, and organising them into a coherent and consistent narrative account. To do this, I engaged in a process of writing and redrafting to describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences. Using this approach in my analysis of the data, I generated two key themes to frame a thematic analysis of the data.

The first theme '*Attitudes to school self-evaluation*', is about the people tasked with implementing the school self-evaluation process to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes in teaching and learning. Whilst the second theme, '*Leadership and staff motivation*' describes the important role school leaders play in motivating and sustaining staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process.

Phase 6 – Writing the report

This final phase involved relating back to my research question and the literature to produce a scholarly report of my findings. This report is presented in sections 5.3, 7.3 and 7.4.

4.8 Reliability and Validity

A pragmatic paradigm was applied in this study using an action research methodology. Action research within a school is, by its very nature, a collaborative endeavour. It's about working 'with' people and not 'on' people. According to Soobrayan (2003), the main research instrument in such an approach as action research, is the actual researchers themselves, concluding that the ethics, truth and politics of research is a deliberate exercise in making choices and taking responsibility. With this in mind, this study was undertaken from the standpoint of care for all participants (Noddings, 2003). The success of this project depended on others. It involved continuous consultation and effective communication with colleagues throughout, a critical community where feedback was both received and given. In such an approach, the researcher is not external to the process, but instead an 'insider' who reflects on and acknowledges their own values, beliefs and aspirations and builds these into their daily practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). According to Nixon (2008), engaging in such reflection at work and undertaking insider led research can make significant contributions to work practices. With in-depth insider knowledge, a researcher can study a particular issue in a detailed and thorough way. However, when researchers are insiders, they draw upon the shared understandings and trust of their colleagues with whom they interact and work with as a community each day (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Whilst this shared information can enhance insider knowledge, it can have a bearing on how knowledge is understood and used in a

research project (Costley et al., 2010). When immersed in such work-based learning, it can be possible to fail to see the obvious. An insider researcher needs feedback on what they are doing. For that reason, the adoption of a reflective approach to insider research is crucial (Costley et al., 2010). The insider researcher must invite critique of both their own perspective and of everyone else, so that they can fully defend the validity of the interpretations they make from the data (Punch, 2005). This too requires having reliably collected evidence on which to base their findings (Burton and Bartlett, 2009).

In order to ensure such reliability and validity in this study, I outline in detail the methodological decisions made throughout the entire project and the rationale for those decisions. This includes comprehensive notes on the contextual background of the data and how that data was collected, managed, coded and analysed (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). A consistent approach was used in relation to the distribution of the surveys and the questions asked at each focus group interview, which were also audio recorded and transcribed. Where appropriate, responses were coded to identify the source of the data for audit trail purposes.

For analysis purposes, data was systematically coded and analysed using the recently revised and amended six-phase guide to performing thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Data triangulation and methodological triangulation were both used to compare data from different sources and validate any findings. The first involved comparing data from a variety of staff members with different roles within our school (Silverman, 2005; Woods, 2006). Specifically, these included classroom teachers, special education teachers, school principal, school deputy principal and special needs assistants. The second involved a comparison of data gathered from both quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, qualitative data from both semi-structured interviews and surveys were triangulated with qualitative/quantitative data from questionnaires. This allowed me to investigate the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school in a number of different ways and from a variety of different sources. Using this approach throughout the study, staff members and I were able to cross-check the data to determine the accuracy of the information (Miles and Huberman, 2014). This added depth to the results and increased the validity of the study's findings, as is evident from both the positive and negative feedback received regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school.

Care was also taken to limit the potential for bias due to the involvement of myself in the implementation of the project. To ensure validity, the data and findings were continually

subjected to rigorous scrutiny, discussion and critique by all staff members at all stages during the project (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). During the study, four staff members went on leave and did not return by the end of the project. To fulfil my ethical obligations, these staff members were reminded of their right to withdraw from involvement in the project without any repercussions. These issues are dealt with in more detail in the section below. However, all four staff members asked to be kept informed of progress in the study and wished to maintain the right to respond with feedback. The same information sent to research participants therefore, continued to be sent to these four staff members, with channels of communication monitored and checked daily for any responses, concerns or issues raised to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

Throughout the study I kept a reflective journal (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Schein, 2013; McNiff, 2017; Coughlan, 2019) and field notes, whilst my deputy principal also fulfilled the role of a critical friend as described in MacBeath (1999; 2006), offering both critical and supportive feedback in relation to my leadership journey and the approaches taken in the project.

4.9 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). Permission to conduct the research was sought and granted from the school's Board of Management. I undertook the dual role of school principal and active researcher. Participants may have felt obliged to be involved in the research as it was being carried out by the school principal. I fully acknowledged this power relationship and its implications. However, I was fully aware of the ethical guidelines for educational research and my responsibilities in this regard.

I was aware that such ethical implications needed further reflection and consideration. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) advise that research ethics are just as important as methodology. In their view, the onus is on the insider researcher to be fully aware of their dual role and the power dynamics at play when making any request to participants. No action should be carried out by the insider researcher without due consideration of the ethical considerations. Costley et al. (2010) identify the insider researcher's position as both a researcher and as a practitioner, engaging with fellow colleagues as a major ethical challenge. It requires careful management of issues regarding power and vulnerability. A way to deal with this, according to Kvale and

Brinkmann (2000), is to present the proposed method as transparently as possible, so that others can ascertain the potential power effects.

With this in mind, all staff were called together at a meeting to explain fully the purposes of the project and to emphasise to all participants, that I was working as a researcher and not as a principal teacher. It was outlined to staff that their involvement and shared ownership of the project would be most welcome as their wealth of knowledge, talent, skills, expertise and insight would be of great benefit to the project and the school self-evaluation process in our school. I was therefore, adopting a collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist approach, where my fellow work colleagues were invited to be co-researchers and share in the ownership and direction setting of the thesis. This approach enabled all participants to be alert to any issues which may have arisen regarding the conduct and direction of the project. Whilst this invitation helped negate against any power dynamics that may have stemmed from my role as school principal, I remained both sensitive and alert to these throughout the research process. I told staff that at all times, I would treat each staff member fairly, sensitively, with dignity and an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice.

Staff were offered every opportunity to discuss in private, any concerns they may have had about the project. A spirit of collaboration and partnership underpinned the research and respect for confidentiality. As a safeguard, a 'gate keeper' was put in place to allow participants bring attention to any concerns they may have during the project. The 'gate keeper' was the chairperson of the Board of Management. Regular reminders were given about the facility to communicate concerns or tensions to the 'gate keeper' by phone, email or in person. This contact email address and phone number was given to every participant. Participants were also supplied with my phone and email contact details.

Staff were informed, both verbally and in writing, that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that they were under no obligation to take part in the research. Staff were informed of their right to withdraw from involvement in the project at any time without repercussions, whether at the beginning, middle or end, by informing the gate keeper or I in person or through phone or email. Regular reminders were also given about this option to withdraw from the research project at any time throughout the entire process. No staff withdrew from the research project.

All potential participants were supplied in advance with a written consent form explaining the nature and purpose of the research, their involvement in it, how the research will be used and

who it will be reported to (Appendix 15). All research participants were given guarantees of anonymity and that any information they provided would be treated in the strictest confidence (subject to the proviso that the researcher had an overriding legal obligation in relation to the disclosure of certain kinds of information, such as child welfare). Full notes would be kept relating to all such matters. No inducements were offered to encourage participation.

The project did not overburden participants. All work carried out by school staff in relation to this project was completed during working hours and the normal allocation of staff meeting hours. The research project did not take from the normal activity of a school day and pupils' right to an education. Under the terms of DES Circular 0008/2011, primary school teachers in Ireland are obliged to work an additional thirty-six hours to provide for certain essential activities without reducing class contact or tuition time. These additional hours were used throughout the project to carry out most of the planning and development work. When this was not possible, infant class teachers were used to provide substitute teaching cover for colleagues working on the project. In Ireland, infant class pupils finish one hour earlier than all other classes.

The research fully complied with all legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data. All data obtained was processed fairly and kept only for the specific purpose of my research. All data given was used only for the purposes for which it was volunteered initially. All data collected was relevant to my research. All primary data will be held for a minimum of ten years. All data stored electronically was secured using passwords, encryption and backup. There was appropriate firewalls and anti-virus software in place. Any manual data was held securely in a locked filing cabinet. Any waste papers, printouts etc. were shredded and disposed of carefully. Data was organised in a manner that allowed for ready verification in either hard copy or electronically. All original data was authenticated. This was in accordance with Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy, Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy, BERA guidelines (2018) and the Data Protection Act (Government of Ireland, 2018) and any subsequent acts.

Chapter 5 – First Phase of Reconnaissance

5.1 Introduction

In Ireland, school self-evaluation operates within a national policy framework which provides a set of themes related to educational priorities, to help guide schools in their evaluation and planning. Schools are required to use this framework to plan and review outcomes (DES, 2016). A standardised, evidence-based school self-evaluation process normally begins by conducting a needs analysis which involves (i) examining pupil achievement information to uncover pupils' learning needs and (ii) identifying teaching and management support needs. Schools then must develop a programme of intervention, which may include professional development to improve aspects of teaching. Finally, schools are required to review their intervention annually, using the data collected and produce a written report of their findings (Lai, 2013). However, in my school I have led school self-evaluation with a quick-fix approach in an attempt to shield my staff from this burden. This approach was down to assumptions I made about my staff and indications they had given me suggesting an apathy for school self-evaluation. I assumed that staff members had a hard and busy workload and that this additional imposed task would only impact negatively on their morale. So, I despised it. This caused me to 'serve' my staff, resulting in an unhealthy practice of going it alone, limiting any possibility of collaborative benefit or meaningful organisational change.

However, leading school self-evaluation in this way negated my core values of authenticity and collaboration. This was problematic as evidence shows that the attitude of school leadership towards school self-evaluation is significant, especially in supporting and enhancing the staff motivation and commitment needed to implement the process successfully and foster improvement (Day and Sammons, 2014). In addition, as I engaged with my own thinking around school self-evaluation and read more about the process, I began to appreciate its potential in having a positive impact on teaching and learning practice. This caused me to engage in this research, to reflect on and give a renewed focus to my leadership practice, in the belief that I could lead the process better and improve its implementation for the betterment of our school. A change in my leadership approach was inevitable as my core values of authenticity and collaboration were not being met or lived as leader of my school. These values were important and really mattered to me. It was important therefore, that any approach I adopted to school self-evaluation was both meaningful and practitioner-based, adopting a collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist approach.

5.2 Reconnaissance

The first cycle of the Action Research began in January 2020. School staff met to ascertain where we were as a school regarding the school self-evaluation process in our school. My aim was to create and maintain a positive, relaxed, friendly and informal space for the sharing of ideas by staff members as a group. One presumed benefit of using groups is that they are able to tackle a problem more effectively than would be possible had the problem been left to any single individual (Hart, 2007; National College, 2012; Lessard et al., 2016; Franco & Nielsen, 2018).

To get a snap shot of the ‘current reality’ regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, the facilitation tool I chose to use with staff was a SWOT analysis (Table 5.1). The objective was to ascertain what was working well and what could be changed or improved.⁴ The quadrant below sets out a detailed picture of the key points noted under each of the sub-headings:

Table 5.1 SWOT analysis on the process of SSE in our school

The process of school self-evaluation in our school	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff relationships, motivation and interest • Manageability of school size • Frequent meetings and communication amongst staff • Involving everyone • Works well • Specific Focus on learning and teaching • Knowledgeable and professional staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions with exceptional events • Turnover of staff • Perceived lack of confidence in staff members • I’m not sure there are weaknesses, a great job is being done • Time consuming • Extra stress and the feeling of “just another area of work that has to be done” • Lack of interest due to constant moving of goalposts regarding SSE

⁴ My deputy principal agreed to be the scribe. This I felt was important as it allowed me greater opportunities to actively listen and observe how ideas were being discussed and decisions made (Hart, 2007; National College, 2012; Franco & Nielsen, 2018).

Opportunities	Threats (obstacles)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to organise more teams to help with each area of school planning • Great opportunity to identify and agree on areas that need our focus and attention • Works well • Clearer layout from the DES • Increased supports for schools • Good opportunity to harness staff energy and interest if led well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness of staff • Availability of sub cover to do it • Not having all staff on board • Time • Support from the DES • Lack of interest and enthusiasm • Feelings that teachers' voices won't be heard and respected

Staff members saw the relationships and the interactions between them regarding school self-evaluation as a strength. They reported these interactions to be frequent with everyone involved. In addition, staff members reported that the school self-evaluation process in our school was strengthened in a positive way by frequent communication to support the flow of information.

Staff members also saw their interest, knowledge, professionalism and motivation for school self-evaluation as key strengths for the process. It was not surprising therefore, that any change in staff was seen as a weakness for the school self-evaluation process. Conversation on this point revealed that any change in staff meant extra work for remaining school members to fill any gaps in the implementation of school self-evaluation, whilst also retraining and bringing up to speed new staff members with the process.

Staff members saw the focus on evaluating teaching and learning at whole school level as a strength, as highlighted below. Interruptions the work of school self-evaluation were reported by staff members to be a weakness to the process.

However, this commitment to the work of school self-evaluation was not held by everyone. Some staff members stated quite clearly in our discussion, that they did not have any interest or enthusiasm in the school self-evaluation process. During the discussion, one staff member found some support in a quite downbeat assessment that school self-evaluation was *“just another area of work that has to be done”*. These negative attitudes towards school self-

evaluation and the possible unwillingness amongst some staff to engage with the process (other than in some form of compliance), were seen as a threat to its success by some staff members.

A few staff members also saw the school self-evaluation process as time consuming and an increase in their workload, causing them extra stress. They said these issues were both a weakness and a threat to the successful implementation of the process in our school. In contrast, some staff members said that they would welcome more opportunities to engage in teamwork as part of the school self-evaluation process, to agree on areas that needed attention. Probing questions revealed however, genuine concerns that their voices would not be heard and respected.

Another obstacle to the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school according to the data, was the lack of tangible support for school staff from the DES. Conversation on this point revealed a real desire amongst some staff members for increased supports and a cleaner layout from the DES on how to implement school self-evaluation, as evidenced below. Coupled with this, the data suggested there was a lack of confidence in doing school self-evaluation amongst some staff members.

To analyse the data, I used an inductive process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) with identified themes being strongly linked to the data. For a full worked example of the thematic analysis applied to the survey, please refer to Appendix 16.

I generated three key themes to frame a thematic analysis of the data. The first, entitled '*Staff involvement in whole school decision-making*', was about the people who drive the implementation of school self-evaluation to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes in teaching and learning.

The second theme '*Resourcing school self-evaluation*', was about the daily experiences of people working in a school doing school self-evaluation and all that entails, physically, mentally and emotionally.

The potential outcomes of both of these themes are grounded in the effective enactment of the final and third theme, '*Leadership and staff motivation*'. School leadership plays an important role in motivating staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process by facilitating the development and provision of any resources required and tapping into the energy and interest of staff members.

5.3 Findings and discussion

5.3.1 Staff involvement in whole school decision-making

From this reconnaissance data, school staff saw the relationships and the interactions between them as a strength and reported these interactions to be frequent. Follow up discussions revealed staff members were both motivated and interested in any activity, such as school self-evaluation, which improved teaching and learning in our school. I was not surprised therefore that probing questions during the discussion revealed a view amongst a few staff members that any change in staff was a loss to the school self-evaluation process in terms of knowledge and experience and extra work for remaining school members to fill any gaps in the implementation of school self-evaluation, whilst also retraining and bringing up to speed new staff members with the process.

However, the positivity by staff to issues regarding teaching and learning at a whole school level was most welcome as research shows teachers to be primarily interested in teaching and not so much in what happens at whole school level (Schildkamp et al., 2012). It was concerning therefore, to see that interruptions to the school self-evaluation process for exceptional events were viewed by some staff as a weakness in our school. The conversation on this point revealed that for them, it removed the focus from their recognised teaching and learning priorities. Exceptional events could include fundraising events, the arrival of new immediate mandated initiatives, a sudden change in staff or unannounced visitors to the school or a global pandemic to name but a few. Therefore, to ensure the success of school self-evaluation at whole school level in this project, it was important that participants had plenty of meaningful opportunities to interact and discuss teaching and learning matters at all levels within our school, with interruptions being kept to a minimum where possible.

According to my data and in follow up discussions, staff members reported that the flow of information between them during the school self-evaluation process, was supported by regular opportunities for communication. Empirical evidence tells us that policy implementation processes are more effective when they involve effective communication strategies (MacBeath, 1999). This implied that if school self-evaluation was to be implemented successfully in our school, the continuation of clear, open and honest communication was vital.

Staff members saw the knowledge and professionalism they brought to school self-evaluation as a strength and were happy that involvement in our school self-evaluation process involved everyone. The view that the school self-evaluation process in our school currently involved

everyone surprised me. Self-reflection on my leadership of the process showed me to have implemented school self-evaluation in a structure of hierarchical compliance. In this approach, staff voted on an area of teaching and learning to improve, I then did the evaluative work and drew up the draft improvement plan for staff. The plan was then communicated to the wider school community and filed away for future review or inspection. Staff were obliged to implement the improvement plan. School staff had to engage with school self-evaluation in this way whether they liked it or not. However, this finding from the data suggested that some staff were more than happy to engage. My data seemed to suggest that any desire amongst staff members to use school self-evaluation for school improvement was questionable, other than in the area of simple compliance with rules. This resonated with similar research from the literature (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012). Vanhoof et al. (2009), believe schools experience self-evaluation as more of an obligation than anything else, the principal objective being compliance, rather than using school self-evaluation as a tool for improving the functioning of the school. This argument finds support in my findings that some staff members view school self-evaluation in a negative way as "*just another area of work that had to be done*". Hall and Noyes (2009) argue that being engaged in such an activity that is more about compliance than educational endeavour, makes teachers feel oppressed and professionally compromised. Other teachers see it as a threat to their autonomy in the classroom (Vanhoof et al., 2009). Sentiments such as these in any evaluation process can lead to inauthenticity and fabrication (Webb, 2006; Perryman, 2009; Ball, 2003), engendering what Power (1997) terms '*pathologies of creative compliance*' (cited in Hall and Noyes, 2009, pg.36). To understand this discrepancy between beliefs and practice (Beaver and Weinbaum, 2015) I referred to an Irish study by O'Brien et al. (2019). It showed participants setting improvement targets using school self-evaluation guidelines, but lacking a belief in the target setting process and being confused when using data to set and measure the targets. It was important this project did not suffer a similar fate. For this project to be successful, my leadership of school self-evaluation in this action research study needed to be authentic, involving staff members working in a community of endeavour where they had agency and wanted to do it. This is achieved by ensuring stakeholder input into any decision-making related to the process of school improvement and change (Mortimore et al., 1988; Rozenholtz, 1991; Day and Sammons, 2014).

Some staff members wanted more opportunities to engage in teamwork as part of the school self-evaluation process. However, further conversation on this point revealed genuine concerns among some staff members, that if their voices were not heard and valued enacting school self-

evaluation, this had the potential to be a serious obstacle to the successful implementation of the process in our school. I believe my leadership of school self-evaluation was confounding the problem. I led school self-evaluation with a quick-fix, go-it-alone approach, thereby limiting any possibility of collaborative benefit or meaningful organisational change. Whilst this issue of teachers' voices not being heard in the school self-evaluation process was concerning, I was encouraged by the fact that the observation was given an opportunity to air in an open forum amongst our staff and that the contributor deemed it safe to do so. School staff wanted more opportunities to work as teams in identifying and agreeing on areas that needed attention. This was a clear indication that the assumptions I previously held in relation to the need to lead the school self-evaluation process in hierarchical ways, were incorrect. In fact, the literature shows an internally motivated evaluation culture can occur (Mann and Smith, 2013) if staff are perceived as team members in a school with shared objectives (Potter et al., 2002) rather than individual classroom teachers (Schildkamp et al., 2012). The data showed a desire amongst many school staff to be involved in school improvement initiatives such as school self-evaluation. It was therefore imperative for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school that it was a collegial and collaborative process with involvement in all decision-making. Such interactions had the potential to increase the motivation, interest and positivity of staff towards the school self-evaluation process in our school.

5.3.2 Resourcing school self-evaluation

This theme refers to the daily experience of staff members working in our school. It references the many resources they call upon each day to engage with the school self-evaluation process. These resources cover a wide spectrum, ranging from tangible evaluation frameworks to inner motivation. School self-evaluation is meant to incentivise and motivate school improvement. However, according to the data, some participants held the view that school self-evaluation was causing an unwanted increase in their workload, with no time to do it and this was therefore a disincentive to engage with it. The data seemed to suggest that the work demands placed on them by school self-evaluation was placing extra stress on staff members. This view of school self-evaluation held by staff members was not uncommon in the literature. O'Brien et al. (2015) report that the nature of the activities involved in school self-evaluation seem to be off-putting to teachers, together with the perception that it is time consuming and difficult to carry out. Another study (Hall and Noyes, 2009) shows teachers express concern about the time required to engage in the process and the additional workload. Participants in the study speak about the intensification of their work and pressures on their time. They say the work of school self-

evaluation is an extra burden., adding to their administrative workload. Research suggests that school principals and teachers share a resistance towards the added paperwork that school self-evaluation brings with it (Vanhoof et al., 2009). Ryan et al. (2007), suggest that those promoting school self-evaluation should pay attention to the daily reality of schools in relation to time and resource constraints and the increased workload expected of schools from other various mandates. Against this backdrop, they believe that experience for evaluation need to be realistic. To ensure the success of this project therefore, it was important to provide both clarification and clear expectations regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation by working out practical answers to such pragmatic questions as who, what, where, when and how (O'Brien et al., 2015). Wikeley et al. (2002) suggest that any actions to be undertaken should be coordinated with activities in other policy areas. For example, whilst implementing curricular change, do it through the school self-evaluation process or whilst increasing the use of technology in teaching and learning, use the school self-evaluation process as the vehicle for change. It was imperative for this project therefore, that any undertaking was authentic and genuine and part of the core business of the school.

Another obstacle to the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school according to the data, was the lack of tangible support for school staff from the DES. In follow up discussions, staff members expressed a desire for increased supports and a clearer layout from the DES on how to implement school self-evaluation. Discussion during the SWOT analysis revealed an awareness amongst staff members of the existence of DES manuals for schools on how to engage with and implement school self-evaluation. However, it was clear from the discussion that staff members were not overly familiar with the title or contents of these documents. This call for increased support from school staff to implement school self-evaluation in our school was significant. Vanhoof and Petegem (2011) tell us that policy implementation processes are more effective when team members are offered both professional and personal support, for example, continuous professional development, substitute teacher cover, time to meet and talk with each other or a personal copy of the school self-evaluation guidelines etc. The availability or lack of such resources (time, information and support) was informing an emerging pattern regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation within our school.

Upon reflection, I believe this was a failure of leadership from both myself and the DES. With the exception of one advisory visit from the Inspectorate, not one member of my staff has received training in the school self-evaluation process. Between 2012 and 2021, my deputy

principal and I received just four release days to train, in leading and implementing the school self-evaluation process, from the PDST. In addition, it proved very challenging to carve out the time and resources required to engage with and prioritise school self-evaluation, as envisaged by the DES, without disrupting our daily core business of teaching and learning. This was in part due to the simultaneous launch of a range of demanding change and reform initiatives at that time upon schools from various government agencies, coinciding too with a period of significant cutbacks in financial and personnel resources within the system (Coolahan et al., 2017). It was within this context that I naively felt compelled as leader of the school, to take full responsibility for implementing school self-evaluation. This was done in the belief that it would shield my staff from any extra burden to their already busy workload and minimise any negative impact on their morale.

The lack of resources to implement school self-evaluation and the increased workload involved was causing stress to staff members. According to the data, this stress was seen as a significant weakness when trying to implement school self-evaluation in our school. This resonates with Fullan (1993) who believes change in organisations is about change in people, attention to their perceptions of reality and particularly their sense of self. This, Fullan (1993) argues, is the key to successful change agency. Indeed, Goleman (1996) believes that emotions are the starting point for development and change, due to the recognition that emotions are powerful determinants of ‘thinking’ (cognitive) processes. Data from the SWOT analysis suggested that there was a “*perceived lack of confidence*” in doing school self-evaluation among staff members. Probing questions during the discussion revealed that a small number of staff members felt they did not have the necessary skills to carry out school self-evaluation in a competent manner. According to Zeichner and Gore (1990) this is problematic, as school members lacking confidence in their ability to self-evaluate are unlikely to produce keen observations, or unique responses when they encounter problems in the school self-evaluation process. Instead, the response will involve a restricted set of behaviours, based on old patterns of unprocessed emotional distress and confused thinking. To bring about meaningful organisational change through school self-evaluation therefore, staff members must engage in reflection at system level to deal with the emotional dimension of their context (Leitch and Day, 2000). However, research shows this is easier said than done. Expanding policy mechanisms, such as school self-evaluation, have been found to diminish, rather than increase, opportunities for structured reflection (Leitch and Day, 2000).

5.3.3 Leadership and staff motivation

The creation of an internally motivated culture of evaluation within a school is easier said than done according to Karagiorgi et al. (2015). School self-evaluation can only work if team members are positively disposed towards it (MacBeath, 1999). Staff commitment is important to the success of any school self-evaluation initiative (Meuret and Morlaix, 2003). According to Bubb and Earley (2008) winning hearts and minds is crucial in the successful launch of any school improvement initiative. Research shows however, that the necessary starting point of a positive attitude for implementing school self-evaluation is frequently absent (Schildkamp, 2007). According to my reconnaissance data, respondents seemed split on whether this necessary starting point existed in our school or not. A small number of participants listed their motivation and interest in school self-evaluation as a strength in our school. In direct contrast however, a larger majority saw their lack of interest and enthusiasm for school self-evaluation as both a weakness and a threat to its implementation. I was not surprised by this finding, as it was similar to findings in the literature. A study of principals in Holland for example, found they have a generally more positive attitude towards school self-evaluation than that of their teachers (Vanhoof et al., 2009) Similarly, a large survey of primary school principals in Ireland conducted by O'Hara et al. (2016) found that only thirty percent of them felt school self-evaluation was popular with their staff. I found hope however, in the finding that some participants believed there was more potential untapped staff energy and interest in school self-evaluation deep beneath the surface, just waiting to be unleashed, if led well. The literature shows that the quality of a school self-evaluation process is strongly determined by how that evaluation process is carried out (Vanhoof et al., 2011). The attitude of school leadership towards school self-evaluation is significant (Day and Sammons, 2014).

From conversations with my critical friend, she in the first instance observed and referenced my negative attitude towards school self-evaluation. She said it manifested itself through my tone of voice, body language and use of language. She said I got visibly annoyed and angry when talking about the process. To unpack my negative thinking towards the school self-evaluation process, I began to use a reflective journal (extracts can be found in Appendix 17). I noted that I unashamedly did not hide my distain or lack of enthusiasm for school self-evaluation from my staff. When speaking negatively about school self-evaluation in casual conversation with my staff in terms of increased workload etc., I noticed many of them agreed with me. From such self-reflective practice and continuous conversations with my critical friend, I learned that my actions had the power to diminish any enthusiasm that my staff had

for the process. This lack of interest and enthusiasm amongst school staff for school self-evaluation was identified by staff members as both a weakness and a threat in the reconnaissance data. According to Leithwood and Mascall (2008) school leaders play a key role in shaping teachers' attitudes, commitment and effectiveness in any school self-evaluation process. This action research project was my attempt to do just that by reflecting on my core values and improving both my attitude towards school self-evaluation and my leadership of the process. A study by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that the more school principals enacted the core leadership practices of (i) building vision and setting directions (ii) understanding and developing people (iii) redesigning the organisation and (iv) managing the teaching and learning programme; the greater their influence on teachers' capacities, motivations and beliefs about the supportiveness of their working conditions. In turn these capacities, motivations and beliefs had a positively significant influence on classroom practice. Going forward therefore, it was imperative, for the success of school self-evaluation as a method for school improvement in our school, that I continuously engaged with my critical friend and reflected on all that I said, did and thought as I led the process.

5.4 Further analysis through the lens of complexity theory

This section will complement the analysis already presented and will comment on the findings through the following four key concepts of complexity theory.

5.4.1 The diversity and dynamic nature of agents

Staff members saw the knowledge and professionalism they brought to self-evaluation as a strength. It was no surprise to find, therefore, that any change in staff was considered by staff members to be a loss to the school self-evaluation process in terms of knowledge and experience. They also said it meant extra work for the remaining school members in retraining and bringing up to speed, new staff members with the process. Typical of a complex system, each member of staff within a school is going to have very diverse experiences of engaging with and implementing school self-evaluation within their school. In fact, data from the SWOT analysis revealed that a small number of staff members still felt that they did not have the necessary confidence or skills to carry out school self-evaluation in a competent manner. Complexity theory would suggest however that such diversity and dynamism among staff members enables a school to continually generate new possibilities and the resilience needed to sustain itself throughout both challenges and losses (Fenwick, 2012). This is problematic however, as the model of school self-evaluation mandated by the DES is a one-size-fits all

approach that seeks input from all school stakeholders as a collective process. The whole school in its entirety is seen as the unit of intervention (Simons, 2013; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). But in reality, the success of the system is very dependent on the capacity of individuals, in a variety of settings with differing skills, knowledge and ability levels (Ryan and Timmer, 2013). School members lacking confidence in their ability to self-evaluate is therefore problematic, as their engagement with the process will involve restricting sets of behaviours based on old patterns of unprocessed emotional distress and confused thinking (Zeichner and Gore, 1990). The necessary starting point of a positive and committed attitude to implementing school self-evaluation is therefore diverse and frequently absent (Schildkamp, 2007). In the data, a large majority of the participants saw their lack of interest and enthusiasm for school self-evaluation as both a weakness and a threat to its implementation which is problematic by itself.

5.4.2 Nested systems, connectedness and patterns of interaction

School staff saw the relationships and the interactions between themselves as a strength. Complexity theory suggests that the more frequent and powerful these interactions are, the more influence they are likely to have on the behaviour of school members (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). Within masses of interaction, the system as a whole can become energised and sensitive to fluctuation, continually operating with unfolding configurations and a multiplicity of possibilities (Osberg, 2008). To ensure the success of school self-evaluation at the whole-school level, therefore, it was important that the participants had plenty of meaningful opportunities to connect and interact with each other. This would suggest that for school self-evaluation to be implemented successfully, it must begin with a 'bottom-up' community approach that involved everyone. This resonates with my findings. The data showed some staff members wanted more opportunities to engage in teamwork as part of the school self-evaluation process. To implement school self-evaluation successfully therefore, it was important to continually give school members adequate time to interact as a collective.

5.4.3 Information flow and feedback loops

Staff members expressed a desire for increased supports to successfully implement school self-evaluation. The availability or lack of resources such as time and information were informing an emerging pattern of discontent amongst school staff with the status quo. This in turn was feeding back into the system and having a negative impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation within our school. Staff members expressed a strong desire for a clearer layout from the DES on how to implement school self-evaluation. This is important as when

information is freely provided, and structures support use of that information, people engage more productively in their work (Bower, 2006). The movement of information, through the interaction of people, lies at the heart of any learning and change process within a complex system, such as a school (Morrison, 2002; Stacey, 2005). To implement school self-evaluation successfully, it was important to resource the project in terms of professional and personal support such as training, access to information, substitute cover and operational manuals.

5.4.4 Change, adaptability, co-evolution, self-organisation, and emergence

Complex systems are always in a state of dynamic interaction, where change is a constant in almost all aspects of school life, occurring with different frequency and intensity (Morrison, 2002; Osberg, 2008; Keshavarz et al. 2010; Fenwick, 2012). When there is a change in conditions, schools can choose to make adaptive changes and evolve to ensure a best fit for their own context (Osberg, 2008). Unity and coherence can sometimes emerge without any imposition or planning (Fenwick, 2012). My findings support this view. Rather than seeing school self-evaluation as a meaningful method of improvement, staff members view school self-evaluation in a negative way as just another area of work that has to be done, adapting a stance of contrived compliance rather than one of educational endeavour (Hall and Noyes, 2009). This sets the challenge of finding ways to change this attitude and emerge with a more meaningful process.

5.5 The next step

Having gathered a detailed picture of the salient issues in the SWOT analysis, it was now imperative to engage school staff in generating solutions and strategies as to how we might collectively overcome them. To do this, we engaged with another facilitation tool called 'Brain Writing 6-3-5'. Use of this tool was discussed and agreed upon by both myself and my critical friend well in advance of the whole staff gathering together. We were quite satisfied that this tool would be both simple and effective for staff to use in generating some ideas to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. My critical friend and I also liked the fact that it was quick to use. Considering having the time to meet as a whole staff was a rare opportunity, we both felt it was important to optimise the time available to us as much as possible. Brain Writing 6-3-5 is a silent brainstorming process developed by King and Schlicksupp (1998) that anyone can use to identify new ideas or solutions. The goal is to generate as many creative ideas as possible.

This silent approach holds many benefits for a school setting. Staff within any school can be quite diverse in terms of their personality. Some staff members for example, can be extrovert and quite verbal, whilst others can be introvert and quite shy (Kise and Russell, 2008). Those on temporary contracts may have a shorter length of teaching service and are not as confident to speak up, as compared to their counterparts on permanent contracts with many years of experience who can express their point of view with great confidence. In my experience of working in a variety of schools, this diversity can affect the input level of individual staff members at whole school staff meetings (Jennings, 2007; Kise and Russell, 2008). As an approach, Brain Writing 6-3-5 (Hart, 2007) effectively lessens power differentials to create a richer dialogic and inclusive community, ensuring that highly verbal people do not overwhelm quieter members. It enables individuals to see what others have written, allowing creative ideas to be shared for mutual benefit, but in a silent way. The process is conducted in six ‘rounds’ of five minutes or less using the ‘ideas’ worksheet pictured below (*Table 5.2*), with teachers working individually and privately at first and then publicly sharing their thoughts.

Table 5.2 Brainwriting 6-3-5 ‘Idea creation’ strategy

How can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?			
Participant’s name	idea 1	idea 2	idea 3

The question in this case was ‘how can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?’ In the first step, each member got a copy of the ‘ideas’ worksheet (*Table 5.2*). Each staff member was required to fill in their name and three potential ideas within a few minutes. When the allocated time was up, each staff member was required to pass their sheet to the person beside them. They then silently read the three potential ideas from the new worksheet

they just received, taking note of anything that interested them. When the allocated time was up, they again passed this sheet to the person beside them. This process of rotation continued until each member received their own original worksheet back. After all the rotations were completed, each participant was invited to publicly contribute two great ideas from all the worksheets they had read. When all the ideas were recorded, they were then combined and streamlined by discussing the pros and cons of each. The following key ideas emerged from this activity.

There was a desire amongst staff members for clarity and communication on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and continuous professional development on how to implement it correctly in our school. Analysis of the reconnaissance data and the idea generating exercise 'Brain Writing 6-3-5', showed that they wanted to learn and understand more about school self-evaluation and its benefits. I believe my leadership was a barrier due to the uncollaborative, monologic and authoritative approach I had taken to implement school self-evaluation. My original contempt for school self-evaluation and the desire to shield my staff from the extra workload influenced my leadership of the process to go it alone. I did not give my staff any opportunity to take part and learn more about the school self-evaluation process and its purpose. For the last four years, staff went along with this practice. One could argue, that school self-evaluation was being implemented in our school, but not with absolute fidelity to what was originally intended by policymakers. However, this had created a school self-evaluation knowledge gap amongst school staff. A vacuum of knowledge and skills can cause staff members to interpret and adapt policies and guidelines in unpredictable ways to the needs and practices of the organisation (Morrison, 2002; O'Day, 2002; Fidan and Balci, 2007; Ngan et al., 2010; Keshavarz et al., 2010). In such a scenario, school self-evaluation as a policy is interpreted by school staff and gets adapted to their own school context (Hudson et al., 2019). However, this action research intervention was an opportunity to address the issue. It was also an opportunity to invigorate interest, enthusiasm and a positivity for the school self-evaluation process amongst my school staff. A good starting point, according to the staff themselves, was to give them access to information, resources and supports to develop their understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose and its benefits. They also wanted visual resources to provide clear communication about the school self-evaluation process which were easy to understand, but due to enormous workload pressures, also easy to use. This implied that in any action going forward staff needed engagement with the school self-evaluation literature and some form of training.

There was also a desire amongst staff members to have a coherent whole school approach to conducting school self-evaluation which was simple and efficient to use and produced achievable outcomes. They wanted to ensure that any time spent doing school self-evaluation led to improved outcomes for both teachers and learners. Staff members had very practical ideas on how this could be done. To begin with, staff wanted to administer questionnaires to school stakeholders. Staff seemed to place great value on the involvement and input of other people from the school community into the school self-evaluation process. This was similar to findings from the earlier SWOT analysis where participants saw the relationships and the interactions between them as a strength and powerfully motivating. They therefore wanted more opportunities to collaborate in teams to identify and agree on areas that needed attention. It highlighted a desire amongst staff to move away from the solo approach I had been taking as school leader to implement school self-evaluation. Staff members clearly wanted school self-evaluation to be a form of community endeavour where everyone was involved and had a voice in the process. It indicated school staff assuming a level of agency in the research and working alongside me as co-researchers. I would argue however that it also represented a desire amongst staff for school self-evaluation to be meaningful, and not just a box-ticking exercise. If school self-evaluation was to be successful, it needed to be meaningful by inviting participation.

Another idea from staff to make school self-evaluation more meaningful and successful involved the analysis of pupil's work. The act of analysing pupil's work suggested that staff were keen to focus on areas of teaching and learning that were both practical and meaningful to their everyday work in the classroom. Research in Ireland by O'Brien et al. (2019) shows that if school self-evaluation results in improvement at classroom level, teachers are more likely to value the process.

Finally, staff members desired to have more input into the school self-evaluation process. An analysis of the data showed staff members to be both interested and willing to engage with school self-evaluation if given the time and space to do so. This suggested that time, as a finite resource, could influence staff participation in the school self-evaluation process. The availability of time, or lack thereof, is a recurring theme in the literature (Ryan et al., 2007; Hall and Noyes, 2009; Vanhoof et al., 2009; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2015). Any attempt to improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school must clearly involve creating the time and space for it. Analysis of the idea generation exercise 'Brain Writing 6-3-5', validated this. Staff wished to meet together in a

spirit of collaboration. They wanted to have professional open conversations about the evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning in their school. This was important. Information, knowledge and feedback is passed on when people within a school interact with each other. Stemming from this can be the creation of new learning and new possibilities. The more frequent and powerful the interactions are the stronger the system will be (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). Staff members deemed it important that all whole school decisions adopted a practitioner-based approach, made in a spirit of collaboration as a collective, allowing all voices to be heard. Due to my desire to shield staff from the extra workload involved in school self-evaluation and go it alone however, I had failed to offer staff any opportunity to engage collaboratively as a collective. For this project to succeed staff needed to be allowed to meet collaboratively without distraction. To make this a reality the supports required, such as non-contact classroom time, needed to be in place.

5.5.1 Prioritising our ideas

Sheets containing all their ideas from the session were put on display in the school staff room for reflection and conversation, with the aim of reconvening another group meeting to prioritise, in order of merit, our main ideas. To do this a visual remodelling tool called a prioritisation grid was used (National College, 2012). It is a quick and effective way to generate group consensus about what should be a priority. It is effective in shortlisting a large number of ideas for action into a more manageable number. Each possible action is written on a sticky note and positioned by the group on a grid in terms of the groups desire to do it and the rate of impact it would have on fulfilling their objectives. The rate of desirability is measured on a sliding scale from 'low to high' on a vertical axis. The rate of impact is measured on a sliding scale from 'strong to weak' on a horizontal axis. Any ideas deemed to be high in desirability and strong in impact are placed close to the top right corner of the grid. These ideas are then the chosen priorities for action. The grid can be seen in *Table 5.3*

Table 5.3 Idea prioritization strategy

	Prioritization of ideas for action	
High Desirability		
Low Desirability		
	Weak Impact	Strong Impact

(National College, 2012).

I discussed the technique with my critical friend. She again liked the technique due to its simplicity and the immediacy of its results. However, she did ask what would happen if a large bulk of the ideas from staff found their way to the top right corner as being highly desirable with the potential for a strong impact. What would we do then? I referenced the techniques manual to find the answer. Upon such a scenario arising, it said a limited debate should ensue to attain consensus on having the items distributed across the matrix so that only a few (but it did not specify), fall in the top right-hand corner of the grid. My critical friend and I were confident this could work and concluded that this tool would be most suitable for this initial stage of the project.

A discussion with staff members resulted in the following prioritisation grid (Table 5.4). Any ideas which were deemed highly desirable and would have a strong impact were placed in the top right-hand corner by school staff.

Table 5.4 Idea prioritization grid – How can we improve the process of SSE in our school?

		How can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?	
High Desirability		<p>A clear agenda of what needs to be done</p> <p>Use a chart or poster to clarify things</p> <p>Bullet point our ideas to keep it simple</p> <p>Give a handout covering the main points about school self-evaluation</p>	<p>Open communication amongst staff</p> <p>More face-to-face conversation, even a ten-minute chat can clarify things</p> <p>Give a clearer understanding of SSE for all staff and its purpose with increased support and resources in</p> <p>Focus on the positives on the school self-evaluation to continue to encourage development</p>
		<p>Regular short questionnaires about what's working in our school/classrooms and what's not!</p> <p>Introduce set timetabled weekly sessions for the specific area being improved/taught...with a little reminder on the intercom that morning!</p> <p>Different teams focusing on different areas</p>	<p>Time management of work time spent on SSE and area of focus to be SMART and beneficial to all teachers</p> <p>Analyse pupil work samples (June/September) to identify improvement</p> <p>Ensure that any interventions are shared equally among all classes</p> <p>Less of a focus on the paperwork and more on teaching and learning</p>
Low Desirability			
		Weak Impact	Strong Impact

The biggest priority for school staff was a desire to have more opportunities for collaborative professional conversations with each other as part of the school self-evaluation process. Staff members felt strongly that this would greatly impact the implementation of school self-evaluation in their school in a positive way. Coupled with this was the aspiration that any time spent doing school self-evaluation needed to improve teaching and learning. This too was a high priority for school staff. Staff wanted more opportunities to meet together as a collective in a spirit of collaboration, to have professional open conversations about the evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning in their school. Staff members deemed it important that all whole school decisions were made in a spirit of collaboration as a collective, with all voices being heard. For this to happen staff needed to be given the supports to meet collaboratively without distraction, such as non-contact classroom time. An analysis of all the reconnaissance data showed that staff viewed time as a valuable commodity. If this time was used to focus on matters of teaching and learning as a collective, they believed it had the strong potential to improve the process of school self-evaluation in the school.

An analysis of the priority matrix also showed that clarity and communication on how school self-evaluation is implemented, was a priority for school staff. They wanted visual resources, such as charts, posters and information sheets to provide clear communication on the practicalities of the school self-evaluation process, which were easy to understand and easy to use. The provision of resources such as this, according to staff, would have an immediate and very strong impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation.

Finally, the desire of staff members for a greater knowledge and understanding of school self-evaluation and its benefits was also a high priority. Reconnaissance data showed that staff members were not familiar with the school self-evaluation literature from the DES. This had created a school self-evaluation knowledge gap amongst school staff. According to staff, a good starting point to address this issue would be to have access to information, resources and supports to develop their understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose and its benefits. This, they believed, would have a strong and positive impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Any action therefore, needed to involve engagement by staff with the school self-evaluation literature and some form of training.

To summarize, the priority issues arising from this reconnaissance were firstly, more opportunities for staff members to meet together as a collective in a spirit of collaboration to have professional open conversations about the evaluation and improvement of teaching and

learning in our school. Secondly, the acquisition of visual resources to provide clear communication on the practicalities of the school self-evaluation process, which were easy to understand and easy to use. Lastly, access to information resources and supports to develop staff members' understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose and its benefits.

Chapter 6 – Action Research Cycle 1

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the first action research cycle in this research. This involved planning and implementing the action steps necessary to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school and monitoring their effects.

6.2 Planning

At a meeting in January 2020 staff members discussed at length the actions steps needed to improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school. The ideas prioritised in the reconnaissance phase were used to frame this action plan.

The priority issues for school staff in the reconnaissance phase were firstly, more opportunities for staff members to meet together as a collective in a spirit of collaboration to have professional open conversations about the evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning in our school. Secondly, the acquisition of visual resources to provide clear communication on the practicalities of the school self-evaluation process, which were easy to understand and easy to use. Lastly, access to information resources and supports to develop staff members' understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose and its benefits. Discussions during the reconnaissance phase also indicated that for school staff, any implementation strategies needed to lead to improved outcomes for both teachers and learners. There was much sharing of ideas among staff members on how all this could be achieved.

The first priority issue represented a desire amongst school staff for increased opportunities to collaborate and have more input as a collective into the school self-evaluation process. Many ideas were put forward to facilitate this, such as more staff meetings or smaller break-out group meetings. However, one participant argued that it was more important to focus on the actual content of the conversations, rather than the format of the meetings. The group did struggle however, to reach consensus on what the content of these collaborative professional conversations should actually be and what format they should take. As a facilitator of the meeting, I stepped in to remind the group that the focus of the planning meeting was on how to improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school. This intervention seemed to renew energy in the discussion. Eventually, constructive ideas emerged. One in particular proved very promising. Some staff members felt that the only way to really improve our capacity in school self-evaluation was to actually do it. One participant termed it "*learning by*

doing”. It was decided by school staff to initiate a school self-evaluation cycle for the current school year, following DES guidelines. Engaging in such a cycle allowed staff members the opportunity to have direct input into the school self-evaluation process and collaborate together in a meaningful way. The DES guidelines (2016) are quite clear that school self-evaluation is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement and that professional collaborative review is a key component of the process. The group nominated the in-school management team to lead the action (Principal, deputy principal and two post holders), with all school staff invited to participate. This planned action was labelled “Action 1”.

To address the second priority issue consensus was reached on the creation of a school self-evaluation timeline, suitably matched to a school calendar year. The aim was to have a timeline that would communicate to all school staff in a very clear way, what practical school self-evaluation activities should occur at whole school level during each month. Staff members agreed that all school staff should be invited to be involved in its creation and that it should be completed and put on display in the school staff room. This planned action was labelled “Action 2”.

The third and final priority issue which emerged during the reconnaissance phase, identified amongst staff members an urgent need for access to information, resources and supports to further develop their understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose and its benefits. Staff members agreed to create a dedicated school self-evaluation information board for the school staffroom. This would specify for each school term or school year, what our chosen areas of focus were on certain school subjects. The information board would also highlight specific improvement targets and whether they were being met or not. It would also be used to show the results of any staff surveys regarding school self-evaluation or highlight any continuous professional development training opportunities in key target areas. This planned action was labelled “Action 3”.

In addition, it was decided by school staff to install school self-evaluation resource trays in the school staffroom. These trays would hold operational manuals, DES guidelines and circulars, newsletters and any available research literature on the implementation of school self-evaluation. Reconnaissance data revealed that staff members were not familiar with the school self-evaluation literature from the DES. This planned action was labelled “Action 4”.

The group also asked me, as school principal, to show and talk staff members through the DES school self-evaluation guidelines and quality framework. The aim was to help school staff become more familiar with the contents and give them a good understanding of the purpose and methodology of school self-evaluation. Reconnaissance data revealed this to be a key issue for staff. This planned action was labelled “Action 5”.

It was at this point of the proceedings however, that one staff member suggested we should reorder the sequencing of our action steps. They argued that actions two to five should precede “Action 1” and be treated as important preparatory steps for the main task of implementing a school self-evaluation cycle. All staff agreed. This concluded the project’s planning phase.

As evident from the planning phase discussion described above, the involvement of dynamic and diverse agents (such as teachers, special needs assistants, principals and special education teachers) in such decision making, makes schoolwork complex, but it also makes our school stronger. Without such variation, the movement and reinterpretation of information would not occur. This lies at the heart of learning and adaption in any complex system (O’Day, 2002; Bower, 2006; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011; McNaughton et al., 2013; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Setlaltooa, 2014). Complexity theory was an important guiding factor in my actions throughout this project. For the success of this project for example, it was important my leadership did not treat school staff as recipients of information, but as the source. Interactions, such as the planning meeting described above, needed to be frequent and powerful to influence the actions of staff members in our school. The more our school was open to change and new ideas and trying new things, the closer we would get to improving the school self-evaluation process in our school through increased innovation and creativity.

Keeping the reader in mind, the following is a summary chart (*Table 6.1*) of the agreed actions described above and undertaken as part of this first action research cycle.

Table 6.1 Action research cycle 1: Action plan

How can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?					
Action Plan					
What will we do?		Why are we doing it?	Who will do it?	When will we do it?	How will we measure our success? (i.e., what criteria do we believe will show the impact of our work?)
Preparatory step 1	Create a school self-evaluation timeline.	(i) for clarity on how school self-evaluation is communicated and implemented (ii) to communicate to staff in a clear way 'what' school self-evaluation activities should occur and 'when' during each month of school (iii) so that any time spent doing school self-evaluation is used efficiently to improve teaching and learning	staff	End of January 2020	A timeline will be created and put on display in the staff room and it will be used in a school self-evaluation cycle
Preparatory step 2	Create a school self-evaluation information board.	(i) for clarity on how school self-evaluation is communicated and implemented (ii) to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of school self-evaluation and its benefits	principal	By Easter 2020	An information board will be attached to a wall in the staff room and labelled as school self-evaluation and it will be used in a

					school self-evaluation cycle as part of this project
Preparatory step 3	Create school self-evaluation resource trays.	to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of school self-evaluation and its benefits	principal	By Easter 2020	Resource trays will be attached to a wall in the staff room and labelled as school self-evaluation. They will be stocked with the latest resources and newsletters regarding school self-evaluation and they will be used in a school self-evaluation cycle as part of this project
Preparatory step 4	Show and talk staff members through the DES school self-evaluation guidelines and quality framework.	to become more familiar with their contents and to gain a better understanding of the purpose and methodology of school self-evaluation	principal	By Easter 2020	The principal will meet all staff (individually or in groups) to show and talk them through the DES school self-evaluation guidelines and quality framework

Action step 1	Initiate a school self-evaluation cycle.	To increase opportunity for professional collaboration	Led by the in-school management team but inviting all stakeholders to participate (somebody called this “ <i>learning by doing</i> ”)	By Easter 2020	The staff will carry out in full, a school self-evaluation cycle using the DES school self-evaluation guidelines, our new school self-evaluation timeline, resource trays and information board.
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After this phase of action planning, I noted in my reflection journal, that during the discussion I observed staff being very concerned with the technical aspects of the school self-evaluation process. Most of the actions listed above, entailed a focus on prescribed procedures, guidelines and information. The exception was ‘Action step 1’, which put an actual focus on engagement in the process of school self-evaluation itself. However, that said, staff would be following in a technical way the process prescribed by the DES. My concern was that staff members saw school self-evaluation as a form of evidence-based, technical activity for change, with pre-determined milestones and fixed end goals, where staff merely played a passive and compliant role. However, this was not to be unexpected. According to McNamara and O’Hara (2012), when the DES provided schools with guidelines and procedures for the formal introduction of school self-evaluation (DES, 2016), no attempt was made within them to define and encourage the conditions necessary to make them possible in practice. Since then, however, the supports and materials available have undergone significant development, but issues still remain (McNamara et al., 2021a). The DES now sends school inspectors to provide professional support to schools on request and has a number of publications and support materials related to school self-evaluation. With the exception of school management teams however, no training in school self-evaluation is provided to entire staff (McNamara et al., 2021). This leaves a gap between the school self-evaluation training needs of schools and the support provided. The school self-evaluation guidelines and procedures, whilst technical, help to fill that gap.

A technical approach to school self-evaluation sees school staff as technicians implementing prescribed procedures to deliver improved outcomes through efficient and effective practice (Bransford and Darling-Hammond, 2005; McNaughton, 2011). It may involve ‘technical’ rational reflection as means of increasing teachers’ efficiency in the delivery of policy (Leitch and Day, 2000) but it presents little perceivable benefit or opportunity for the development of staff members capacities for reflection ‘in’ or ‘on’ practice to develop knowledge of practice (Leitch and Day, 2000; Schön, 1983). This was problematic, with potential consequences for the success of this study. I was conscious that for school self-evaluation to be effective, it needs to move beyond a technical interest, and instead engage in critical questioning and reflection by school staff to understand and explain their actions as they institute change to their practice (Sjøbakken and Dobson, 2013; Klenowski and Woods, 2013; Van Der Voort and Wood, 2014).

In keeping with the spirit of this practical action research study to improve our practice, the process of school self-evaluation we implemented was rigorous and critical, asking fundamental questions about what we do, how we do it and most importantly, why we do it. This, according to Leitch and Day (2000), builds problem-solving, self-evaluation capacities and an understanding of effects on teaching and learning, thus encouraging further research, experimentation and ultimately, change (Burton and Bartlett, 2009; McNaughton et al., 2013). As a result, rather than implementing other people’s knowledge in practice through prescribed procedures, the intention in this action research was for staff members to become thoughtful and learn from their work, reflecting on both their actions and the consequences (Leitch and Day, 2000).

According to Elliot (1991) “*action initiates reflection*” (pg.23). The fundamental aim of action research is to investigate and improve practice (Elliot, 1991) through a process of action and reflection (McNiff, 2012). According to Burton and Bartlett (2009) this reflexivity heightens as researchers develop their skills. Therefore, whilst my concerns were legitimate, Ryan et al. (2007) acknowledge that planning and implementing school self-evaluation is multi-faceted and requires considerable expertise. In their study, schoolteachers and principals as novice evaluators, experienced significant challenges with the conceptual and technical aspects of evaluation, suggesting the existence of evaluation knowledge deficits. Another study by Sjøbakken and Dobson (2013) found that school stakeholders during school self-evaluation were not immediately motivated or skilled in writing down their own experiences. But what was even more interesting was the finding that stakeholder engagement with the school self-evaluation process over a period of time showed a pendulum movement between school self-

evaluation as a technical, practical and emancipatory process, suggesting that those engaged with school self-evaluation do not necessarily move in a chronological fashion from technical to practical and practical to emancipatory research, as suggested by Carr and Kemmis (1986), its fluid. Therefore, upon reflection, I felt that staff engaging with a technical perspective towards school self-evaluation at the outset of this action research study was acceptable and part of a longer journey of progression towards more reflexive critical thinking and development.

6.3 Implementation

The following preparatory steps were implemented as part of a suite of resources to be used as part of our planned cycle of school self-evaluation, to improve the process in our school. An evaluation of these actions and their impact on the aim of this research is discussed later in the thesis, as part of an appraisal of our overall engagement in a cycle of school self-evaluation.

6.3.1 Preparatory step 1: Create a school self-evaluation timeline.

In January 2020 staff members came together to discuss and agree on a broad school self-evaluation timeline that would fit our school's annual calendar. The school self-evaluation process envisaged by the DES (DES, 2016), is a six-stage process that facilitates repeated cycles of analysis or a return to a previous stage of the cycle as required. It involves looking at the evidence of pupils' learning, analysing it, interpreting it and acting on it to improve outcomes. The cycle looks as follows:



Figure 6.1 The school self-evaluation cycle

Steps one, two and three of the cycle outline the investigation phase of the process. This begins with the identification of an area for focus and inquiry through teachers' own understanding and knowledge of their school context. This is followed by the gathering of evidence with regard to the area chosen. The evidence is then analysed, and judgements are made regarding the school's current strengths and areas for improvement. These three steps take place in the first year of a four-year cycle. In steps four, five and six schools retain a record of the evaluation and describe the actions for improvement. This school self-evaluation report and improvement plan is then shared with the school community. The improvement plan is put into action and is monitored and evaluated over the course of a three-year implementation.

As a staff we discussed the possibility of mapping the six-stage school self-evaluation model over a calendar year beginning in January, as extra-curricular activity in our school tends to dip during the months of January, February, early March and November. These months are free from seasonal events such as Christmas, Easter and Halloween. They are also outside of busy school periods, such as end of school year activities in May and June and the start of school year activities in September. When we did, we found that it was very workable, potentially giving us the time and space, we needed in the first three stages of the school self-evaluation cycle to engage with the practical tasks of gathering evidence, analysing data and making judgements. We agreed on the following school self-evaluation timeline:

Table 6.2 School self-evaluation timeline

School Self-Evaluation Cycle		
Year 1	Teaching and Learning	
January – March	Step 1	Identify focus
	Step 2	Gather evidence
April – June	Step 3	Analyse and make judgements
September – October	Step 4	Write and Share
November – June	Step 5	Put school improvement plan and digital learning plan into action
Year 2, 3, 4	Step 6	Monitor actions and evaluate impact for beginning of next cycle

A large copy of the timeline was put on display for all participants to see and use in the school staff room.

6.3.2 Preparatory step 2: Create a school self-evaluation information board.

I purchased a noticeboard specifically for school self-evaluation and organised it to be attached to a wall in the school staff room. Information such as standardised test data, school improvement targets and the new school self-evaluation timeline were displayed there for all staff to see and engage with (*Figure 6.2*).

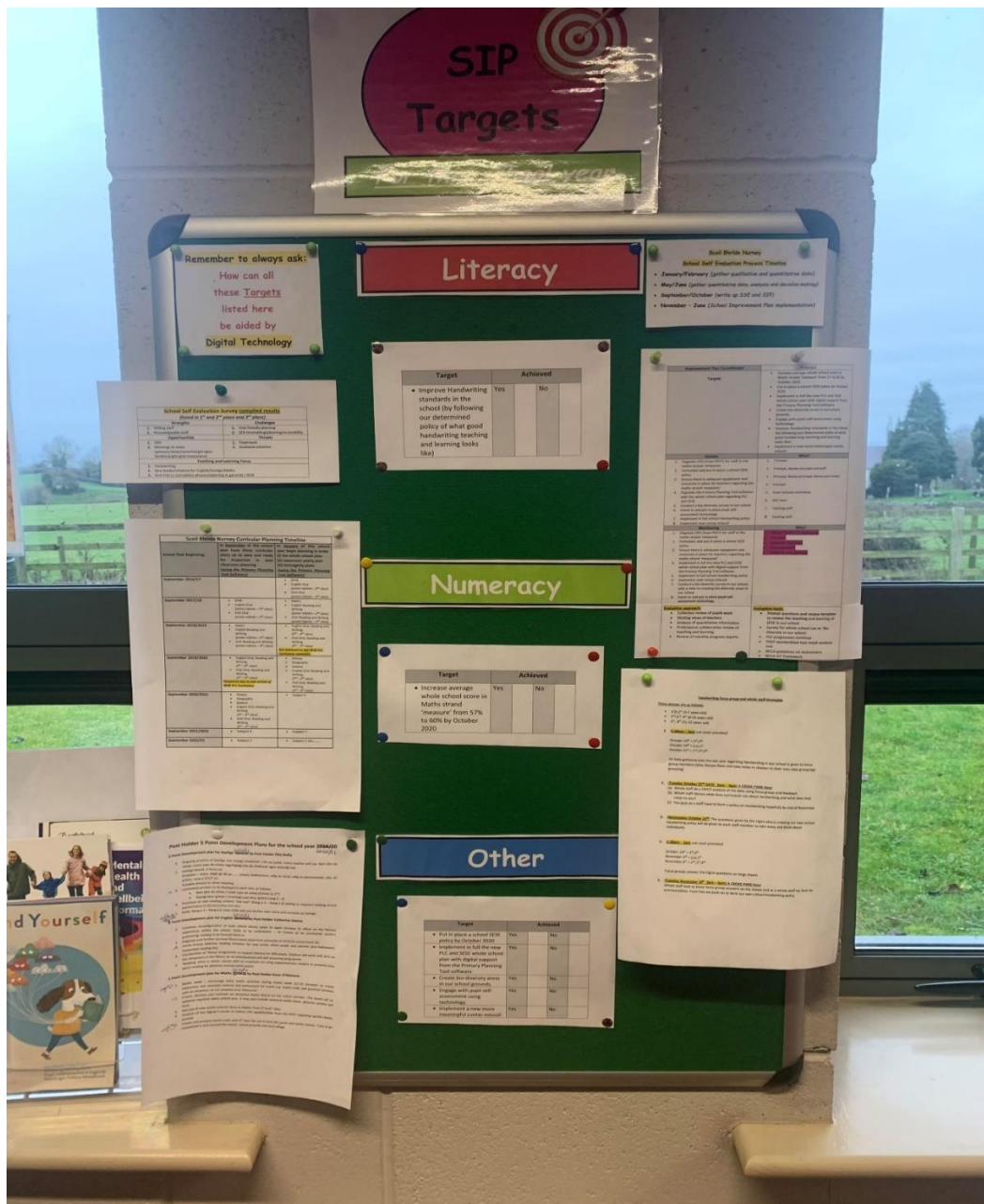


Figure 6.2 School self-evaluation information board

6.3.3 Preparatory step 3: Create school self-evaluation resource trays.

Preparatory step three entailed the installation of resource trays to hold books, information folders and newsletters relating to school self-evaluation, all in an attempt to help staff have a greater knowledge and understanding of school self-evaluation and its benefits. As the person responsible for the realisation of this action, I ensured the trays were installed in the staff room (*Figure 6.3*). I filled them with the most up-to-date DES literature on school self-evaluation I could find, as well as information on teaching, learning and assessment from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

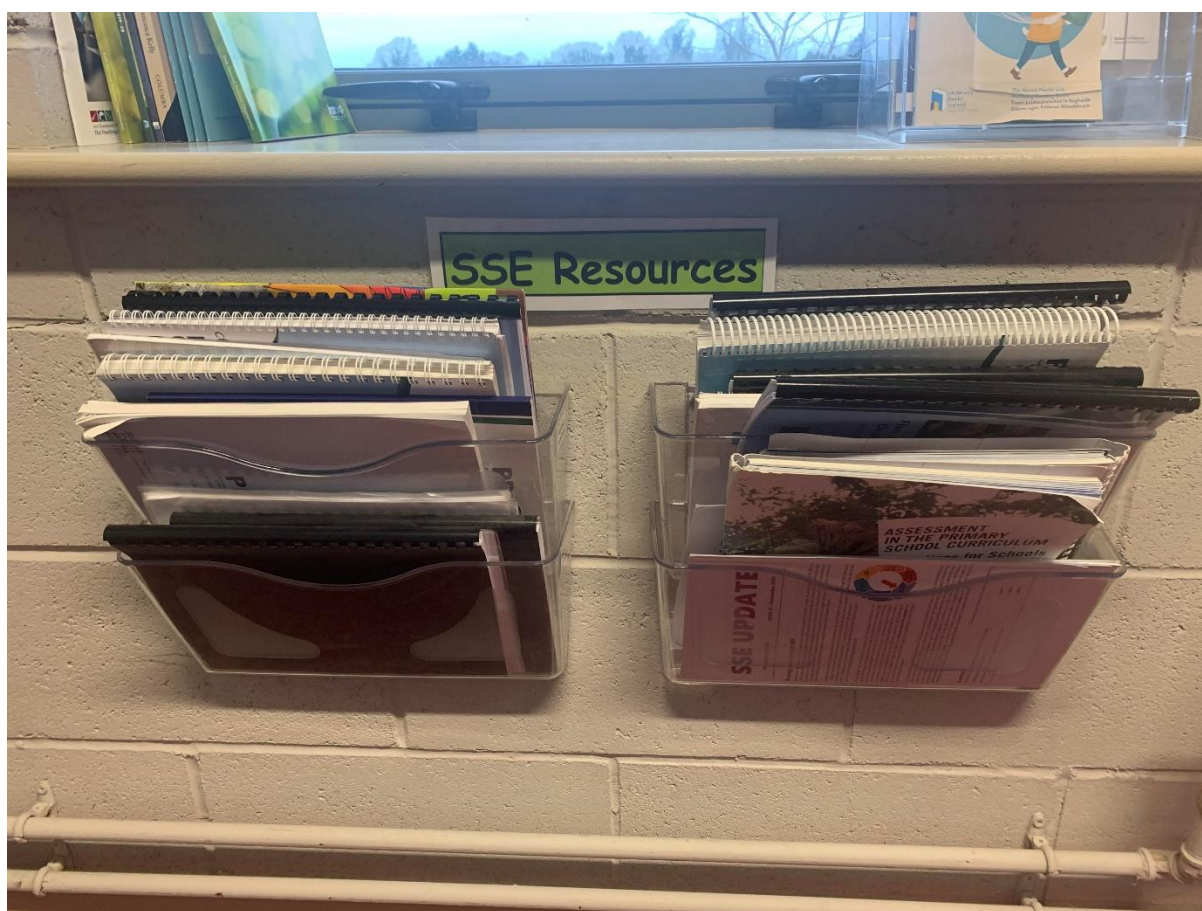


Figure 6.3 School self-evaluation resource trays

6.3.4 Preparatory step 4: Show and talk staff members through the Department of Education school self-evaluation guidelines and quality framework.

As part of preparatory step four, all staff were to be shown the school self-evaluation circulars and school self-evaluation guidelines from the DES to become familiar with their contents. This was to address the identified need of staff members to have a better understanding of the purpose and methodology of school self-evaluation.

In the spirit of action research, I felt an appropriate approach would be to actively read the DES documents together with each staff member. However, I was aware that meeting staff members on an individual basis had ethical implications regarding power relations which needed further reflection and consideration. I was in the dual role of researcher and school principal. It was important I did not put staff members into a position of vulnerability. For that reason, I discussed with my critical friend, my proposition to meet all staff members on an individual basis. I explained how this approach would allow each staff member and I the time and space to read and discuss in depth together, the DES school self-evaluation documents. I explained further how it would enable me to give my full attention to any individual needs or questions they may have regarding school self-evaluation, in a private, safe and secure way. This, I felt, was important, so as to ascertain as clear a picture as possible, what level of understanding staff members possessed regarding the school self-evaluation process.

As expected, my critical friend questioned if I was putting participants in a vulnerable position. She was concerned for fellow colleagues who may have felt an obligation to take part in this research as it was being carried out by the principal and may be uncomfortable about exposing gaps in their knowledge about school self-evaluation. Whilst I took solace in the fact that this preparatory step was suggested and agreed upon by staff members themselves in the planning phase of this action research cycle, I was aware that they did not suggest this one-to-one approach. My critical friend and I agreed however, that these one-to-one meetings would be beneficial, but with clear steps to be taken, showing an awareness of my ethical responsibilities in this regard and the dual role I was playing as the school principal and an active researcher and the implications of this regarding power and vulnerability.

The individual meetings were scheduled for January 2020. As a precondition, all staff members said they were happy and willing to have this conversation with me. To begin the conversation, I asked what did they know about school self-evaluation. Of the fourteen people I talked to, all

could give me an answer to the purpose of school self-evaluation in terms of its general application as a method to find our weak points as a school and improve on them. I handed them a copy of the school self-evaluation circular and guidelines and the quality framework. We proceeded to actively read through them and discuss the main headings together. Out of the fourteen staff members I engaged with, only eight were familiar with the documents. This can be explained by the fact that these eight staff members were working in the school system for over ten years and therefore had encountered school self-evaluation before in some guise, be it through in-service training or working with the process. For the others this was their first time to explore the documents, having received no exposure to them in teacher training, but more telling, no encouragement to engage with them due to my poor leadership of the process.

This gave credence to the argument that if school self-evaluation was not considered important enough for work at classroom level, it ran the risk of not only being viewed by new teachers as a documentation exercise for the purposes of compliance and accountability (O'Brien et al., 2019), but also as a process in which a negative attitude was totally warranted. A national survey of Irish primary school principals found school self-evaluation to be popular with only thirty percent of staff, with seventy-nine percent of their staff seeking more training in how to do it (O'Hara et al., 2016). This is worrying for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation among new teachers. To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, it was imperative that any exposure to the process documents was both positive and meaningful. Giving staff members their own time and space to read and navigate their way through these documents in this preparatory step, as compared to doing it in a group type setting, allowed each member a real differentiated approach to learning about school self-evaluation.

At the end of each meeting, I asked the staff member if there was anything they did not understand and if they had any questions. With the exception of a few technical questions about the school self-evaluation process itself, all staff members reported themselves to be now more familiar with the documents and understood their purpose. As a result of this action, I was confident that all staff at least could now identify the school self-evaluation documents and their basic function. However, upon reflection this was a missed opportunity. I did not have any actual hard evidence to demonstrate this assumption. In hindsight, a better strategy would have been to get the first participant I met to explore, discuss and explain the school self-evaluation documents to the next person attending and so on. My role then would have been to gather actual hard evidence that the action target was achieved. However, using a complex

adaptive system theory lens, this strategy too would be deemed ineffective as an interaction of any great power, as the movement of the information is limited. In a complex adaptive system, not all information leads to learning and change. A top-down flow of information such as this, whether from researcher to participant or from participant to participant, sees agents within a system as mere recipients of information, instead of a source of valuable information in their own right. I took comfort in the fact however, that staff members would get an opportunity to interact with these documents when the school engaged in a school self-evaluation cycle through this collective action research project. An evaluation of this step, and indeed all the aforementioned preparatory steps, and their impact on the aim of this research are therefore discussed later in the thesis as part of an appraisal of our overall engagement in a cycle of school self-evaluation.

6.3.5 Action step 1: Initiate a school self-evaluation cycle.

6.3.5.1 Implementing the action.

It was decided by staff that this action would be managed by the in-school management team (i.e., the principal, deputy principal and two post holders) for logistical reasons, but that all staff members would be involved. On a practical level, staff members felt that it would be far easier for the in-school management team to regularly come together and coordinate the school self-evaluation cycle rather than the whole staff. Importantly however, staff members were to be consulted at every step of the evaluation process by the in-school management team to ensure a spirit of collaboration, democracy and community endeavour.

In late January 2020 the in-school management team had one of two meetings to work out the strategy for initiating a school self-evaluation cycle in our school. After much discussion and the sharing of ideas, the team decided that the first goal was to facilitate staff members voting on an area of focus that we could evaluate and improve on. Voting sheets were returned by the end of January 2020. The compiled results (*Table 6.3*) were disseminated to all staff members as follows:

Table 6.3 School self-evaluation 'area of focus' survey results

<p style="text-align: center;">School Self Evaluation Survey <u>compiled results</u> (Listed in 1st and 2nd place and 3rd place)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching and Learning Focus</p>
<p>1. Handwriting</p> <p>2. New books/schemes for English/Gaeilge/Maths</p> <p>3. Oral Irish (+ cumulative phrases/planning in general) / SESE</p>

The in-school management team met again to discuss the results and take action. From the team's deliberations a three-step strategy to initiate a school self-evaluation cycle in our school was discussed, developed and approved by all staff members as follows:

Step 1

The staff perhaps unsurprisingly, identified handwriting as a teaching and learning focus. With the arrival of the new Primary Language Curriculum in 2019, the entire staff had to attend in-service training organised by the PDST. During these in-service days, we were given great opportunities as a staff to review the new language curriculum and our current school practice. With the help of the PDST the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school was an area in which staff members identified gaps in our practice. In the handwriting section of our school's Primary Language Curriculum policy, we had no agreed baseline standard of what good handwriting would look like for each class level. It should be noted at this point of the study, that parents and pupils were not asked to identify an area of school practice that we could evaluate and improve on. We were of course aware that the DES describes school self-evaluation as a collaborative and inclusive process during which school staff, in consultation and with the fullest participation of parents and pupils, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school (DES, 2016). However, as a school we felt it was important at this juncture to have the time and space we needed as a staff to learn and improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school. The decision was made therefore not to involve the wider school community at this point in time.

To begin our cycle, we needed to gather data on the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school. We discussed the creation and administration of a survey to parents, pupils and teachers. Through a process of drafting and revision, we crafted three sets of key questions

regarding handwriting in our school. One for parents, one for pupils and one for teaching staff. Please refer to Appendix 18 for the survey questions and results. To make sure the data aligned from different perspectives, we asked similar questions to both the parents and pupils and numbered them the same way. We wanted the set of questions to give a broad picture of both the child's and the parents' experience of handwriting. The teacher survey was comprised of eighteen questions broken up into two sections. The first section concerned what the teaching and learning of handwriting looked like in our school at that current moment in time. The second section asked teachers what the teaching and learning of handwriting 'should' look like in our school into the future and to give some specifics. We felt this approach would allow us to see, in a broad sweep, how handwriting was being taught in the school, but also allow individual teachers then to break free of any group think or indoctrinated school policy and suggest some alternative progressive practice ideas. We also included the current section on handwriting from our school's Primary Language Curriculum policy and asked teaching staff which parts they would like to retain. The teaching staff survey was administered in hard copy due to the small scale in numbers.

The parent's survey was administered online. Out of a total of one hundred and thirty-eight families we received thirty-one responses. It is hard to explain the low response. A key factor may be the effect digital technology has had on devaluing the importance of handwriting quality and ability for these older children and their families. Due to the technologies available, handwriting may no longer be seen as too important (Hensher, 2013; Stevenson and Just, 2014; Ates, 2018; Taneri and Akduman, 2018). A child can just as easily type and print their work. Whatever the reason for such a low response, it suggested that the teaching and learning of handwriting may not have been as high a priority for pupils' families as it was for school staff.

Further analysis showed the majority of responses in our survey coming from more junior classes such as senior infants to 3rd class. In my experience of engaging with parents in parent teacher meetings, handwriting in this younger age cohort seems to be something more tangible and valued by parents. They see its value due to the positive or negative effect it can have on both their child's development and ability to express their thoughts, ideas and knowledge in written form. The handwriting ability of older siblings too would often be used as a benchmark to gauge the quality of their younger child's handwriting.

Next, we surveyed the pupils. Assessing pupils is part of daily teaching and learning in Irish primary schools and is considered best practice (NCCA, 2007). This survey did not therefore

overburden pupils. All the work carried out by pupils in relation to this project was carried out during school hours. The survey did not take from the normal activity of a school day and the pupils' right to an education. The whole process and the purpose of the survey was clearly explained to all pupils in a differentiated and age-appropriate way. Pupils were kept together as part of their normal class grouping and all activities involved in the survey were carried out in line with Child Protection best practice guidelines (DES, 2016) and the Data Protection Act (Government of Ireland, 2018). In line with best teaching practice, we were at all times vigilant for signs of stress or tension in pupils caused by engagement in the survey. Regular reminders were also given by staff members to pupils, about communicating any concerns or tensions they had during the survey. Systems were in place for pupils to bring these concerns to school staff, for example raising a hand to talk to the teacher. All pupils were treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity and an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice.⁵

In conclusion, all surveys from parents, pupils and teachers were completed and gathered up by late February for analysis by staff. Data is the raw material of school self-evaluation. An understanding of data in terms of definition, usage, problems, solutions and guidelines is essential in implementing a school self-evaluation process (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). The capacity of staff to learn and develop skills in using data this way was essential to the continued effective implementation of school self-evaluation in our school (Schildkamp et al., 2013; Faddar et al., 2018). In this first step, staff members identified a focus area for improvement and gathered data to investigate it through the creation and administration of a survey instrument to parents, pupils and teachers. These are key skills in the school self-

⁵ With the help of our two special education teachers, both myself and the deputy principal arranged a timetable for senior infants, 2nd class, 4th class and 6th pupils to take the survey. In the school library we set up the necessary computers, each connected to the internet. One group at a time was escorted to the school library. Each child was assigned a computer. They were given help to access the online pupil survey and then asked to fill it in. All pupils were given the same survey. If any issues arose understanding the survey, the deputy principal, the two special education teachers and I were on hand if they needed help. For senior infant pupils each question was read aloud and explained by the special education teachers. A pause was then given after each question to allow the special education teachers assist each senior infant in submitting their answer.

evaluation process described by the DES guidelines (2016). This learning for staff was invaluable to our aim of improving the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. It also allowed all staff the opportunity to work together in a collaborative and meaningful way. All decisions were made in a spirit of improvement and community endeavour. In other words, not only were we effective in gathering the data as a collective, but as a collective we took the opportunity to learn and develop from the experience itself (Timperley, 2013).

Step 2

In mid-January 2021, school staff discussed the process of collecting handwriting samples for a collective review of pupils' handwritten work (DES, 2016). It was felt by us all that collecting handwriting samples from every pupil would simply take too long. In addition, an analysis of such a broad sample would also be too time consuming. For the purposes of this evaluation, we only required a simple snapshot of current handwriting standards in our school. We therefore agreed on collecting a broad, but small sample for ease of analysis. We adopted this approach knowing that this method of evaluation is recommended and described in the DES school self-evaluation guidelines (2016).

We collected samples from the same classes who completed the pupil online survey i.e., senior infants, 2nd class, 4th class and 6th class. From each of these classes it was decided to ask each teacher to use the Primary Language Curriculum pupil handwriting progression continua (NCCA, 2019) to select three samples, each showing the top, middle and bottom of handwriting standards within their class. Gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting information on children's work in this way, is part of regular daily assessment in Irish primary schools and is considered best practice (NCCA, 2007). In some cases, the teacher photocopied from a child's copybook. In other cases, the teacher just asked the selected classes to copy something out into their copy book in their best handwriting. This allowed a collection of twelve samples to be gathered from the entire pupil cohort by early February. In this second step, staff members gained valuable experience in building on existing evidence from a range of sources. In this case, work samples from different pupil age groups. These are key skills in the school self-evaluation process described by the DES guidelines (2016).

Step 3

Gathering data is not in itself self-evaluation, but more so how it is used is critical (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). We therefore organised class teachers to meet in small working groups to analyse all the data gathered from steps one and two. By using (analysing, interpreting etc.)

the data, it was turned into information to evaluate our functioning at whole school level to foster school improvement. Findings from the reconnaissance phase showed staff seeking more opportunities for collaborative professional conversations. This group meeting was an opportunity to address some of that perceived need. Staff members were being given the opportunity to evaluate the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school and agree on any necessary improvement plan. The logistics and proposed content of the meeting was as follows:

- **Meeting A**

Staff members were split into three working groups as follows:

Group 1: Jr/Sr/1st

Group 2: 2nd/3rd/4th

Group 3: 5th/6th

Research suggests that groups which are assigned tend to perform better than self-selected groups (Felder and Brent, 2001). Research also suggests that groups of three or four members tend to work best (Csernia et al., 2002). This was our first time to try this approach of ‘break out’ groups in our school. Normally we would just meet as a whole staff. According to Beebe and Masterson (2003), there are both advantages and disadvantages to working in groups. However, by understanding the benefits and potential pitfalls, a school can capitalise on the virtues of group work and minimise the obstacles that hinder success (Burke, 2011).

As this was a collaborative and dialogical process it was important to get the groups talking and debating with each other right from the start. Instructions for the meeting were therefore kept as simple as possible. The group’s objective was to simply read, discuss and take notes on (i) all the survey data gathered from parents, pupils and staff on the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school to date as it pertained to their class grouping (ii) the twelve handwriting samples gathered by teachers from their pupils and (iii) the comparisons between our current approach as compared to the description of good and effective practice provided in the new Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2019). These notes would serve as a record of their thought process and reasoning to share with future full gatherings of staff. Successful group work is easier if group members know what the final product is supposed to be (Burke, 2011; Davis, 1993).

The use of working groups as an evaluation tool is recommended by the DES in their school self-evaluation guidelines (2016). It was an opportunity for staff to be part of a working group engaged in professional collaboration to evaluate and improve matters relating to the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school, emerging from a review of pupils' work and surveys administered to parents, pupils and staff.

- **Meeting B**

Staff members decided to come together as a collective to compare their group notes. Having analysed the data, staff members reported they now had a good general picture of where the teaching and learning of handwriting was in our school. The salient issues identified were a lack of uniformity and consistency in the teaching and learning of handwriting across all classes in terms of letter formation, correct writing implements, pencil grip and copybook presentation. I proposed to staff that maybe now it was time to try and begin the process of mapping that collective knowledge into some form of collaborative consensus about what good effective teaching and learning of handwriting could and should look like in our school. I asked staff to consider using a project management technique called '5W2H' (Tague, 2005). I explained to staff that the process involved all of us collectively, creating a set of key questions to ask ourselves about the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school, based on who, what, when, where, why and how. This approach was in keeping with the action research methodology of the study, based on active participation, open-ended objectives, high levels of commitment and active learning (Bell et al., 2004) with the expectation that any improvement strategies were developed by the staff members themselves as a form of collaborative intervention (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Bana, 2010; Klenowski and Woods, 2013; Walters, 2014; Jacobs, 2016).

By the end of the meeting, staff created a list of four key questions relating to the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school (Appendix 19) . Each member of staff took a copy of these key questions and agreed to attend another working group meeting to answer them.

- **Meeting C**

Staff members again asked to be split into the same three working groups as before. The purpose of this final group meeting was to reflect on and discuss the key questions asked at our last whole school meeting about the teaching and learning of handwriting. It was decided by staff members that each working group would answer each key question on a large sheet of

paper in the context of their class grouping. As before, these sheets would serve as a record of their progress to share with future full gatherings of staff.

- **Meeting D**

To conclude the process of formulating a school handwriting policy, we decided to bring the staff back together as a whole school. They were keen to look at the answers given by each working group to the key questions asked regarding what could and should the teaching and learning of handwriting look like in our school. Staff members wanted to look at the answers given on each group's sheet, in an attempt to debate the commonalities and gain consensus. Agreed answers were written onto a large blank answer sheet. This method allowed our collective knowledge to be shared in a quick and easy manner. It also allowed everyone as a collective to debate the differences and to see the commonalities in our attempt to construct and reach whole school consensus on an agreed handwriting policy for our school.

Using the key questions as our guide, we collectively reached consensus on a draft handwriting policy (Appendix 20) detailing what the teaching and learning of handwriting 'would' look like in our school going forward, as described below. For the next two years we planned to put our handwriting policy into action and monitor its impact. More importantly however, as part of this research project we had completed key stages of a school self-evaluation cycle.

6.3.5.2 Monitoring implementation of the action and its effects.

An important step in the Elliot (1991) action research cycle is to both monitor and evaluate the implementation of any actions taken. To monitor the implementation and effects of this plan therefore, I administered survey 3 (appendix 21). Section 'A' comprised twenty-five Likert-scale questions and three yes/no question. Section 'B' comprised six open-ended questions. The anonymous survey was administered to staff in a paper and pen format and received twelve responses out of fourteen.

The quantitative data gathered from section 'A' was illustrated in numerical graph format (bar chart) for analysis (Dixon & Woolner, 2012) (Appendix 22). In relation to the cycle of school self-evaluation, we had just engaged with as part of the first action phase, the data showed that six staff members agreed and two strongly agreed that they had the necessary skills required to carry it out. The data showed nine staff members to be comfortable engaging in self-evaluation to improve outcomes for their pupils, as the evaluation was something they all did on a regular

basis as part of daily practice. This suggested that the root of any problems experienced in ‘doing’ self-evaluation seemed to lay elsewhere.

The data showed a belief amongst the majority of school staff that they needed more training in how to conduct school self-evaluation. This resonated with earlier data which too showed a feeling amongst the majority of staff members that they needed more training in school self-evaluation. Data from survey 3 however, showed the majority of staff believing they had the necessary skills required to carry out school self-evaluation. I interpreted this to be a desire for training in how the DES wanted school staff to do school self-evaluation. This may also have been due to the fact that the majority of staff members according to the data, found any resources provided by the DES on how to conduct school self-evaluation, hard to understand.

In addition, the data clearly showed that the approach being mandated by the DES was causing an increase in workload and anxiety for all staff members, bar one. The end result according to the data, was a process which was both meaningless and unpopular with staff members.

An initial analysis of the data gathered from section ‘B’ showed half of staff members being unable or choosing not to name any DES school self-evaluation policy documents or resources (*Table 6.4*). This was despite the preparatory work we had undertaken before our first action step.

Table 6.4 Useful documents regarding SSE according to staff members

Any useful policy documents that you know of regarding SSE?	
S3 Respondent 1	<u>No</u>
S3 Respondent 2	<u>(No answer)</u>
S3 Respondent 3	<u>None</u>
RS3espondent 4	<u>None</u>
S3 Respondent 5	<u>(No answer)</u>
S3 Respondent 6	SSE guidelines
S3 Respondent 7	SSE guidelines
S3 Respondent 8	SSE guidelines (Purple book)
S3 Respondent 9	<u>(No answer)</u>
S3 Respondent 10	SSE guidelines
S3 Respondent 11	SSE guidelines

S3 Respondent 12	LAOS – looking at our schools School self-evaluation guidelines
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This lack of knowledge may have been a factor in participants having divided opinions on the purpose of school self-evaluation, namely whether it was a process of improvement or accountability, as can be seen from some of the responses in *Table 6.5*

Table 6.5 The purpose of SSE according to staff members – sample survey results

What do you think is the purpose of SSE?	
S3 Respondent 1	Give a sense of agency to schools to work on what actually needs <u>improvement</u>
S3 Respondent 4	I think it's a <u>tick the box exercise</u> and I am not really sure to be honest

However, as can be seen in *Table 6.6*, the majority of staff saw the potential for school self-evaluation to improve the school.

Table 6.6 The positive aspects of SSE according to staff members – sample survey answers

What are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 5	As a government policy the positive aspects are; it allows for a <u>whole school review</u> of our own personal teachings and going forward <u>delivering the best possible outcomes</u> for our learners
S3 Respondent 6	It is a positive way of <u>improving a school, the teaching, learning and overall management</u>
S3 Respondent 12	It allows schools the <u>autonomy</u> to choose areas of most concern to them and their organisation. It acknowledges the inbuilt desire of the vast majority of teachers <u>to improve their schools teaching and learning.</u>

However, the data clearly showed concerns amongst staff members regarding the practical implementation of school self-evaluation. As can be seen from the sample responses below in

Table 6.7, resourcing issues, regarding time, information and support were still causing stress amongst some staff.

Table 6.7 The negative aspects of SSE according to staff members – sample survey answers

What are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 2	<u>Very time consuming</u> ; lots of <u>abstract</u> , repetitive ‘splitting of hairs’; <u>quite meaningless</u> exercise at times
S3 Respondent 3	<u>Additional paperwork</u> on <u>already stretched staff</u>
S3 Respondent 6	<u>Added workload</u> and <u>time required to do it</u>
S3 Respondent 7	<u>Time consuming</u> – takes a lot of meeting times. <u>Increased paperwork</u> equals <u>increased stress</u> which <u>affects morale</u> .

In fact, these issues were causing a variety of emotions amongst some staff to the process in general, as can be seen from some of the responses in Table 6.8

Table 6.8 Emotions felt by staff members when they think of SSE

What emotions come to mind when you think of SSE?	
S3 Respondent 1	<u>Calm</u> , content, mostly positive, somewhat <u>inattentive and detached</u> . Irritated (with stop-start, training followed by strike) <u>unenthusiastic but willing to participate</u> , have input, follow instructions
S3 Respondent 9	<u>Frustration</u> , dissatisfaction, <u>disappointment</u> , annoyance

In conclusion, the data showed staff members having varied opinions on the school self-evaluation process in general, as is evident in Table 6.9

Table 6.9 Staff members opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations and comments in relation to SSE – sample survey answers

Please describe any other opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations or comments you have in relation to your experience of SSE to date in your educational career	
S3 Respondent 1	<u>Happy to participate in SSE</u> but also <u>happy to be told what to do at times if it saves on time/discussion/meetings</u>
S3 Respondent 2	<u>I find it quite tiresome in general</u>
S3 Respondent 3	SSE <u>does not seem to be a ‘whole school process’</u>
S3 Respondent 6	I think it’s <u>great for management to involve everyone in the process</u>
S3 Respondent 9	<u>SSE is added pressure</u> from the Department.
S3 Respondent 11	I feel as <u>though it is seen as an approach of something that just ‘has to be done’ as a school approach overall, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.</u>

I found the data gathered from section ‘B’ to be extremely rich. However, I was quite surprised to see that despite all the preparatory work and the actions we had taken as a collective to date, half of school staff were still unable to name any DES school self-evaluation policy documents or resources. Staff were also unclear as to the purpose of school self-evaluation despite having spent time together examining these policy documents and actively engaging in an action cycle. In essence, even though staff members had worked together in the first action phase to evaluate the school’s handwriting policy, the reconnaissance data was showing that significant concerns and confusion still remained. One staff member claimed that they did not know what benefit school self-evaluation actually had for teaching and learning but as it was government policy it just had to be done regardless. In addition, in our action plan we agreed to give ourselves the necessary time and space outside of the classroom to meet and collaborate regarding the school self-evaluation process, yet staff members still claimed to be stressed in terms of workload and lack of time, claiming it to be quite a tiresome process and indeed, added pressure. In fact, one respondent wanted to be told what to do if it saved time on such discussions and meetings. So, what exactly was going on here? To be honest I didn’t know. After all the work we had done

collectively in creating and implementing our action plan I did not expect these negative outcomes.

6.4 Conclusion

Without data to compare what our actions have accomplished to the performance of the prior state we have little or no foundation for decision making or improvement (Hart, 2007). As part of a second phase of reconnaissance therefore, I decided to collect data using both a quantitative and qualitative survey approach triangulated with semi-structured focus group interviews. Using more than one method such as this in a study, gives a more comprehensive and trustworthy picture than one which does not (De Vos et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2011; Babbie, 2012). We rely on the perceptions of participants, who can provide insightful information on the topic under review (MacBeath, 1999).

An analysis of this reconnaissance data showed staff members acknowledged the benefits of school self-evaluation in improving their school and were favourable to the increased levels of collaboration, autonomy, decision-making, reflection and discussion it brought. However, they said the increase in their workload due to school self-evaluation and the lack of resources such as time, information and support to carry it out, was causing them continued stress, thereby negatively impacting their attitude towards the process. The findings also showed that amongst staff members, there was no collective understanding of school self-evaluation, its purpose or how it differed to other evaluation activities undertaken in our school. For example, staff members believed that engaging with the school self-evaluation process was equivalent to doing the same job as the inspectorate. They saw it as an added thing that they were being forced to do in their already busy workload. This lack of clarity was negatively impacting their attitude towards the process and causing staff members to comply with school self-evaluation in a contrived way as a form of resistance.

Chapter 7 – Second Phase of Reconnaissance

7.1 Introduction

The second cycle of the Action Research began with a reconnaissance phase to help us as a school explain any shortcomings in the implementation of our action plan. This reconnaissance also helped us to guide and shape the direction of our future and subsequent action phases. Babbie (2012) believes the activities of analysis, interpretation and presentation are the culminating activities of qualitative inquiry. This involves the categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising of the data to obtain answers (DeVos et al., 2007). We needed to collect data to find out what our actions had accomplished compared to the performance of the prior state. Without this data we had no foundation for making decisions regarding any further necessary action. As part of a second phase of reconnaissance, four staff members agreed to be interviewed and audio recorded. One was a special education teacher; the other three were a junior infant teacher, a 4th class teacher and a 2nd class teacher. Some researchers advocate undertaking two or three rounds of interviews (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, the interviews were held over two days, with the participants interviewed in pairs. The interviews followed the protocol described in section 4.7.1. The information collected from the survey and interviews yielded rich amounts of both quantitative and qualitative data. In order to ensure credibility, a rigorous and systematic approach was used to reduce and interpret the data. These processes are described and explained in greater detail in the following chapter. To begin I detail the methodological approach and design decisions taken.

7.2 Reconnaissance

Reconnaissance data from the first phase of action research showed the lack of interest and enthusiasm for school self-evaluation amongst the majority of staff members to be both a weakness and a major threat to its successful implementation. To address this and other concerns relating to time, information and support, an action plan was implemented by school staff. However, despite all the preparatory work and the actions we had taken as a collective to date, half of school staff were still unable to name any DES school self-evaluation policy documents or resources. Staff were also unclear as to the purpose of school self-evaluation despite having spent time together examining these policy documents and actively engaging in an action cycle. In essence, even though staff members had worked together in the first action phase to evaluate the school's handwriting policy, the reconnaissance data was showing that significant concerns and confusion still remained.

I arranged a meeting with my critical friend to discuss these issues. We both agreed that something more was going on here. We had created an action plan as a collective to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, but an initial analysis of the data showed the plan had not worked for all staff members. We both felt that more reconnaissance and fact finding was necessary to explain this effect. To further interpret the findings yielded in the survey my critical friend and I discussed gathering reconnaissance data using a different method. I therefore consulted the literature on research methodology (Briggs et al., 2012). At a later meeting I proposed to my critical friend that an interview of staff members may be suited to understanding the lived experience of staff as they implement school self-evaluation in our school, but more importantly the meaning they make of that experience (Coleman, 2012). My critical friend agreed. We therefore formulated and constructed a set of eleven interview questions (Appendix 23) to probe more deeply into the survey data gathered and co-construct the experiences of these staff members and their relationship with school self-evaluation to date.

Over two days, four staff members were interviewed in two groups of two. The interviews followed the protocol described in section 4.7.1. All went according to schedule. After the interviews were completed, I transcribed them into written form and gave the transcripts to the interviewees for their approval. Once approval was given, I subjected both the transcripts and the gathered survey data to simultaneous thematic analysis (Floyd, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2019). For a full worked example of the thematic analysis applied to the survey and interviews please refer to Appendix 24.

These interviews proved fruitful, as findings later showed the emergence of new data pointing to a feeling amongst staff members that by being mandated to implement school self-evaluation, they were being forced to do the work of the inspectorate. So, whilst the data later showed staff members to have an appetite for school self-evaluation in principle, they seemed to have no desire for, and were resistant to, the version outlined by the DES.

7.3 Findings and discussion

In an attempt to dig deeper and clarify and expand on data gathered in the reconnaissance phase of this second action research cycle, we carried out two semi-structured focus group interviews with four consenting staff members. From the data collected, I generated two key themes to frame a thematic analysis. The first, entitled ‘Attitudes to school self-evaluation’, is about the people tasked with implementing school self-evaluation to achieve the end goal of improved

outcomes in teaching and learning. The second theme ‘Leadership and staff motivation’, is about the important role school leadership plays in motivating and sustaining staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process. What follows are the findings from our two focus group interviews and a further re-examination of our staff survey.⁶

7.3.1 Attitudes to school self-evaluation

This first theme to emerge from the data analysis was about the people tasked with implementing the school self-evaluation process, to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes in teaching and learning. It describes the daily experiences of school members working in our school as they implement school self-evaluation and all that entails physically, mentally and emotionally. Based on these experiences, it details the deep held views of staff members towards school self-evaluation and how this impacts their engagement with the process.

Staff members acknowledged the potential of school self-evaluation to improve our school. Similar to the findings from action research cycle one, school improvement was desirable amongst school staff. It was an end goal they believed in working towards in order to achieve an outcome of improvement. The data showed the majority of school staff (83%) were committed to the principle of school improvement and saw it as a worthwhile endeavour.

This view was also echoed by respondents in the focus group interviews as follows:

“To improve the learning process for our children...to improve our practice and...to help...children...achieve more or achieve their potential” (interviewee C)

“I think the intention is very good... I think it has to be a positive thing you know because we’re always trying to improve, it’s good to keep looking at ourselves and looking at our practice” (interviewee D)

Reconnaissance data showed staff members acknowledging positive outcomes due to their engagement with this first phase of action research. They expressed an appreciation for the

⁶ The findings were sent to all staff members in early September 2020 via email for comment and further analysis, with a due date of late September 2020. Due to a global pandemic and national emergency health measures, it was no longer recommended to gather as a group for meetings. We were therefore unable to meet in person. All correspondence was therefore via email. I have included their contributions in sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2.

increased autonomy, participation, reflection, discussion and collaboration it allowed. The time spent by school staff interacting with each other, discussing DES policy documents and actively doing evaluation, seemed to help staff members gain confidence in integrating the process into their daily practice.

“It allows for a whole school review of our own personal teachings and going forward delivering the best possible outcomes for our learners” (S3 respondent 5)

The literature underlines the important contribution that such strong collegial relationships can make to positive school improvement and change (Rozenholtz, 1991; Day and Sammons, 2014). It was interesting to note that some respondents saw this process of identifying weaknesses and putting plans into place as part of their normal everyday activities within the classroom anyway. Staff members saw the school self-evaluation process as both supportive and complimentary to their professional daily practice.

“Because in our job, that’s what we do every day. You do that day to day in your own classroom and in your setting that we’re watching, and seeing what children need to work on” (interviewee B)

“it’s happening anyway, on a classroom level...on a band level, within classes...teachers talk about things...we know the areas of strengths and weaknesses...and look at our own test results, or their own assessment, and see where a class needs to go” (interviewee A)

“We don’t reflect on it. We don’t stop and say...this is evaluation...That’s what teaching is though isn’t it? You’re improving all the time” (interviewee D)

School staff saw the positive contribution that their collective engagement with school self-evaluation made at both classroom and whole school level.

“Strength can become a whole school thing...for example, with the handwriting; if people start to implement changes within their rooms, then that’s shown throughout the school, whether that’s in displays or handwriting competitions...becomes a whole school result” (interviewee A)

“So far, it’s been classroom based and I’d say it has led to improvements...There’s a very supportive environment here in the school” (interviewee D)

“Any good school with a positive atmosphere, this happens, you see we’ve a little weakness, it’s mentioned at a staff meeting and we do something to change it” (interviewee C)

The willingness of staff to positively engage with school self-evaluation increased when they were given the autonomy to choose the focus of improvement.

“Only thing that would encourage enthusiasm is that if it’s something you would personally do next year, like the handwriting, I do feel positive about that next year, I feel good that we’ll all be doing the same thing...I wouldn’t feel...negative about this because it is...actually going to be used next year” (interviewee C)

“I think if it’s interesting, I have the enthusiasm, it depends on what the topic is, what the area is. There are certain subject areas I’d be much more interested in than others” (interviewee B)

“I would need a lot of encouragement and a lot of support... and enthusiasm and interest in what the area is” (interviewee A)

In addition, they recognised the benefits school self-evaluation brought to our whole school and themselves in terms of internal accountability.

“I think there’s an accountability as well, when it’s a whole school thing” (interviewee B)

“Nobody wants to be seen to be letting the side down, and you want to pull your weight, if it’s on a whole school level. So, it does impact your classroom teaching” (interviewee A)

“We’re all professionals...everyone here is here with the best of intentions...works hard and wants the best...for our students..., pride in our school, we want the school to be the best that it can be...staff are willing and are enthusiastic and care enough about the school as a whole” (interviewee A)

The literature shows that an internally motivated evaluation culture can occur (Mann and Smith, 2013) if staff are perceived as team members in a school with shared objectives (Potter et al. 2002) rather than individual classroom teachers (Schildkamp et al., 2012). Every opportunity must be used to show the positive benefits that collective actions taken at whole school level can have for classroom practice and vice versa.

To increase the motivation, interest and positivity of staff towards the school self-evaluation process, the first action plan gave increased opportunities for staff members to collaborate together and to be involved in all decision-making. The data showed a general consensus among school staff, that collaborating as a collective and playing a fully active part in the school self-evaluation and decision-making process, had a positive effect on their experience

of 'doing' school self-evaluation in our school. Increased opportunities for collective discussion and decision-making seemed to have a positive impact on attitudes towards school self-evaluation amongst the majority of staff. Ninety percent of staff said they felt involved in the school self-evaluation process and that this was a contributing factor to any success.

"Great for management to involve everyone in the process" (S3 respondent 6)

"I think it's important that everyone has an active part and everyone probably feels that they have a voice...I think with the school self-evaluation that we've been doing, everybody has been involved, everybody has been asked an opinion, whether they want to or not...I think from that regard, it's been operating very successfully where everyone has been involved in the process" (interviewee B)

To ensure success, it was therefore imperative that the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, was both a collegial and collaborative process with staff involvement in all decision-making.

According to some respondents, the promotion and growth of reflection and discussion amongst staff members was seen as a positive and motivating factor to engage with the school self-evaluation process.

"Working in smaller teams, and then feeding back – probably like we did with the handwriting. I did feel that was helpful...kind of funnelling it through, so it's not just one big staff meeting and everyone's sitting there...the voices who are confident in speaking probably, and probably the people who have been doing it longer feel a little bit more confident in doing it...I think for younger teachers, it's quite difficult in that setting to put themselves forward, even though they might have a lot of newer ideas, maybe, if they can bring fresh things to the table" (interviewee B)

According to O'Day (2002), information, knowledge and feedback are passed on when people interact with each other. This increases their exposure to raised levels of variety, innovation and creativity. The more frequent and powerful these interactions are, the stronger a school will be in its ability to learn, adapt and evolve.

"I like the group thing...that we can all you know share ideas" (interviewee D)

To ensure the success of school self-evaluation going forward therefore, it was important to ensure that staff members had plenty of meaningful opportunities to interact, discuss and reflect on teaching and learning matters collectively, with an input into all decision-making relating to improvement and change at whole school level (Leitch and Day, 2000).

In terms of practical supports, time out from the classroom to engage with the school self-evaluation process was seen as very positive

“One thing that’s very practical is the time out that we had from the classroom to be able to talk in focus groups about...the handwriting...it’s very hard as you now if you’re trying to do that at lunchtime or after school. Like we were given time and plenty of time to, so that helped to engage and we could all agree in our group” (interviewee D)

Ryan et al. (2007) suggests that those promoting school self-evaluation should pay attention to the daily reality of schools in relation to time and resource constraints and the increased workload. Vanhoof and Petegem (2011) tell us that policy implementation processes are more effective when team members are offered both professional and personal support. To ensure the success of the project going forward therefore, there was a need for clear and practical expectations regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation. It was also necessary to give adequate time for school members to talk and reflect collectively when implementing the process in our school. In addition, resourcing the project in terms of professional and personal support such as training, access to information, substitute cover and operational manuals, was imperative.

However, as Keshavarz et al. (2010) show in their study of Australian primary schools as complex systems, planned interventions do not always lead to predictable and intended outcomes. When time was carved out for staff to engage in the process in a more meaningful way as a collective, this caused problems for some participants. There was a feeling of it being valuable time wasted

“An awful lot of investment for very little, a very specific little area” (interviewee D)

“I know there’s an effort to have every voice heard...there was so much talk and discussion and meetings to get a few, quite basic points...so I guess that’s the part of it that I have an instinct to resist...it’s just the time and all the democracy...On the flip side, if we weren’t given all the time, we’d all be moaning wouldn’t we” (interviewee C)

“There were times where I didn’t think we all needed to be part of it, that you...might have got that bit done...sometimes, too many cooks can slow a whole process down” (interviewee D)

“Happy to be told what to do if it saves on time, discussion, meetings” (S3 respondent 1)

Time is a valuable and finite resource in schools (NCCA, 2010). According to the literature and the findings of this study, school staff are of the belief that there is insufficient time to do all that is required of them such as implementing curriculum, meeting the needs of learners, communicating with parents and working collaboratively together to deliver positive change as a staff (Hall and Noyes, 2009; Cambridge Primary Review, 2009; NCCA, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2015; McNamara et al., 2021a). For that reason, staff members prioritise and make productive choices (O'Day, 2002). This may explain the negativity of staff members to the discussions and meetings described above. It is important to give attention to these beliefs as they can influence how school staff receive, interpret and enact policies (McGrath et al., 2017; Lambert and O'Connor, 2018). According to Skerritt et al. (2021), it is simply not possible for school staff as a collective unit to respond to school self-evaluation in coherent and consistent ways; Instead, the complex and intricate policy work of various actors combine to make school self-evaluation happen.

However, despite the generally positive shifts in outlook as described above, the majority of staff members, seemed to have a negative attitude towards the school self-evaluation process. Our survey showed a strongly held belief amongst participants that school self-evaluation was still not popular with ninety percent of their colleagues. The survey gave interesting insights into staff members' relationship with the school self-evaluation process. Eighty percent described their own attitude to school self-evaluation as indifferent, with only twenty percent claiming it to be positive. Despite the action plan, staff still felt stressed, under resourced and overworked when engaging in the school self-evaluation process. One respondent commented *"I can understand, that it is perhaps, adding more work, to already very busy teachers"* (S3 respondent 5). The interplay of other components within a school such as a perceived lack of time, training opportunities and resources can have the potential to inform the emerging collective behaviour among staff members within that school system. (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Feelings of stress and workload pressure can become the dominant view, with knock-on effects for motivation and enthusiasm. An emerging pattern such as this has the potential to inform the entire behaviour of school staff and affect the potential success of school self-evaluation in a school (O'Day, 2002; Keshavarz et al. 2010). I discussed the survey and interview data with my critical friend. She described the findings best as a love-hate relationship. Those who felt positive towards the process were at the same time not enthusiastic about it.

"Positive without being enthusiastic...I don't enjoy the process...I don't enjoy that kind of work in terms of policies...and paperwork...it's not something I would enjoy...I have to do with

work...I'd have no feelings of excitement...my lack of enthusiasm about the whole thing...I'm very happy to do whatever" (interviewee D)

Despite the general negativity it seemed our staff did have an appetite for school self-evaluation and acknowledged its benefits for improving our school. Even though it wasn't popular with staff members, they could clearly see its merits when approached in the collaborative manner undertaken in the first action phase. This was a noticeable change in attitude following the implementation of the first set of action strategies. However, they seemed to have no desire for the version of school self-evaluation outlined by the DES. At the onset, this research was very much motivated by my own values of authenticity and collaboration being denied in practice as I led school self-evaluation. The desire to take ownership of the problem and implement change came from me initially and not my school staff. Since school self-evaluation was not an issue raising any concern for staff, it came as no surprise that they were unenthusiastic to engage with it and own it. However, research shows the important role school staff play in implementing change in schools (Garner, 2010; Thornburg and Mungai, 2011). This action research aimed to address that issue, affording them the time and space necessary to own the process and make it their own. According to the literature however, implementing change in schools is a complex process (Austin and Harkins, 2008; Guhn, 2009; Given et al., 2010; Craig, 2012; Hannay and Earl, 2012; Williams et al., 2012), even when staff members are provided with the time, and supports they need to do it well (Pescarmona, 2010). Balancing the needs of staff members while driving change is tricky and very difficult, as staff may truly believe they have no reason to change (Kise and Russell, 2008).

In our attempt to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school for example, the request for extra supports from staff to do it, such as time and resources, were delivered. However, despite all the actions taken, the negative attitude of staff members to the version of school self-evaluation put forward by the DES, had not changed, signalling a strong resistance from staff members to implementing the process. Like Barger and Kirby (1995), Clancy (1997) found that resistance to change increases when needs are not met and that leaders in general, fail to recognise and deal effectively with these needs. The solution, according to Kise (2004), lies in providing staff members with the motivation to change their practice, through structuring events and situations to produce changes in their beliefs (cited in Kise and Russell, 2008). This solution was to prove very fruitful in this research, as will be explained later in the thesis.

One respondent believed that the aims of school self-evaluation for a school were “*very long term*” (S3 respondent 1). This was problematic they contended, where “*staff turnover is high*” (S3 respondent 1). In fact, of the fourteen staff members involved in this action research project, at the time of writing, five have since moved on.

“I’m always a little nervous about plans that operate over a few years...you’ve a changeover of teachers, you could have a new principal, maternity leaves, you’ve everything and those things get lost and so I love when something can be implemented between September and June and done and it’s there...Anything that’s a little more long term I am starting to lose enthusiasm for because I’ve started to realise they just fade away...if you say for a year, 1, 2, 3 and 4, we’re going to implement this...it starts of great but inevitably people come and go and puff...we forget...but the intention is good” (interviewee C)

The findings overall, suggested that staff members did not care too much about the school self-evaluation process as envisaged by the DES. It was seen as irrelevant and a “*quite meaningless exercise at times*” (S3 respondent 2) containing “*lots of abstract repetitive splitting of hairs*” (S3 respondent 2) but a requirement “*Acceptance...acquiescence, resignation*” (interviewee D)

“I do very little taking out school self-evaluation documents and reading them” (interviewee B)

On reading these findings one staff member commented, “*I was surprised that there were some negative views towards school self-evaluation*” (S3 respondent 13).

Such diverse views are typical of a complex adaptive system, demonstrating in very simple terms that a ‘one size fits all’ rule or solution may not meet the needs of an entire school community (Ngan et al., 2010; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). However, complexity theory suggests that this diversity of views amongst people within a school, are essential if it is to learn, adapt and evolve (Morrison, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Fidan and Balci, 2017). In a study of educational reform in the United States of America, O’Day (2002) states that “*without variation among the agents of a system or in the surrounding environment, there is little information on which to act*” (pg.6). However, Keshavarz et al. (2010) warn that it would be a failure not to investigate and address the misgivings of people within a system, as their concerns can emerge as the dominant pattern, informing the entire behaviour of people within a school (Keshavarz et al., 2010; O’Day, 2002). The fact that some school staff found school self-evaluation both meaningless and irrelevant was undoubtedly going to have major consequences for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation

in our school. MacBeath (1999) argues that school self-evaluation can only work if team members are positively disposed towards it. For the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school therefore, it was imperative to address this issue. We needed to take action to further build on the positive gains amassed in the first phase of this action research by continuing to support staff in this work, highlighting the very positive and real benefits to their daily practice. This required a different approach.

Seventy percent of respondents felt they needed more training on how to conduct school self-evaluation from the DES, with only ten percent saying the process of school self-evaluation was easy to understand

“I find it hard to engage with” (interviewee D).

“Attitudes are one of confusion to it...a lot of confusion...wasn't much clear guidance in the first place” (interviewee B)

“I think what they're supposed to be doing mostly, across the board is the big part of the problem...The main thing schools are missing is just guidance...if they were to give very clear guidelines on what they want to see” (interviewee A)

O'Brien et al. (2019) reports that the levels of support provided to Irish school in 2012 to formally implement school self-evaluation was relatively generous in comparison with other European countries at that time. In 2015 the European Commission (2015) indicated that Ireland was one of eleven countries that had five or more different types of supporting measures in place to help schools implement school self-evaluation. One support included an advisory visit to schools by the inspectorate. In the context of our school, this was not looked on favourably by school staff.

“A long time ago, I just remember the cold in the library, that's what I remember... 'pick a very small area' ... that's all I remember...I wouldn't be keen to get more training on it really” (interviewee D)

Upon reflection therefore, school staff had minimal contact with the policymakers responsible for the school self-evaluation policy that they were tasked to implement (with the exception of the principal and one other member of staff). The only training given to staff was through DES guidelines (DES, 2016), in-service feedback from two members of staff, an inspectorate-built website and an advisory visit with a school inspector (O'Brien et al., 2019) which the data showed was not meaningful for some.

In essence, the view of our staff was the DES was delivering as the knowledgeable expert, with staff members playing a passive role. The movement of information in this way was limited. The top-down flow of policy information from the DES, treated staff members as mere recipients of information, instead of valuable sources of information in their own right. This phenomenon is discussed in a study by O'Day (2002). She argues that the nature and quality of information must be adequate and fit for purpose if an organisation is to learn from it. In her study of American educational reform, O'Day (2002) found that a top-down transmissive model of information flow, can result in schools reacting to directions imposed from above and outside the school in a form of compliance, more so than a meaningful reflection on internal practice. In such an act of compliance, she concludes that the information received by the school may not lead to learning and change. This resonates with international and Irish research indicating that the existence of a driving force for collaborative internal school improvement is questionable, other than in the area of simple compliance with rules (McNamara and O'Hara, 2012). Hall and Noyes (2009) argue that being engaged in such an activity that is more about compliance than educational endeavour, makes teachers feel oppressed and professionally compromised. Other teachers see it as a threat to their autonomy in the classroom (Vanhoof et al., 2009). My findings from the reconnaissance data support this view.

My findings showed there to be a real disconnect between school staff on the ground and DES policy.

“As an SNA it seems irrelevant to me” (S3 respondent 3)

“My own attitude is, I suppose one of indifference...on board with doing whatever I have to do, but I'm not over interested in it” (interviewee B)

“a kind of apathy towards it” (interviewee C)

“Not realistic” (S3 respondent 5)

Be that as it may, it is assumed by the DES that school staff will drive and steer the school on a predetermined route to the destination of school improvement, using available resources. Indeed, they are mandated to do so. However as described earlier, whilst there was an acknowledgement amongst staff members of the potential benefits of school self-evaluation, seventy percent of staff members felt the DES approach to school self-evaluation was meaningless, irrelevant and out of touch with reality on the ground. So, despite staff members having just created a suite of resources and engaged in a school self-evaluation cycle, it seemed

staff were merely complying with their mandated duties in a contrived way, just to satisfy an external governing body.

“It’s not an area of personal interest to me but I still think it’s a fairly good idea for schools to do...it’s...what schools do...all the time seeing how we can improve things, but...I wouldn’t get excited about it” (interviewee C)

In a complex adaptive system such as a school, government mandates are interpreted by the individual staff members within them (O’Day, 2002; Skerritt et al., 2021). This produces unpredictable thoughts and actions by school staff as they engage with and implement government policy. (Morrison, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Skerritt et al., 2021). An analysis of the thoughts and actions of staff members in the reconnaissance data showed the majority of school staff struggled to adapt to the external government mandate of school self-evaluation. On a whole school level, the collective attitude of staff members towards school self-evaluation seemed generally negative. However, the data showed this not to be the case when participants were driving their own self-evaluation processes on a daily basis within their own classrooms. In this context, teachers seemed comfortable engaging in the self-evaluation process in their own setting, i.e., observing and questioning, creating their own resources, interpreting documents and theorising their own practice (Simons, 2013). The data showed them to be comfortable using it each day to drive towards improved outcomes for all the pupils within their classroom. If staff members were ‘doing’ self-evaluation each day in their own classroom, then why wasn’t this being replicated at whole school level? I concluded that the root of the problems experienced in ‘doing’ self-evaluation at whole school level seemed to lay elsewhere.

Specifically, an analysis of the data suggested that school staff felt they were doing the work of the inspectorate when ‘doing’ school self-evaluation. They also felt accountable to the inspectorate for this work. In simple terms, staff felt mandated to use school self-evaluation as a method for school improvement, but at the same time their engagement and results with it were open to public scrutiny for accountability purposes. In reality, school staff are externally accountable for their efforts to improve their school (DES, 2016). This tension between improvement and accountability seemed to be problematic. Staff members felt the school self-evaluation process was something imposed on them from outside as an accountability exercise for the inspectorate rather than an improvement process that they do for themselves. In essence, a *“box ticking exercise”* (S3 respondent 1).

“It is seen as an approach of something that just ‘has to be done’ as a school approach, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning” (interviewee C)

School staff also felt they were being ‘forced’ to do the job of the inspectorate, viewing school self-evaluation as being that of inspection by stealth.

“It forces them to get on board with it and I guess then you need proof in the form of paper work” (interviewee C)

“Rather than, the department coming in and doing their WSE and deciding, this area, you need to improve, and this is what we want you to do. They were just saying, okay schools, you need to do this yourselves” (interviewee A)

One respondent even said the purpose of school self-evaluation was to *“cut down on unnecessary investigations”* and to *“take pressure of the department”* (S3 respondent 1)

This view amongst staff of being forced to be accountable and give assistance to an external agency such as the inspectorate, did not arise in the first phase of the research. This was a noticeable change in response following the implementation of the first set of action strategies. The fore-fronting of this tense relationship between inspection and school self-evaluation is highlighted by O’Day (2002). She believes that the pattern of interaction between inspection and school self-evaluation is contradictory. School improvement, she argues, is premised on a flat command structure aimed at fostering growth. Members within the school are seen as a source of information, with valuable insights into their own unique setting and context (O’Day, 2002). These members are seen to be proactive as a collective in fostering improvement within their school through meaningful reflection on internal practices (DES, 2016).

In contrast however, O’Day believes (2002) school accountability is premised on a hierarchal structure, aimed at fostering compliance. Members within the school are seen as recipients of externally mandated ‘*one size fits all*’ rules and programs, delivered in a ‘*top-down*’ flow of information (pg.16-17). School staff interpret and adapt these directions to their own organisation in unpredictable ways (Keshavarz et al., 2010).

One participant commented, *“perhaps...when the process becomes more familiar it will be a more ‘liked journey’...perhaps the department’s guidelines could be presented to staff differently”* (interviewee A)

I agreed with this view. For the success of this project, school self-evaluation needed to be presented differently to staff. Action had to be taken to show school staff that externally mandated school self-evaluation was basically the same in operation as internal classroom self-evaluation but on a macro level. We needed to show the commonalities between the two. We needed to demonstrate that the practical tasks of staff members ‘doing’ self-evaluation in their classroom were basically the same as the externally mandated school self-evaluation they felt forced to use. They were more similar in operation than not.

More importantly, action was required to show staff that school self-evaluation was not a form of inspection. Although staff members were introduced to school self-evaluation in the first phase through various collective actions, the reconnaissance data showed there to be no collective understanding of what school self-evaluation was. At individual level, staff members had diverse interpretations as to the purpose of school self-evaluation. These ranged from being one of improvement, identifying weakness, whole school planning, autonomy, professional development, recognising strengths and accountability. This is typical of a complex system, where diverse members within an organisation, can have diverse interpretations of an external mandate (Keshavarz et al., 2010). To ensure the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school we needed to give staff a cohesive understanding of where school self-evaluation fitted alongside all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school. Although they were doing self-evaluation all the time in their own classrooms, they saw it as an added thing to do in their already busy workload. One participant commented “*although we have always been self-evaluating our teaching, subconsciously we now feel it’s an extra ‘job’ or task to complete on top of our everyday responsibilities*” (interviewee B). It seemed they could not see the overlap between the two.

7.3.2 Leadership and staff motivation

This second theme that emerged in the reconnaissance data was the important role school leadership plays in motivating and sustaining staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process.

Self-reflection in the first cycle of action research showed me to have implemented school self-evaluation in a structure of hierarchal compliance. I led school self-evaluation with a quick-fix, go-it-alone approach to shield my staff from any burden, limiting any possibility of collaborative benefit or meaningful organisational change. The voice of school staff was simply not sought. In this action plan however, staff members wanted to play a fully active part in the

school self-evaluation process, in partnership with school leadership. Over the course of this action project my leadership of school self-evaluation was changing towards one of community endeavour, where all staff members had agency in the process. Staff members were invited to engage in a collaborative cycle of evaluation, with involvement in all decision making through a suite of supports. According to the reconnaissance data, this had a positive effect.

“I think with the school self-evaluation that we’ve been doing, everybody has been involved, everybody has been asked an opinion, whether they want to or not...I think from that regard, it’s been operating very successfully where everyone has been involved in the process” (interviewee B)

School staff believed that responsibility for the success of any school self-evaluation process lay in the approach taken by me as the senior school leader. They contended that school leaders must use their skillset to facilitate opportunities for the motivation of all staff members to actively participate and collaborate together in school self-evaluation.

“Whether it’s principal and vice-principal, the main push comes from them, but that everybody needs to be on board...everything that happens in a school, the staff have to be a team...once staff are involved and know what’s happening...this is where we’re going with it, this is the direction we’re going to take...the push comes from management, from leadership... I need that driver, that motivation” (interviewee A)

The literature suggests that principals have a key role to play in setting direction and creating a positive school culture, including a proactive mindset, and supporting and enhancing the staff motivation and commitment needed to foster improvement (Day and Sammons, 2014). School leaders play a key role in shaping teachers’ attitudes, commitment and effectiveness in any school self-evaluation process (Leithwood et al., 2008). Going forward therefore, it was imperative for the success of school self-evaluation as a method for school improvement in our school, that I, as school principal, continue to reflect on all that I said, did and thought as I led the process.

There was also general consensus among staff members that school leaders should be responsible in resourcing and coordinating the process *“you’re down to who keeps everyone together, and rounds it up, and mediates...I suppose the leadership has to come from the top”* (interviewee A). Fidan and Ozturk (2015) believe that a flat and flexible hierarchical structure such as this, where hierarchical structures are maintained to carry out functions like coordination on the one hand and horizontal structures are allowed in order to conduct complex functions such as communication, innovation and creativity on the other, could be more

successful in creating more space for innovation. This comes from the school leader facilitating participants to self-organise in order for them to find the best way to implement school self-evaluation successfully in their own school (Morrison, 2002).

For the success of this project, my leadership of school self-evaluation needed to continue to resource and coordinate staff members working in a community of endeavour, where they had full agency and input into any decision-making related to the process of school improvement and change (Day and Sammons, 2014). Such interaction had the potential to increase the motivation, interest and positivity of staff members towards the school self-evaluation process and in turn, improve its implementation in our school.

7.4 Further analysis through the lens of complexity theory

This section will complement the analysis already presented and will comment on the findings through the following four key concepts of complexity theory.

7.4.1 The diversity and dynamic nature of agents

In a complex adaptive system such as a school, government mandates are interpreted by each individual staff member (O'Day, 2002; Skerritt et al. 2021). This produces unpredictable thoughts and actions by school staff as they engage with and implement government policy (Morrison, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Skerritt et al., 2021). According to Skerritt and colleagues (2021), it is simply not possible for school staff as a collective unit to respond to school self-evaluation in coherent and consistent ways. Each staff member within a school is going to have very diverse views on all aspects of school self-evaluation and its implementation within their school. This is problematic, however, as the model of school self-evaluation mandated by the DES is a one-size-fits all approach that seeks input from all school stakeholders as a collective process. The whole school in its entirety is seen as the unit of intervention (Simons, 2013; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). But in reality, the success of school self-evaluation as a government policy is very dependent on the attitude and capacity of individuals in each of their own school settings (Ryan and Timmer, 2013). In my findings, eighty percent described their own attitude to school self-evaluation as indifferent, with only twenty percent claiming it to be positive. Such diverse views are typical of a complex adaptive system, demonstrating in very simple terms that a 'one-size-fits all' rule or solution may not meet the needs of an entire school community (Ngan et al., 2010; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). There were divided opinions on the purpose of school self-evaluation, namely whether it was a process of improvement or accountability. Staff felt mandated to use school self-

evaluation as a method for school improvement, but at the same time, their engagement and results with it are open to public scrutiny for accountability purposes. This tension between improvement and accountability seemed to be problematic. Staff members felt the school self-evaluation process was something imposed on them from outside as an accountability exercise for the inspectorate rather than an improvement process that they do for themselves. Interviews unearthed a perception held by some staff members of a convergent relationship between the role of the inspectorate and school self-evaluation and accountability and improvement. Action was required to show that the practical tasks of 'doing' self-evaluation in classrooms were basically the same as the externally mandated school self-evaluation they felt forced to use and that school self-evaluation was not a form of inspection. To ensure the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, the staff needed a cohesive understanding of where school self-evaluation fitted alongside all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school.

7.4.2 Nested systems, connectedness and patterns of interaction

Complexity theory would suggest that members in a school community need to develop an internal interactive capacity to meet any external challenge. Within masses of interaction, the system as a whole can become energised and sensitive to fluctuation, continually operating with unfolding configurations and a multiplicity of possibilities (Osberg, 2008). This suggests that for school self-evaluation to be successfully implemented, it must begin with a 'bottom-up' community approach. An internally motivated evaluation culture can occur (Mann and Smith, 2013) if staff are perceived as team members in a school with shared objectives (Potter et al., 2002) rather than individual classroom teachers (Schildkamp et al., 2012). The more staff members are facilitated to engage in collaborative professional conversations regarding school self-evaluation, the more such interactions have the potential to increase the motivation, interest and positivity of staff towards the school self-evaluation process, thereby improving its implementation and potential success. However, I led school self-evaluation in a structure of hierarchal compliance, with a quick-fix, go-it-alone approach to shield my staff from any burden, limiting any possibility of collaborative benefit or meaningful organisational change. The voice of school staff was simply not sought. In this action plan however, staff members played a fully active part in the school self-evaluation process, in partnership with school leadership. My findings suggested that this approach had a very positive influence on the outcome of initiating and implementing a school self-evaluation cycle in our school. The data showed a general consensus among school staff, that collaborating as a collective and playing

a fully active part in the school self-evaluation and decision-making process, had a positive effect on their attitude towards and their experience of ‘doing’ school self-evaluation in our school.

7.4.3 Information flow and feedback loops

According to complexity theory, information, knowledge and feedback are passed on when people interact with each other (O’Day, 2002). This lies at the heart of any learning and change process within a complex system, such as a school education system (Morrison, 2002). However, using this theory O’Day (2002) identifies major flaws with school self-evaluation as a government mandated policy. School improvement, she argues, is premised on a flat command structure aimed at fostering growth. Members within the school are seen as a source of information, with valuable insights into their own unique setting and context (O’Day, 2002). In contrast, school accountability is premised on a hierarchal structure, aimed at fostering compliance, where members are seen as recipients of externally mandated ‘*one-size-fits all*’ rules and programs, delivered in a ‘*top-down*’ flow of information (O’Day, 2002). This top-down flow of policy information from the DES as the knowledgeable expert treats staff members as mere recipients of information playing a passive role, instead of valuable sources of information in their own right. Such a top-down transmissive model of information flow, can result in schools reacting to directions imposed from above and outside the school in a form of compliance, more so than a meaningful reflection on internal practice (O’Day, 2002; Hall and Noyes, 2009; McNamara and O’Hara, 2012). In Ireland, this has been compounded even further by the lack of a loop mechanism for school staff to feedback to the policymakers responsible for school self-evaluation policy that they were tasked to implement. Contact between the two has been minimal. The only training given to staff has been through DES guidelines (DES, 2016), in-service feedback from two members of staff, an inspectorate-built website and an advisory visit with a school inspector (O’Brien et al., 2019) which data showed was not meaningful for some. According to complexity theory, staff members receiving information in such a passive and complaint way, may not lead to learning and change (Morrison, 2002; Bower, 2006). To ensure the success of school self-evaluation, it was important to ensure that staff members had plenty of meaningful opportunities to interact, discuss and reflect on teaching and learning matters collectively, with an input into all decision-making relating to improvement and change at whole school level (Leitch and Day, 2000). In addition, resourcing the project in terms of professional and personal support such as training, access to information, substitute cover and operational manuals, was imperative.

7.4.4 Change, adaptability, co-evolution, self-organisation and emergence

Implementing change in schools is a complex process (Austin and Harkins, 2008; Guhn, 2009; Given et al., 2010; Craig, 2012; Hannay and Earl, 2012; Williams et al., 2012). In complex systems such as schools, planned interventions do not always lead to predictable and intended outcomes (Keshavarz et al., 2010). When there is a change in conditions, school members can make adaptive changes without any imposition or planning and emerge unified with a coherent best fit for their context (Osberg, 2008; Fenwick, 2012). The findings showed that the staff did have an appetite for school self-evaluation and acknowledged its benefits for improving our school. Even though it wasn't popular, they could clearly see its merits when approached in a collaborative manner. This was a noticeable change in attitude following the implementation of the first set of action strategies. Yet despite this, seventy percent of the staff members felt the DES approach to school self-evaluation was meaningless, irrelevant, and out of touch with reality on the ground. The fact that some school staff found school self-evaluation both meaningless and irrelevant was undoubtedly going to have major consequences for the successful implementation of the process in our school. In addition, the interplay of other components within our school, such as the perceived lack of time, training opportunities, and resources, was informing the emerging collective behaviour among staff members and negatively affecting the potential success of school self-evaluation in our school (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Staff members were prioritising and making productive choices by complying with their mandated duties in a contrived way, just to satisfy an external governing body (O'Day, 2002). To address these concerns, the staff members organised extra support for themselves, such as time and resources. However, true to the unpredictable nature of a complex system, despite all the actions taken, the data showed the negative attitude of the staff members to the version of school self-evaluation put forward by the DES, did not change. The staff emerged strongly resistant to implementing the process. In complex systems, such as schools, planned interventions do not always lead to predictable and intended outcomes (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Some staff members even went as far as to say that the time carved out for them to engage more meaningfully in the process as a collective, was actually valuable time wasted. Implementing change in schools is a complex process, even when staff members are provided with the time, and support they need to do it well (Austin and Harkins, 2008; Guhn, 2009; Pescarmona, 2010; Given et al., 2010; Craig, 2012; Hannay and Earl, 2012; Williams et al., 2012). A school's general behaviour therefore, is the result of the interplay of multiple factors,

and is accordingly an emergent phenomenon that is not easily or fully predictable (Osberg, 2008).

7.5 Summary of findings

To summarise, staff members acknowledged the benefits of self-evaluation in improving their school. However, staff reported a lack of resources in the practical implementation of the school self-evaluation approach mandated by the DES such as time, information and support. This caused an increase in workload and anxiety for school members and divided opinions on the purpose of school self-evaluation, namely whether it was a process of improvement or accountability. This was having a negative impact on their interest and enthusiasm for the process. To ensure the success of the project going forward therefore, there was a need for clear and practical expectations regarding the implementation of school self-evaluation. It was also necessary to give adequate time for school members to talk and reflect collectively as they implemented the process in our school. In addition, resourcing the project in terms of professional and personal support such as training, access to information, substitute cover and operational manuals, was imperative.

To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, staff members tackled the issues of time, information and support in an action plan, in the belief that this would increase the level of interest and enthusiasm for school self-evaluation amongst staff members. As a result, the evidence showed a positive shift in outlook amongst staff members to certain aspects of the process, such as increased levels of collaboration, autonomy, decision-making, reflection and discussion. However, the data showed school staff to be complying with the external mandate of school self-evaluation in a somewhat contrived way.

Interviews unearthed a perception held by some staff members of a convergent relationship between the role of the inspectorate and school self-evaluation and accountability and improvement. Staff members engaged in school self-evaluation believed they were doing the job of the inspectorate. They saw it as an added thing to do in their already busy workload. The reconnaissance data showed this perception to be problematic as it was having an impact on their attitude towards the implementation of the school self-evaluation process in our school. Our action plan involved making staff members familiar with DES school self-evaluation guidelines. The guidelines (DES, 2016) clearly described school self-evaluation and external evaluation as two different, but complementary processes, as they both focus on improvement. The guidelines stated that the school self-evaluation process gave schools a means of

identifying and addressing priorities, whilst external evaluation gave the inspectorate a means to inspect and assess the school's teaching and learning practices, taking into account the schools' engagement with self-evaluation and its outcomes. However, based on the data gathered from staff in this reconnaissance phase, it was clear that some school members saw both processes as interchangeable. They saw no difference between external and internal evaluation. They were seen as one and the same. All the inner beliefs, attitudes and emotions associated by most staff members with inspection were applied to school self-evaluation. This was problematic as both international and Irish research show school staff in general, having a negative disposition towards school inspection (O'Connor, 2001; Oluwatomi, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Ofsted, 2019). Also problematic, was the absence amongst staff of any collective understanding of what school self-evaluation was. The actions taken to clearly outline and define the distinct purpose of school self-evaluation to staff members, had clearly not succeeded.

Going forward, it was important to show staff members that school self-evaluation was so much more than a form of inspection. I needed to develop with staff a cohesive understanding of where school self-evaluation fitted alongside all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school and to demonstrate how it was basically similar in operation at macro level, as the internal classroom self-evaluation they were doing at micro level in their daily practice.

It was also important to maintain the interest and positivity of staff members to collaborate together and be involved in all decision-making. My findings suggested that the nature and strength of interactions between staff members had a very positive influence on the outcome of initiating and implementing a school self-evaluation cycle in our school. Interaction such as this seemed to increase the flow of information, knowledge and feedback between school staff, raising their exposure to variety, innovation and creativity, in turn creating new possibilities and opportunities for learning, adaption and evolution. It was in these forums that staff members explored diverse individual interpretation, in attempts to reach a consensus of interpretation at whole school level. Complexity theory would suggest that members in a school community need to develop this internal interactive capacity to meet any external challenge. For this to become a reality however, school leaders need to resource and coordinate this community of collaborative endeavour, giving all staff members full agency and input into any decision-making related to school improvement and change. In simple terms, the more staff members are facilitated to engage in collaborative professional conversations regarding school self-evaluation, the more such interactions have the potential to increase the motivation,

interest and positivity of staff towards the school self-evaluation process, thereby improving its implementation and potential success. It was important therefore, that there were continued opportunities for staff to interact meaningfully, to collectively discuss and reflect on teaching and learning. It was imperative for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, that it was a collegial and collaborative process with input from all staff into any decision-making. Every opportunity needed to be taken to show the positive benefits that such collective actions taken at whole school level had for classroom practice and vice versa.

7.6 The next step

In my review of the literature, I came upon an article by Mutch (2013) which described a process undertaken in New Zealand to develop a collaborative school evaluation approach which balanced the strengths and weaknesses of both internal and external perspectives. At its core was self-evaluation. Similar to Ireland's approach to school self-evaluation (DES, 2016), it provided schools in New Zealand with an externally mandated self-evaluation framework. Mutch (2013) argues however, that the methodology of evaluation was unfamiliar and imposed on schools and in the end required more supports to enable the schools undertake the process. More interestingly however, was Mutch's (2013) contention that for school self-evaluation to succeed, there was a need to resolve the tensions between improvement and accountability. This resonated with the findings in this action research study.

To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation, a collaborative project involving a series of workshops was launched in 2008 between the New Zealand school inspectorate and school stakeholders to enhance school self-evaluation. School stakeholders came away with three tasks from these workshops. The first was to come to an agreed statement with their staff and school community of what self-evaluation meant in the context of their school. The second was to collate and organise all the evaluative activities that were already undertaken in their school in an attempt to show that self-evaluation was not a new added-on activity. It existed in much of the work already being done by schools. The third was to graphically organise their evaluation plan in a coherent way to portray an internal-external continuum, at the same time showing an accountability and improvement focus to explain to staff why they were doing the evaluation activities that they were doing. It also allowed schools to discuss where they thought much of their evaluation energy as a school staff was being spent and where they might need to refocus. In my experience, these activities had never been done in the roll-out of school self-evaluation in Irish primary schools. The only direct contact staff members have had with the

creators of the school self-evaluation policy they have been tasked to implement has been through DES guidelines, an inspectorate-built website, an advisory visit from a school inspector and in-service feedback from two members of staff. In a national survey of Irish primary school principals (O'Hara et al., 2016), approximately seventy-eight percent said both they and their staff needed more training on how to conduct school self-evaluation. No opportunity was ever afforded to school staff to train together and learn how to 'do' school self-evaluation, with the exception of two members of staff (O'Brien et al. 2019). Nor was an opportunity afforded to staff to collectively discuss and reflect on 'why' we do school self-evaluation and where it fits within our current school practice. Findings from this action research have shown this non-contact approach to be problematic.

As a result of the process described in Mutch (2013), an OECD report (Nusche et al., 2012) found that the earlier apprehension of 'inspection' by schools in New Zealand, was removed or at least attenuated and that the generally positive response to evaluation by school staff could be explained by its non-threatening nature. Before I gave the article to staff for analysis and comment, I discussed it with my critical friend. She found the article easy to read, easy to understand and very relevant. She felt it would be quite accessible and user friendly for school staff. She said it would be important to keep this in mind going forward, considering that staff members had only just begun to settle into a new school year with their pupils amidst a plethora of local pandemic restrictions. Staff members as a result were both anxious and extremely busy. According to my critical friend, any actions going forward in this research project, had to be mindful of that fact and not over burden staff.

A copy of the article by Mutch (2013) was sent to staff via email for comment and analysis, with a due date of late September 2020. At a follow up meeting with staff members, three strong ideas emerged from their engagement with the article. This feedback formed the basis of a possible action plan. Unsurprisingly, their ideas resembled those described in the article i.e., to develop a collaborative school evaluation approach for our school, which defined and balanced the relationship between internal and external perspectives. The two main ideas were as follows:

1. As a school we should create an agreed definition of what school self-evaluation means to us in the context of our own school.

In this action, staff were opening our school to change. If our school remained resistant to an external force, such as DES school self-evaluation policy, our opportunity to experience

variety, innovation and creativity would be limited (Fidan and Balci, 2017). The diversity of our staff and their diverse interpretation of that policy were there to be explored (Cilliers, 1998; Morrison, 2002). Complexity theory suggests that such diversity and dynamism among members puts the system in a state of uncertainty, continually operating with unfolding configurations and a multiplicity of possibilities (Osberg, 2008). This generates the resilience a system needs to sustain itself throughout both challenges and losses. As diverse and dynamic individuals interact within a system, information and resources are exchanged. The more frequent and powerful these interactions are, the more influence they are likely to have on the behaviour of school members and in turn, collective behaviour patterns at whole-school level (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). It is here that new relationships and new structures are forged causing the school to evolve (Morrison, 2002). This suggested that for school self-evaluation to be implemented successfully it must begin with a ‘bottom-up’ community approach. This diversity gave our school great dynamism (Morrison, 2002; Keshavarz et al, 2010; Fenwick, 2012; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Fidan and Balci, 2017). As leader of the school, it was important that I now stepped back and allowed staff to interact and self-organise in a community of collaborative endeavour, with full agency and input into all decision-making related to the creation of a shared definition of school self-evaluation (Osberg, 2008; Day and Sammons, 2014; Fidan & Öztürk, 2015). This interaction would motivate the increased sharing of information and interpretation among staff members. It would stimulate new possibilities in our collective attempt to reach whole school consensus on what school self-evaluation means in the context of our own school (Leitch and Day, 2000; O’Day, 2002).

2. As a school we should list and organise into a graph all the general activities that are undertaken in our school for accountability and improvement, acknowledging why we do them and for whom

According to complexity theorists, everyone within our school community is interconnected within a nested network system (Holland, 1998; Cilliers, 2001; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). Within this system there are other nested sub-systems such as individuals, classes and year groups. On a macro level however, our school is also nested within supra systems such as the DES. As part of this particular supra system our school is in a continuous state of dynamic interaction where change is a constant, occurring with different frequency and intensity (Morrison, 2002; Osberg, 2008; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). When there is a change in policy, such as school self-evaluation, schools can choose to make adaptive

changes and evolve to ensure a best fit. School members as a diverse, but yet dependent collective, can randomly organise themselves and emerge with the best fit for their context (Osberg, 2008; Fenwick, 2012). If on the other hand however, a school chooses not to listen, adapt or contribute to policy, it runs the risk of becoming stagnant and ineffective as an organisation (Morrison, 2002). To adapt and survive as a school, with the ability to feedback into and influence the evolution and emergence of future policy (Osberg, 2008), we needed to know our context and acknowledge our place within a nested system. Making a list of all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school, knowing why we do them and for whom, represented the need of our school to be able to communicate and explain, in graph format, our evaluation plan, to all those we are interconnected with as part of a nested network.

Chapter 8 – Action Research Cycle 2

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe action research cycle two in this research. This involved planning and implementing the action steps necessary to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school.

8.2 Planning

At an online meeting in early October 2020, staff members discussed at length the action steps needed to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Findings from the review (i.e., reconnaissance) of the first phase of action research showed staff members to have diverse opinions on the purpose of school self-evaluation and its place in relation to all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school.

Two ideas emerged in the reconnaissance phase to frame this action plan and address these issues. The first idea generated by staff members represented their desire to create an agreed statement of what school self-evaluation meant within the context of their school. To implement school self-evaluation successfully, staff members needed clarity on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and what was expected of them (McNamara and O'Hara, 2005; Ryan et al., 2007; Schildkamp, 2007; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2015). This required an unambiguous definition of school self-evaluation that was meaningful, free of confusion, easy to work with and both agreeable and understood by staff members. The hope here was this would help school staff to take ownership of the process and engage more effectively with it (MacBeath, 1999; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2009; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015). However, findings from the last reconnaissance phase showed staff members having no collective understanding of school self-evaluation or how it differed in relation to other evaluation activities undertaken in their school. At an individual level, the evidence showed staff members to have diverse interpretations regarding the purpose of school self-evaluation. These ranged from being one of improvement, identifying weaknesses, whole school planning, autonomy, professional development to recognising strengths and accountability. Whilst it is typical for diverse members within an organisation such as a school to have diverse interpretations of an external mandate (Keshavarz et al., 2010), it is problematic when a government expects their policies to be performed exactly as they were designed (Skerritt et al., 2021). The findings from this action research study resonated with Terhart's

(2013) claim that the culture and convictions of school staff and the culture and convictions of reformers remain significantly apart.

One of the reasons for this according to the literature is that the language and theoretical thinking used in evaluation initiatives can prevent the very people who are responsible for school self-evaluation in the field, from engaging with it (Simons, 2013). However, this problem can be addressed. One prerequisite is a strong staff commitment to school self-evaluation (OECD, 2013). Empirical evidence tells us that policy implementation processes are far more effective if they involve clear communication (MacBeath, 1999) and involve shared objectives amongst staff (Potter et al., 2002). This secures a commitment and a positive attitude amongst staff members to school self-evaluation as a meaningful exercise (Schildkamp, 2007; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015). This encourages both staff ownership and staff engagement. For these reasons, it was imperative for the improvement and overall success of our school self-evaluation practice and to ensure staff commitment, that staff members as a collective came to a shared understanding, using clear and simple language, of what school self-evaluation meant for our school.

There was much sharing of ideas among staff members on how this could be done. Agreement was finally reached amongst school staff that the best way to do this was for each staff member to source and share with each other, any information they could find which described best practice and gave clarity on the practicalities of school self-evaluation, and what was expected of them. Using this knowledge, we aimed to reach consensus on a definition of school self-evaluation specific to our own school context. Staff members agreed that all school staff should be invited to be involved in the creation of this statement and that it should be completed by the end of October 2020. This planned action was labelled 'Action 1'.

Findings from the last reconnaissance phase also showed that staff members had no clear understanding of how school self-evaluation differed in relation to other evaluation activities undertaken in our school, such as inspection. This was problematic as international research shows most school staff in general to have a negative bias towards school inspection (O'Connor, 2001; Oluwatomi, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Ofsted, 2019). Findings from the first phase of this action research showed this bias having a negative impact on staff member's attitudes towards the school self-evaluation process.

However, this problem can be addressed according to Wikeley et al. (2002), if school self-evaluation is coordinated with other school activities and this is communicated effectively to

everyone (MacBeath, 1999). For this reason, it was imperative for the improvement and authenticity of our school self-evaluation practice that staff acknowledged all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school and understood the part they played in them.

Staff members shared many ideas on how we could do this and at one of our regular meetings consensus was finally reached on systematically listing all of the evaluation activities undertaken in our school. This list would categorise and portray all the activities into a coherent diagram showing who carries them out, why and for whom. This diagram would then be used to communicate and explain to everyone, in as clear and efficient a way as possible, all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school. This planned action was labelled ‘Action 2’. Staff members agreed that all school staff should be invited to be involved in the creation of this diagram and that it was to be completed by January 2021. This concluded the project’s planning phase. Keeping the reader in mind, the following is a summary chart of the agreed actions undertaken as part of this second action research cycle.

Table 8.1 Action research cycle 2: Action plan

How can we improve the process of school self-evaluation in our school?					
Action Plan					
What will we do?	Action number	Why are we doing it?	Who will do it?	When will we do it?	How will we measure our success? (i.e., what criteria do we believe will show the impact of our work?)
Create an agreed definition of school self-evaluation.	1	to increase the flow of information and shared interpretation between members within our own context, with the aim of reaching consensus	Principal and staff	Immediately	An agreed statement of what school self-evaluation means in our school will be adopted into our school self-evaluation policy.

List and organise into a graph all the general activities undertaken in our school for accountability and improvement.	2	to better understand how school self-evaluation differs in relation to other evaluation activities undertaken in our school and to communicate and explain in as clear and efficient a way as possible our evaluation activities to everyone	Principal and staff	By January 2021	All the evaluative activities already undertaken in our school will be graphically illustrated and adopted into our school self-evaluation policy.
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8.3 Implementation

8.3.1 Action step 1: Create an agreed definition of school self-evaluation.

8.3.1.1 Implementing the action.

Earlier reconnaissance data showed a wide diversity of opinion on the topic of school self-evaluation amongst staff members. To reach agreement on any definition of school self-evaluation, we needed a mechanism that allowed any collective decisions to be made in an effective and efficient way (Kacprzyk et al. 2020). I asked staff members to consider using a decision-making technique called ‘multi-voting’ (Tague, 2005). Multi-voting is a group decision-making technique that allows the most popular options from a list to be selected, in order to get an idea about the consensus of the group. I saw the technique being used at a school leadership training seminar in NUI Maynooth to reduce a long list of items to a more manageable number, by means of a structured series of votes. The result is a shorter list, identifying what is important to the group. Multi-voting, in general, allows the items that are favoured by all, to rise to the top (Tague, 2005). This approach was in keeping with the action research methodology of the project, based on active participation, open-ended objectives and high levels of commitment and active learning (Bell et al., 2004), with the expectation that any improvement strategies would be developed by the school members themselves as a form of

collaborative intervention (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Bana, 2010; Klenowski and Woods, 2013; Walters, 2014; Jacobs, 2016). To begin, various definitions of school self-evaluation were gathered by school staff as a community task from various sources including books, journals, DES policy documents and the internet. They are all listed with their source in Appendix 25. A total of nineteen definitions of school self-evaluation were gathered by staff members. The plan was for staff members to reduce this list of nineteen definitions to three definitions via online multi-voting. The top definitions of school self-evaluation would then be combined into one definition by consensus.

The nineteen definitions were compiled into an online survey (Appendix 26) and sent to staff in early October 2020, with a due date of mid-October 2020. Staff were requested to select from the list the three definitions of school self-evaluation that they most agreed with. Staff were not required to justify their decisions. The survey received fourteen responses out of fourteen. The content of the online survey and the full results can be seen in Appendix 27.

At this stage we did not engage in any analysis or discussion of the choices made by staff members. Our main focus was to narrow this list of definitions down by identifying and assigning priority to the highest ranked items, with a high degree of staff agreement. The top three votes were shared amongst five definitions. These top ranked definitions were compiled into an online survey one last time and sent to staff with a due date of late October 2020. Staff were asked to select the one definition of school self-evaluation that they most agreed with. The survey received twelve responses out of fourteen. Two staff members from the original fourteen participants were now on leave and this made engagement with the project more difficult for them. The content of the online survey and the results can be seen in Appendix 28.

An analysis of the definitions chosen by staff showed they had both differences and similarities. Some gave a narrow and brief definition of school self-evaluation, whilst others were lengthier and broader in scope. For the purposes of analysis, I underlined and extracted every key word and phrase. I then assigned these key words and phrases a description title, each presenting and encapsulating a recurring aspect of school self-evaluation. These descriptions were then analysed and combined into overarching themes (see *Table 8.2*).

Table 8.2 Definitions of school self-evaluation thematic analysis

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation Thematic Analysis				
	Definition (With extracted key words and phrases in bold)	Themes	Percentage of staff votes in agreement	Overall ranking
A	<p>“SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”</p> <p>(Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.51)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • Collection of evidence • Making judgements and decisions • Goals, targets, strategies and programs • Reflection on practice • Systematic and transparent • Pupil development • Teacher development • School development • Improvement 	17%	3
B	<p>“School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”</p> <p>(Hofman et al., 2009, cited in O’Brien et al., 2019, pg.2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • Quality • Teacher development • Pupil development • School development • Improvement 	0%	4

<p>C</p>	<p>“<i>School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that <u>schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves</u>’. School Self-Evaluation (SSE) involves <u>examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture</u> and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to <u>improve student outcomes</u>. It also provides an opportunity for the <u>whole school community</u>, including learners, parents and all staff, <u>to reflect</u> on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key <u>improvement</u> strategies from the previous <u>planning cycle</u>”</i></p> <p>(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005, pg.239; Smith, 2012, cited in Setlalentoa, 2014, pg.525)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • Making judgements and decisions • Teacher development • Pupil development • School development • Whole school community • Reflection on practice • Improvement • Cycle of planning 	<p>58%</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>D</p>	<p>“<i>a procedure involving <u>systematic information gathering</u> that is <u>initiated by the school itself</u> and intends <u>to assess the functioning of the school</u> and the <u>attainment of its educational goals</u> for purposes of supporting <u>decision making</u> and learning and for fostering <u>school improvement as a whole</u>”</i></p> <p>(Schildkamp, 2007, pg.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic and transparent • Collection of evidence • School development • Goals, targets, strategies and programs • Making judgements and decisions • Internal • Improvement 	<p>25%</p>	<p>2</p>

E	<p>“Self-evaluation is a <u>process of reflection</u> on practice, made <u>systematic and transparent</u>, with the aim of <u>improving pupil, professional and organisational learning</u>” (MacBeath, 2005, pg.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on practice • Systematic and transparent • Pupil development • Teacher development • School development • Improvement 	0%	4
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All the definitions chosen by staff, displayed strong references to school self-evaluation being a systematic internal process of improvement, which used reflection and judgement to develop pupils, teachers and the school, as a whole. Interestingly, the word ‘quality’, appeared only once in the definition sharing the lowest ranking. The literature shows quality can be multi-faceted, contested and never fully representable (Stake and Schwandt, 2006) and therefore, difficult to define. Also of note were the strong references to the technical aspects of school self-evaluation in the definitions ranked second and third i.e., the systematic process of collecting evidence, making decisions, planning and setting targets and implementing them. This was significant and obviously an important issue for staff, in terms of school self-evaluation practice. It suggested that school staff wanted clarity on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and what was expected of them. Another salient aspect was the reference to ‘community’, which was mentioned in the definition with the most votes. Staff members seemed to favour a definition of school self-evaluation in which the school community played an active role, with potential development benefits for all. This was significant, and up until this research, the school community had only played a passive role in the process, due to my assumed hierarchal leadership style.

As can be seen from Table 8.2 above, definition ‘C’ gained fifty-eight percent of the votes. However, that said, this definition was not agreeable to approximately forty percent of respondents. There seemed to be no definitive winner. This was problematic. I discussed the results with my critical friend. We both agreed that the exercise had been very worthwhile in encouraging staff to actively engage and take ownership of the process. However, the end goal of the exercise was to give clarity to staff members on the practicalities of school self-

evaluation and what was expected of them, by creating an unambiguous definition of the process that was meaningful, free of confusion, easy to work with and both agreeable, and understood by all staff. We felt it would be therefore foolish to ignore over forty percent of the school staff. One disadvantage of multi-voting as a decision-making method, according to the literature, is that it does not guarantee consensus (Tague, 2005). My critical friend and I both agreed that we had gone as far as we could go using the multi-voting approach. An online meeting was organised to update staff of this outcome. Staff members agreed that it would be better at this point to take a more nuanced approach, and amalgamate the themes which resonated with school staff, into a bespoke definition agreeable to all.

The plan was to use the definition with the most votes and its key themes, as the bedrock of our agreed definition of school self-evaluation. In addition, strong key themes from other definitions were to be interwoven to give it strength. Whilst the goal was to come to an agreeable statement that was meaningful, clear, user-friendly, flexible and well documented for school staff, equally it needed to be reliable and valid, grounded in theory and best practice from scholarly research (Chapman and Sammons, 2013). It was important that we got the balance right between what we felt were good practical solutions and the evidence-based descriptions of best practice described in research literature (Haroon et al., 2015). This was important to assist staff members in making better decisions and achieving better learning outcomes for both them and their pupils. We know that studies into the effects of school self-evaluation have shown it to improve school quality in terms of improved pupil achievement levels (Campbell and Levin, 2009; McNaughton et al., 2012) but that this is dependent on school staff being committed and positively disposed towards it (MacBeath, 1999; Meuret and Morlaix, 2003). However, if staff members are included and involved as a team (Schildkamp et al., 2012; Mann and Smith, 2013) in all decision-making (Rozenholtz, 1991; Day and Sammons, 2014) and school self-evaluation is implemented with clear communication (MacBeath, 1999) and shared objectives amongst staff (Potter et al., 2002), studies show this to encourage both staff engagement and ownership of the process. Therefore, it was imperative, for the improved implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, to get both the definition and the process of reaching consensus on it right. This entailed a step-by-step process of drafting, ensuring there were appropriate references to all key words and phrases and continuous feedback from staff members on each draft. The final draft agreed by staff was as follows:

*“School Self-Evaluation is a **cyclical** procedure we do to ourselves, by ourselves and for ourselves. It provides an opportunity for the **whole school community**, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and **systematically gather information** to examine, **assess and make decisions** on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster **quality, improved teaching and learning** and **enhanced professional and organisational performance**”.*

This definition made strong references to all the aspects of school self-evaluation identified by staff members as important. It described a cyclical and systematic internal process of quality improvement, involving the whole community, based on gathering evidence, reflection and making judgements to develop pupils, staff and the school as a whole. It also stated school self-evaluation was being done to improve quality within the school in terms of pupil, staff and school outcomes. Lastly, it outlined that active responsibility for school self-evaluation lay with the whole community. This was a welcome move away from it being my sole responsibility as principal of the school, where everyone else played a passive role in the process. The literature shows that such an approach encourages ownership and engagement in the process amongst staff (Parr and Timperley, 2013; Chapman and Sammons, 2013). This shift from me leading school self-evaluation, to them leading it and taking ownership as a community, was important and represented a significant and strategic shift in emphasis over the course of this action research.

This draft definition was sent to staff for final sign off in early November 2020 in the form of an online survey for their approval and feedback (Appendix 29). The survey asked staff members for their thoughts on the definition and if they agreed with it. The survey also asked staff members had they any comments, thoughts or ideas on the way we reached the definition. The survey received seven responses. I raised my concern at this low response with my critical friend. She believed it was due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. All staff were religiously following and monitoring public health safety guidelines in their classrooms. As a result, staff members were both nervous and exhausted on a daily basis. Upon reflection, it was therefore no surprise to me that at that specific point in time, this study had lost some of its urgency. Another factor at play was staff leave. During the research for example, four members of staff went on leave and did not return. However, they all asked to be kept informed of progress and responded with feedback, when possible, but not always. From this point on in the study, I

deemed it important to continuously monitor the response rate and consult with my critical friend and staff members to check for any concerns or issues.

Out of seven respondents, six agreed with the definition. One respondent however took issue with the phrase “*we do to ourselves, by ourselves and for ourselves*” (S6 respondent 2). In the opinion of this respondent, school self-evaluation was a process “*driven by an external force*” (S6 respondent 2) which schools had no choice but to submit to. This was true. In 2012, school self-evaluation was put on a formal footing by the DES as a government mandated, whole school development process. Prior to this schools were only required to produce general written reports and establish and maintain systems to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, but with no requirement for annual productivity targets or specific outputs (O’Brien et al., 2015). The respondent also referred with fondness to this more informal arrangement saying “*schools by their nature are centres of continued analysis, with a view to enhancing outcomes, but in a more informal fashion*” (S6 respondent 2).

This more informal approach is supported by Brady (2016) who argues that the government mandated school self-evaluation guidelines introduce a level of prescription never before seen in an Irish school improvement process. She argues that the 2012 document is so prescriptive that it leaves very little room for the teachers own self to be present in the evaluation or for their own criteria for good teaching to be developed or even considered, making what is supposed to be a spontaneous and self-generated process into a bureaucratic, externally produced, standard driven procedure. Staff members in this study saw the DES as an external force making them do added work in the form of inspecting their own school. This was problematic. The prevalence of this perception amongst several staff was having a negative impact on their attitude towards school self-evaluation and its successful implementation. It was important that our collectively agreed definition acknowledged school self-evaluation was not a form of inspection by stealth driven by an external force.

After much reflection and consultation with my critical friend and the teacher who raised the concern, it was decided therefore, to replace the phrase with the name of our school. This, we felt, would better reflect school self-evaluation being an internally owned process in our school driven by the staff within. This was a significant and important step forward in creating within school staff a sense of ownership of the school self-evaluation process. The opportunities afforded to staff members in our action plan to interact in a spirit of collegiality and

collaboration, and to collectively discuss and make decisions regarding a shared meaning of school self-evaluation, was bearing fruit.

This draft definition (*Table 8.3*) was compiled into an online survey (Appendix 30) and distributed to staff in mid- November 2020, with a due date of late November 2020. The survey received nine responses.

Table 8.3 An agreed definition of what school self-evaluation means to us for our school

An agreed definition of what “School Self-Evaluation” means to us for our school
<i>“In [our school name] school self-evaluation is a cyclical procedure, which provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and systematically gather information to examine, assess and make decisions on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster quality, improved teaching and learning and enhanced professional and organisational performance”</i>

Out of nine respondents, all nine agreed with the final draft definition. Eight respondents had no further comments, thoughts or ideas on the agreed definition and wrote ‘*pass*’.

All staff members were involved in the creation of this collective definition to address the absence amongst school staff of a collective understanding of what school self-evaluation was. This first action was enacted by staff members to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. It aimed to give clarity to staff members on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and what was expected of them, by creating an unambiguous definition of school self-evaluation that was meaningful, free of confusion, easy to work with and both agreeable and understood by all staff.

8.3.1.2 Monitoring implementation of the action and its effects.

The process devised by staff to reach this definition was generally well received. One respondent found the process “*to be clear*” (S7 respondent 6). In terms of giving clarity on how things are done for example, one respondent said “*the definition is clear and understood*” (S7 respondent 4), whilst another stated “*I think the above statement gives a very clear definition of what school self-evaluation means to us and takes the mystery out of it*” (S7 respondent 1). This clarity was important. For example, one respondent believed that having such an agreed definition “*is essential for the development and improvement of the school*” (S7 respondent 5). However, it must be acknowledged that one respondent in feedback said that ‘parents’ were

not specifically mentioned (S7 respondent 6). Yet in the statement they were. This begged the question, was the statement read with vigour by staff members or was this just a simple oversight. Whilst the agreed definition was a tool to provide staff members with clarity on the practicalities of school self-evaluation and what was expected of them, its usefulness going forward would need to be measured against the success of any future implementation of school self-evaluation in our school (Ryan et al., 2007; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2009). In terms of ownership, staff members positively embraced the opportunity to give their input into an agreed definition of what school self-evaluation meant to them in their own school. One respondent said *“it enabled everyone to voice an opinion without getting distracted or some voices taking over”* (S7 respondent 8) whilst another stated that the agreed definition was reached *“by coming together as a whole school staff to organise and improve on strategies to best suit our role in the school and the future learning of the children”* (S7 respondent 5). The opportunities given to staff members for whole school reflection and collective input into all decision-making regarding the creation of a meaningful definition seemed to have a positive impact on their attitude towards school self-evaluation too. One respondent stated *“the manner in which the statement has been reached allows for all voices to be heard, ultimately promoting buy-in from all”* (S7 respondent 1).

8.3.2 Action step 2: List and organise into a graph all the general activities undertaken in our school for accountability and improvement.

8.3.2.1 Implementing the action.

To list and organise into a graph all the general activities undertaken in our school for accountability and improvement, we used the four-quadrant evaluation framework (*Figure 8.1*), described earlier in Mutch (2013), where each evaluation activity is placed within one of the four following quadrants based on their purpose (i.e., improvement or accountability) and who conducted it (i.e., internally or externally):

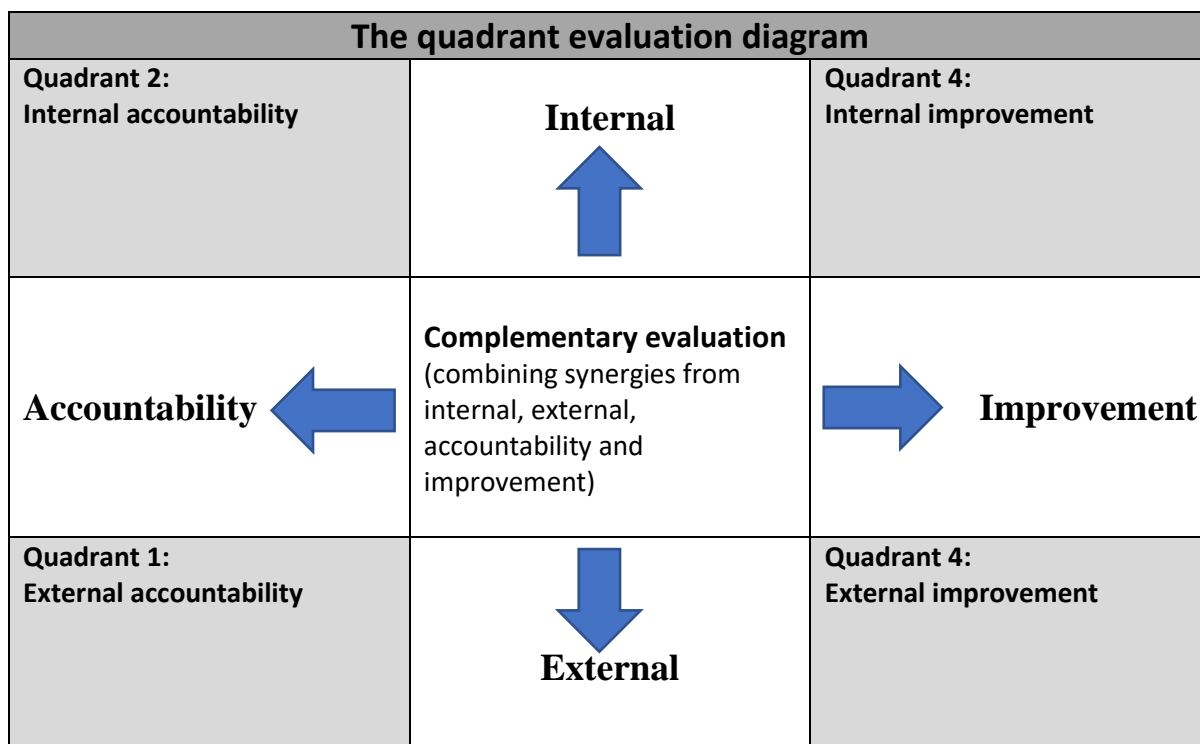


Figure 8.1 Four-quadrant evaluation diagram

Quadrant 1: External accountability relates to school evaluations that are externally mandated, implemented and reported upon e.g., audit, assurance, compliance.

Quadrant 2: Internal accountability is where evaluations are selected and conducted by the school for internal or external accountability purposes e.g., self-assessment, self-accountability, self-inspection.

Quadrant 3: Internal improvement is where formative evaluations are selected and conducted by the school for the purposes of improvement. e.g., self-evaluation, self-review, action research.

Quadrant 4: External improvement is where a developmental or improvement focused school evaluation is conducted by an outside agency or person. e.g., external evaluation, external development review.

Mutch (2013) describes in great detail how this four-quadrant framework was used to list and categorise all the evaluation activities undertaken by schools each year in New Zealand. It was an attempt in New Zealand to show that school self-evaluation was not a new ‘added-on’ activity, but that it existed in much of the work already being done in their schools. According to Valli and Buese (2007), many teachers express concern at the time required to engage in

school self-evaluation and the additional workload involved. They say the work of school self-evaluation is an extra burden adding to their workload (Hall and Noyes, 2009). According to Vanhoof et al. (2009) if staff members experience school self-evaluation as something imposed on them, this can contribute to it being seen as more of an obligation than anything else, the principal objective being compliancy rather than improvement. To prevent such confusion, my staff members wanted to see how school self-evaluation differed from all the other evaluation activities undertaken in their school, understanding why they were doing it and for whom. This was important, as O'Brien et al. (2015) like Vanhoof et al. (2009) believe, one precondition which favours a successful school self-evaluation is achieving an awareness that it is both meaningful and worthwhile.

To begin, the basis of each quadrant was compiled into an online survey and sent to staff in mid-November 2020, with a due date of late November 2020. Staff were requested to answer four questions. If they could not think of anything to contribute, they had to write the word 'pass'. The survey received nine responses. The content of the online survey and the results can be seen in Appendix 31. What follows is a sample (Table 8.4).

Table 8.4 Evaluation activities undertaken in our school and why, according to our school staff

Question 1	
What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that are driven or conducted externally for accountability purposes? (If you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')	
Respondent	Answer
4	Pass
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspectorate advisory teams / individual enhancing progress of whole school development • PDST supports guidance • Comparing national figures of child development / statistics to current school levels etc.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning • School self-evaluation • Special Education Needs and inclusion • Mentoring and Droichead process • Monitoring attendance • Curricular changes • Active and green school flags

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vetting procedures • Employment • Data protection – GDPR • Health and safety • Child protection and welfare • NEPS • Anti-bullying procedures • Legislation • FSSU
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit union quiz
9	Pass
Question 2	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for self-accountability purposes? <i>(If you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>
Respondent	Answer
4	Pass
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual teacher self-reflection • Continuous Professional Development • Whole School Self-Evaluation • Staff meetings • Great communication between colleagues • Planning
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of and for learning, teaching and learning activities
Question 3	What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for school self-improvement purposes? <i>(If you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>
Respondent	Answer
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting – uniformity of approach and practice • Píosa as Gaeilge performed by each class at assembly (pre COVID)
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Professional Development • Whole school self-evaluation • Self-reflection and review of practice • Open minded to ideas for improvement • Team spirit among staff • Pupil and parent input
8	Pass

Question 4	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that are conducted or supported externally for improvement purposes? (If you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')	
Respondent	Answer	
1	Pass	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses • Training programmes • Upskilling 	
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses carried out in the Education Centre in order to upskill ourselves 	

As can be seen from the table above, staff were able to list many of the evaluation activities undertaken in our school. However, when categorising these activities as having an accountability or an improvement focus, they experienced difficulties. Staff members were both unclear and confused regarding whether the focus of school self-evaluation was one of improvement or accountability. For example, four out of the nine respondents believed school self-evaluation was conducted for accountability purposes (respondents 3,5,6,7). One respondent for example said DES inspection was an activity conducted externally for accountability purposes but at the same time also said it was conducted externally for improvement purposes (respondent 6). The majority of staff members did not associate school self-evaluation with activities that were conducted for improvement. When asked for activities that our school conducts for self-accountability purposes, two respondents listed school self-evaluation (respondents 5,6). A fourth respondent listed whole school development (respondent 3). When asked for activities that our school conducts for school improvement purposes, only one of the nine respondents listed school self-evaluation (respondent 6). This blurred line between improvement and accountability was problematic as international research shows most school staff in general to have a negative bias towards accountability mechanisms, such as school inspection (O'Connor, 2001; Olutwatomi, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Ofsted, 2019). This was causing a diverse range of responses amongst staff towards school self-evaluation, ranging from resistance to a contrived compliance. When combined with what was my hierarchal leadership of the process, the overall outcome was one of an ineffective, unauthentic and fabricated improvement process, to satisfy the inspectorate.

To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, this issue needed to be addressed. It all seemed to stem from staff members having a limited understanding of how school self-evaluation differed in relation to other evaluation activities undertaken in their school. A meeting was organised to discuss these results with school staff and to begin the process of rectifying the problem. After the discussion, staff members collectively began to place each evaluation activity they listed into a group based on its purpose (i.e., improvement or accountability) and who conducts it (i.e., internally or externally) using the four-quadrant evaluation framework described in Mutch (2012) as our guide. In feedback at the end of the meeting, staff agreed that a clear graphic device to explain this list of evaluation activities to everyone would be invaluable. New people join our school each year, mainly due to staff taking leave, resignations or retirements. There was of course also the impact of Covid-19 on staffing, which proved especially challenging in the conduct of this action research. With such an annual turnover of school staff, it was important to have mechanisms in place to sustain any improvement made in implementing school self-evaluation. This graphic diagram would allow us to communicate and explain all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school in as clear and efficient a way as possible. It would also help people to see how school self-evaluation differed from all these other activities, why they were doing it and for whom. Showing school self-evaluation as a meaningful and worthwhile endeavour in this way, according to the literature, is favourable to its successful implementation (Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015). This was important to ensure the continued successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school going forward. Together as a staff we engaged in a process of filtering and organising the list of evaluation activities into a coherent diagram that could be explained to everyone, which was approved by staff members. The completed diagram can be seen in *Figure 8.2* below.

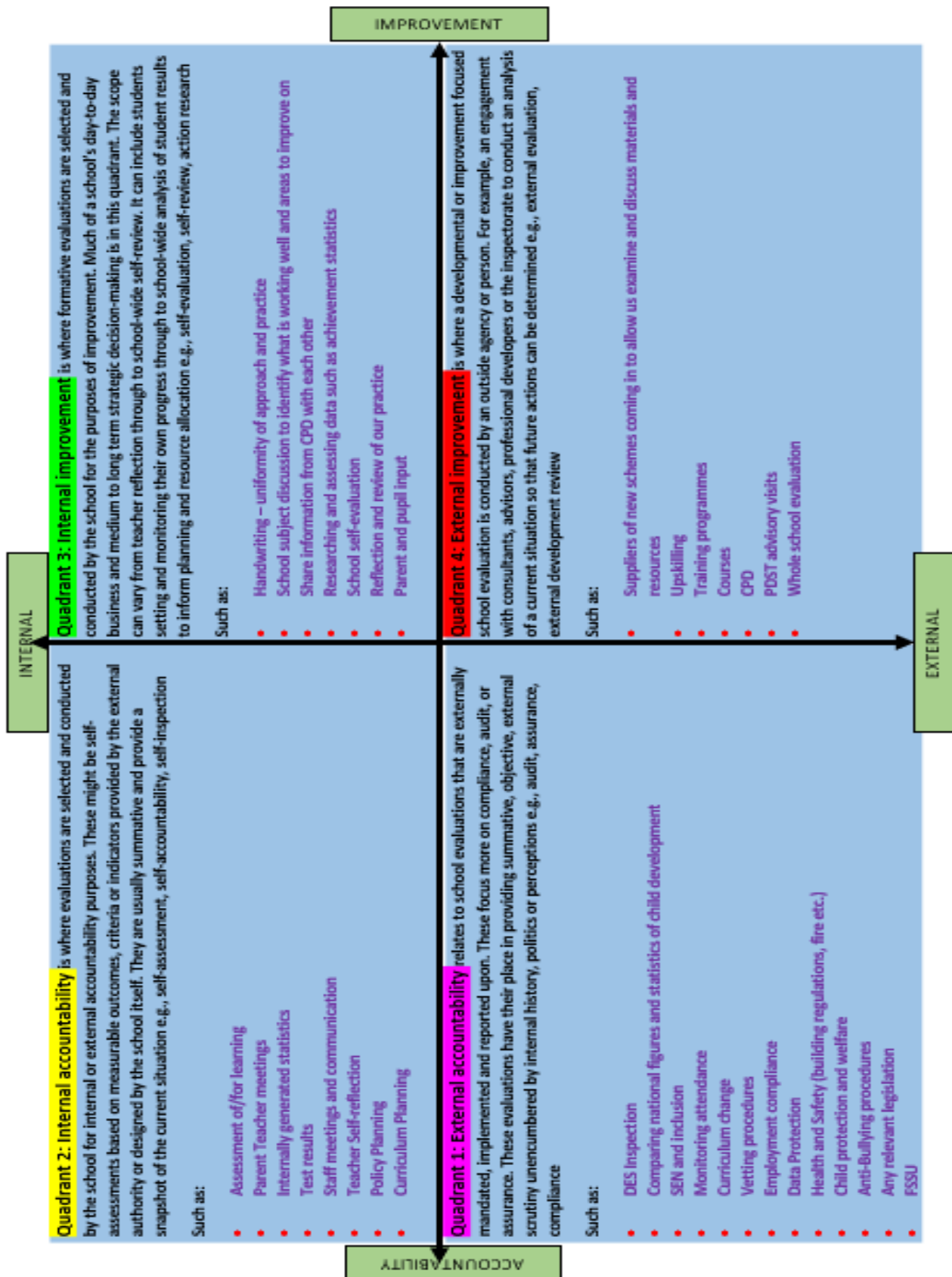


Figure 8.2 Diagram of all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school

8.3.2.2 Monitoring implementation of the action and its effects.

The diagram was sent via email to staff members for final sign off in the form of an online survey for their approval and feedback (Appendix 32). The survey asked for their thoughts on the diagram and if they agreed with it. The survey also asked if they had any comments, thoughts or ideas on the way we reached this diagram.

Two respondents said the quadrant diagram gave a clear picture of all the evaluation activities undertaken in the school and their primary focus.

“The quadrant format is very clear” (S9 respondent 1)

“It was well put together and made everything look much clearer when it was broken down into each quadrant” (S9 respondent 2)

One respondent found that the quadrant diagram helped them to better understand the purpose of specific evaluation processes.

“I thought there were good points made as to what these evaluative processes are actually for” (S9 respondent 1)

The same respondent goes on to specifically mention their attitude to whole school evaluation as being *“really negative...I tend to think of it as something we do for outside people”* (S9 respondent 1). However, the quadrant diagram helped to *“point out the benefits”* (S9 respondent 1). This was a significant movement in attitude towards seeing school self-evaluation as a positive process for our school, and an important step to ensure staff members engaged with it in an authentic and uncontrived way.

Interestingly, at the conclusion of the first phase of action research, when asked to describe what emotions came to mind when they thought about school self-evaluation, the same respondent said *“confusion, apathy, fear, bewilderment and trepidation”*, (interviewee C) describing school self-evaluation as *“a little distasteful...not very appealing to me”* (interviewee C).

At the conclusion of this second phase however, when speaking of the quadrant diagram, the same respondent said *“if it’s intended as a motivational tool, I would deem it a success! ... If it’s designed to encourage engagement with the SSE and WSE process, I would also say it’s successful”* (S9 respondent 1).

Whilst the diagram was a tool to show staff members what evaluation activities are undertaken in our school, who carries them out, why and for whom, its creation represented a significant shift in building a whole staff commitment to school self-evaluation and their recognition of its professional value.

8.4 Findings and discussion

The findings showed these actions had a positive impact on the attitude of school staff towards school self-evaluation, by not only giving staff members greater clarity about the process and their role within it, but also a greater sense of ownership. The process of reducing nineteen definitions to one definition, also revealed one interesting finding. Out of a possible forty-two votes (14 respondents x 3 votes each = 42 votes), the definition of school self-evaluation offered to primary schools by the DES, received just one vote. This resonated with earlier findings that seventy percent of staff members found school self-evaluation, as presented by the DES meaningless, irrelevant and confusing. Emerging negative attitudes such as these have the potential to inform the entire behaviour of people within a school and the potential success of its school self-evaluation process (MacBeath, 1999; O’Day, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010).

The definition of school self-evaluation agreed upon by staff in this study showed staff members were positively disposed towards a cyclical and systematic internal process of quality improvement involving the whole community, based on gathering evidence, reflection and making judgements to develop pupils, teachers and the school as a whole.

An analysis of the definition of school self-evaluation, offered by the DES (2016) as “*School self-evaluation is a **collaborative**, inclusive, and collective process of **internal** school review. An **evidence-based** approach, it involves **gathering information** from a range of sources, and then **making judgements**. All of this with a view to bring about **improvements in students’ learning**” (pg.10), similarly makes reference to school self-evaluation being a collaborative internal process based on gathering evidence and making judgements to develop pupils. Interestingly however, it makes no reference to teacher and school development or the concept of community. There is also no mention of it being an ongoing continuous process to ensure quality.*

The disconnect between school staff on the ground and DES policy had real implications for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Staff members seemed to favour a definition of school self-evaluation which valued the school community as a whole and offered potential development benefits for all within it (e.g., pupils, parents, staff, locality).

This was further borne out by participants voting favourably to insert our school's name in the agreed final definition. This resonated with research by O'Brien et al. (2019) which showed that teachers were more likely to value school self-evaluation if the process results in improvements at classroom level. To improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school therefore, it was important that every opportunity was taken to show the positive benefits that collective actions had at both whole school and classroom level. However, it is important to state that whilst there was a focus on classroom improvement at the outset of this research, as the work proceeded it became clear there were real and significant issues regarding staff negativity towards school self-evaluation, as well as issues regarding their sense of ownership and value of the process.

For example, findings showed that whilst staff were able to list many evaluation activities that were undertaken in our school, they experienced some difficulties when categorising these activities as having an accountability or an improvement focus. The DES guidelines (2016) clearly state that school self-evaluation is focused on improvement. In the findings here however, four out of nine respondents believed school self-evaluation was conducted for accountability purposes (S8 respondents 3,5,6,7). This resonated with data from the reconnaissance phase where school staff felt they were doing the job of the inspectorate.

“Rather than the department coming in and doing their whole school evaluation and deciding, this area, you need to improve, and this is what we want you to do. They were just saying, okay schools, you need to do this yourselves” (interviewee A)

One respondent even said the purpose of school self-evaluation was to *“cut down unnecessary investigations”* and *“to take pressure of the department”* (S3 respondent 1).

One respondent said DES inspection was an activity conducted externally for accountability purposes but also at the same time said it was conducted externally for improvement purposes (S8 respondent 6). The findings also showed that school staff did not associate school self-evaluation with activities that were conducted for improvement. When asked for activities that our school conducts for self-accountability purposes, two respondents listed school self-evaluation (S8 respondents 5,6). A fourth respondent listed whole school development (S8 respondent 3)

When asked for activities that our school conducts for school improvement purposes, respondents replied

“Regular meetings to discuss the areas in which we are performing well...and identifying the areas upon which we can improve to ensure we are improving as a school” (S8 respondent 9)

“Discuss areas of improvement...discuss what is working well...focus on areas in need of enhancement” (S8 respondent 5)

“School subject based discussion and meetings to act on and improve on” (S8 respondent 3)

However, only one of the nine respondents listed school self-evaluation (S8 respondent 6).

This suggested that staff members in general, did not see school self-evaluation as a process of improvement and didn't identify it as such. So, what did staff identify as a process of improvement? Interestingly, when asked for activities that our school engages in that are conducted externally for improvement purposes, one respondent named 'Department of Education inspections'. This blurring of lines between improvement and accountability was problematic and was negatively affecting their attitude towards the school self-evaluation process and its potential successful implementation. The findings showed however, that when staff members listed, categorised and portrayed all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school into a clear and coherent diagram using the four-quadrant framework described by Mutch (2013), it had a positive impact on their attitude towards the school self-evaluation process.

For school self-evaluation to be implemented successfully therefore, it must have clarity of purpose for school staff (Leitch and Day, 2000). Policy implementation is more effective if staff members are motivated (Mann and Smith, 2013) and have agency in the process working as a team (Rosenholtz, 1991; Schildkamp et al., 2012), with clear communication (MacBeath, 1999), shared objectives and expectations (Potter et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2007; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2009) and input into all decision-making (Day and Sammons, 2014). Making school self-evaluation more meaningful in this way helps to secure commitment and a positive attitude from those implementing it (Schildkamp, 2007; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015), vital preconditions to the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in any school (; MacBeath, 1999; Meuret and Morlaix, 2003; Schildkamp, 2007; Bubb and Early, 2008). The information, knowledge and feedback shared between staff members in such an environment, increases their exposure to raised levels of variety, innovation and creativity, leading to new possibilities and a continuous evaluation of how things are done, both of which are vital to organisational improvement (Morrison, 2002; O'Day, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Chapman and Sammons, 2013; Fidan and Balci, 2017). Strong interactive relationships such as these,

make a positive contribution to school improvement and change (Rozenholtz, 1991; Day and Sammons, 2014), proving that an internally motivated evaluation culture can occur (Mann and Smith, 2013) if staff are perceived as team members in a school with shared objectives (Potter et al. 2002). According to my findings, school self-evaluation to be implemented successfully must also be a collegial and collaborative process of community endeavour, where staff members have continued meaningful opportunities to interact, discuss and reflect collectively on the distinct purpose of school self-evaluation within their own school, with full agency and input into all decisions and actions necessary regarding its implementation.

8.5 Further analysis through the lens of complexity theory

This section will complement the analysis already presented and will comment on the findings through the following four key concepts of complexity theory.

8.5.1 The diversity and dynamic nature of agents

The ‘one-size-fits’ all model of school self-evaluation mandated by the DES did not resonate with the diverse and dynamic range of staff members within our school. Implementing school self-evaluation successfully is complex due to this diversity and dynamism (Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fidan and Balci, 2017). On this basis, a big question for this study was, how could we reach beyond the collective level of our school, to mobilise the ‘change’ needed at individual level, to implement school self-evaluation successfully.

Coming to an agreed definition of school self-evaluation by the staff had a positive impact on the attitude of school staff towards the process, by not only giving the staff members greater clarity about the process within their own context and their role within it, but also a greater sense of ownership. It resonated with them and was more meaningful, in comparison to the definition of school self-evaluation offered by the DES (2016). As a school principal, I too personally moved to see school self-evaluation as a form of self-improvement that allowed us the freedom to collectively take ownership of our school’s own processes, motivating us to increase our knowledge and skills in teaching and learning. All these developments had a positive impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school at an individual level.

Due to a diverse range of knowledge, staff members also experienced however, some difficulties categorizing activities undertaken in our school as having accountability or an improvement focus. The findings showed, however, that when staff members listed, categorized, and portrayed all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school into a clear and

coherent diagram using the four-quadrant framework described by Mutch (2013), it had a positive impact on their attitude towards the school self-evaluation process. To ensure the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school, the staff needed a clear understanding of what school self-evaluation was and where it fitted alongside all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school.

8.5.2 Nested systems, connectedness and patterns of interaction

Complexity theory contends that in the right conditions, interactions amongst members within a system have the power to alter behaviour patterns at individual level and in turn collective behaviour patterns at whole school level (Holland, 1992, 1999; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012). My findings support this view. When school self-evaluation was implemented as a collegial and collaborative process of community endeavour, where the staff members have continued meaningful opportunities to interact, discuss, and reflect collectively on the distinct purpose of school self-evaluation within their own school, it made a positive contribution to school improvement and change.

8.5.3 Information flow and feedback loops

Policies get adapted to local contexts by the people within them and often times they are not exactly what was intended (McNamara et al., 2002; Meuret and Morlaix et al., 2003; Fullan et al., 2006; Howlett and Raynor, 2006; Ngan et al., 2010; Terhart, 2013; McNamara and Nayir, 2015; Hudson et al., 2019). The disconnect between school staff on the ground and DES policy had real implications for the successful implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Staff members seemed to favour a definition of school self-evaluation which valued the school community as a whole and offered potential development benefits for all within it. The blurring of lines between improvement and accountability among staff members was problematic and was negatively affecting their attitude towards the school self-evaluation process and its potential successful implementation. However, the increased flow of information, knowledge and feedback shared between staff members raised their exposure to heightened levels of variety, innovation, and creativity, leading to new possibilities and an evaluation of how things are done. For example, when staff members spent the time and effort to unpack and analyse various definitions of school self-evaluation and re-write the definition in their own words, it resonated with them and was more meaningful. Coming to our own agreed definition of school self-evaluation had a positive impact on the attitude of school staff towards the process.

The findings also showed that when staff members themselves listed and categorised all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school into a diagram under the headings of external accountability, internal accountability, internal improvement and external improvement, it gave us all clarity and a better understanding regarding the name and purpose of each evaluation activity. When structures are placed to support the provision, movement and use of information, people engage more productively in their work (Bower, 2006). The movement of information, through the interaction of people, lies at the heart of any learning and change process within a complex system, such as a school (Morrison, 2002; Stacey, 2005). Our actions helped develop a positive attitude towards the process, showing school self-evaluation to be a non-threatening, non-judgmental and formative process of improvement, with a positive focus on our own efforts at improvement and good practice.

8.5.4 Change, adaptability, co-evolution, self-organisation and emergence

Fidan and Ozturk (2015) believe that a flat and flexible hierarchical structure can be more successful in creating more space for innovation in a complex system. My actions as school leader facilitated the participants to interact and self-organise in order for them to find the best way to implement school self-evaluation successfully in our school (Morrison, 2002). Complexity theory contends that such multiple interactions among diverse school members can allow unity and coherence to emerge without any imposition or planning (Fenwick, 2012). Consequently, some staff members reported that the actions we had taken as a collective, would motivate them and encourage them, to engage with the school self-evaluation process in a more successful way going forward. This was a significant movement in attitude towards seeing school self-evaluation as a positive process, and an important step in ensuring staff members engaged with and emerged from the process in a more authentic and uncontrived way.

8.6 Summary of findings

This second phase of action research revealed three key findings. The first finding showed that school staff were very receptive to being offered the opportunity to come to an agreed definition of what school self-evaluation meant to them for their school. It helped them to better understand both the purpose and operation of school self-evaluation within their own context. It resonated with them and was more meaningful, in comparison to the definition of school self-evaluation offered by the DES (2016). The findings showed it made a difference by not only giving staff members greater clarity about school self-evaluation and their role within it,

but also a greater sense of ownership of the process. This had a positive impact on their attitude towards school self-evaluation.

The definition of school self-evaluation agreed upon by staff showed staff members were positively disposed towards a cyclical and systematic internal process of quality improvement involving the whole community, based on gathering evidence, reflection and making judgements to develop pupils, teachers and the school as a whole. Staff members seemed to favour a definition of school self-evaluation which valued the school community as a whole and offered potential development benefits for all within it (e.g., pupils, parents, staff, locality). This was further borne out by staff members voting favourably to insert our school's name into the final agreed definition.

Based on these findings therefore, to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation, the process needs to be a collegial and collaborative process of community endeavour, where staff members have meaningful opportunities to interact, discuss and reflect collectively on the distinct purpose of school self-evaluation within their own school, with full agency and input into all decisions and actions necessary regarding its implementation.

The second key finding showed that when staff members themselves listed and categorised all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school into a diagram under the headings of external accountability, internal accountability, internal improvement and external improvement, it gave us all clarity and a better understanding regarding the name and purpose of each evaluation activity. They said the diagram helped us see the benefits of school self-evaluation and would therefore motivate and encourage us all, as a community, to engage with the school self-evaluation process in a more successful way going forward. This was a significant movement in attitude towards seeing school self-evaluation as a positive process, and an important step in ensuring staff members engaged with it in an authentic and uncontrived way. Based on these findings therefore, to improve the implementation of school self-evaluation, school staff must be allowed to list and categorise what evaluation activities are undertaken in their school, who carries them out and for whom. Our actions helped develop a positive attitude towards the process, showing school self-evaluation to be a non-threatening, non-judgmental and formative process of improvement, with a positive focus on our own efforts at improvement and good practice.

The third and final key finding showed that my professional practice as a school leader, underwent change as a result of my own self-development during this study. The findings

revealed learning for me on both a personal and professional level as a member of the school staff. At the beginning of this project, the focus was on my actions as leader of the school self-evaluation process. At the outset, I felt school self-evaluation was an unwelcome addition to my staff's workload, more attuned to a policy of control and compliance than improvement. My experience of this influenced both my negative attitude and hierarchical approach to school self-evaluation. However, the action cycles expanded concentrically to include the actions of my school staff. Through my study and self-reflection of values and this action research, I personally moved to see school self-evaluation as a form of self-improvement. To increase the potential success of school self-evaluation, this action research revealed the necessity for an active and engaged leadership that worked closely in more low-rise ways with staff members in a spirit of community endeavour, rather than a form of leadership based on hierarchy. This was a significant shift, as a principal's leadership can influence a school's handling of evaluation, whether it is perceived as a threat or an opportunity for development (MacBeath, 2008). As a result of this study, I concluded that school self-evaluation allowed us the freedom as a school staff, to collectively take ownership of our school's own processes, and motivated us to increase our knowledge and skills in teaching and learning. This change in my thinking as principal, had a positive impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I summarise the work presented in the thesis which investigated school self-evaluation in practice, examining its implementation by school staff in a primary school. The purpose of this qualitative study was to improve the school self-evaluation process in my school and how I, as school leader in collaboration with my school staff, could create the optimal conditions necessary for its successful implementation, whilst also addressing any barriers which may have existed. The conclusions drawn from this study derive from the interpretation of the findings from the surveys, the interviews, the documents and the literature review and they form the basis for the recommendations provided. I outline the contribution of the study to the aims of the research, as well as its contribution to knowledge and the methodological field, followed by its limitations. Finally, I identify aspects of school self-evaluation for possible future research.

9.2 Summary of findings

School self-evaluation is a form of internal evaluation which has become a key mechanism for school improvement and accountability to guarantee educational quality (Hopkins, 2005; MacBeath, 2006; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2011; DES, 2012; OECD, 2013). Since 2012, all schools in Ireland are formally required to engage in school self-evaluation (DES, 2012). This thesis seeks to augment the existing body of research relating to school self-evaluation at implementation level in an Irish school setting. The research question guiding this study was how can we improve the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school.

The study demonstrated from a methodological perspective that the adoption of an action research approach enabled us as a collective to reflect on and examine in a systematic and careful way our implementation of school self-evaluation. This practice-based approach facilitated learning during each cycle of the study from the perspective of staff members. Taking this approach enhanced the value of the study, so that it was more than a technical exercise. It was also offering evidence on how school self-evaluation mechanisms, as well as improvement strategies could be designed and developed for use in primary schools.

From a theoretical perspective, to answer the research question and help school leaders to be more aware of the optimal conditions and potential barriers to successfully implementing

school self-evaluation in their school, staff members responses about their experience with school self-evaluation were analysed through the conceptual lens of complexity theory. This study makes a beneficial and distinctive contribution to knowledge by drawing complexity theory and action research together, to explore how the model can be applied in practical terms to the implementation of school self-evaluation in an Irish rural primary school, at local level by school staff.

To begin, this study found that similar to research by O'Brien et al. (2015) school self-evaluation seemed to be 'built-on' rather than 'built-in' to the accepted core business of our school. However, school staff saw the relationships and the interactions between them whilst they engaged in school self-evaluation as a strength. Staff members reported the interactions between them to be powerfully motivating in sparking their interest to be involved in school activities concerning teaching and learning. Anything that threatened these relationships or their focus on teaching and learning was seen as a weakness. Similar to research by O'Day (2002), this study found that the more staff members were facilitated to exchange information, knowledge and feedback in collaborative professional conversation and meaningfully involved in any decision-making regarding school self-evaluation, this increased their motivation, interest and positivity towards the process. This in turn had a very positive influence on the outcome of initiating and implementing a school self-evaluation cycle. In addition, this study supported findings in other research which showed an internally motivated evaluation culture can occur, if staff work as team members with shared objectives and input into any decision-making related to the process of school improvement (Mortimore et al., 1988; Rozenholtz, 1991; Potter et al., 2002; Schildkamp et al., 2012; Mann and Smith, 2013; Parr and Timperley, 2013; Jones and Harris, 2014; Day and Sammons, 2014).

However, numerous researchers have suggested that school staff are resistant to school self-evaluation due to a perception of it being time consuming, difficult to carry out and an increase in their workload (Valli and Beuse, 2007; Hall and Noyes, 2009; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015). The results of this study support these conclusions. Staff members reported the school self-evaluation process to be under resourced, time consuming and an increase to their workload. This negatively affected their motivation and enthusiasm for it. Similar to the conclusions drawn in other research (O'Day, 2002; Keshavarz et al., 2010), the data from this study showed these issues caused unwanted stress for staff members and negatively informed their collective attitude and behaviour towards the process. The data also showed there to be a lack of self-confidence in doing school self-evaluation among staff members.

Numerous research has pointed to the importance of providing support and clear expectations to school staff if school self-evaluation is to be implemented successfully, such as effective leadership, continuous professional development, substitute teacher cover, time to meet and talk with each other and answers to pragmatic process questions such as who, what, where, when and how (O'Day, 2002; Ryan et al., 2007; Hall and Noyes, 2009; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2011; Vanhoof et al., 2011; Mutch, 2013; O'Brien et al., 2015). The data from this study confirmed these conclusions. Three actions taken as school principal had a positive impact on the implementation of school self-evaluation in our school. Firstly, when I led the school self-evaluation process adhering to my core values of collaboration and authenticity, the motivation, interest and positivity of staff members towards the process increased. Secondly, the same effect was also found, when I used every opportunity to show the positive benefits school self-evaluation and our collective actions had on classroom practice. Finally, when I resourced the process in terms of professional and personal supports, there was a positive shift in outlook amongst staff members to certain aspects of the school self-evaluation process, such as increased levels of collaboration, autonomy, decision-making, reflection and discussion.

The study demonstrated therefore, that school leaders play a key role in shaping staff members' attitudes, commitment and effectiveness in any school self-evaluation process. A hierarchical 'top-down' approach to leading the process fails, because it forces people to change what they do, without having input or ownership into the change process. For school self-evaluation to succeed, this study revealed the necessity for an active, engaged leadership that works closely, in low-rise ways with all school staff, rather than a form of leadership that views the process as something to be tightly controlled or delegated. It is important that school leaders, in as far as is possible, resource the process, with plenty of opportunities for staff members to collectively talk, reflect and make decisions in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration. Equally, it shows the importance of school leaders being positive towards school self-evaluation and continuously reflecting on all that they say, do and think as they lead the process.

This study expanded the school self-evaluation literature however by moving beyond school self-evaluation as a technical exercise to be executed and asked staff members to answer the important question of, why are we doing school self-evaluation? My analysis of the data revealed an absence amongst staff members of any collective understanding of what school self-evaluation was. The findings showed staff members to have diverse opinions on the purpose of school self-evaluation and its place in relation to all the other evaluation activities undertaken in our school. This supports findings in other research which shows diverse

members within an organisation can be both unpredictable and diverse in their reactions and interpretations of an external mandate (Morrison, 2002; O'Day, 2002; Fidan and Balci, 2007; Keshavarz et al., 2010; Ngan et al., 2010). To secure the positive commitment of school staff in implementing school self-evaluation, various studies point to the importance of clear communication (MacBeath, 1999; Leitch and Day, 2000; Meuret and Morlaix, 2003; McNamara and O'Hara, 2005; Ryan et al., 2007; Schildkamp, 2007; Bubb and Earley, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2015; Vanhoof and Petegem, 2009; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; Simons, 2013; Terhart, 2013; Fullan, 2015). The results of this study support this conclusion, finding that the lack of clarity amongst staff members regarding the purpose of school self-evaluation had a negative impact on their attitude towards it. In addition, the findings showed a real disconnect between school staff and DES policy regarding school self-evaluation, similar to conclusions drawn from other research (O'Brien et al., 2015; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012). Data from this study showed seventy percent of staff members found school self-evaluation, as presented by the DES, meaningless, irrelevant and confusing. Indeed, out of a possible forty-two votes, the definition of school self-evaluation offered to primary schools by the DES, received just one vote.

However, the findings of this study confirm conclusions drawn in other current research which show that when staff collectively engage in a meaningful process of coming to an agreeable and clear definition of school self-evaluation relevant to their own school context, it makes a difference by not only giving staff members greater clarity about school self-evaluation and their role within it, but also a greater sense of ownership of the process (Mutch, 2013). In addition, my analysis of the data revealed that school staff were very receptive to being offered the opportunity to come to an agreed definition of school self-evaluation for their school, as it helped them to better understand both the purpose and operation of the process within their own school and make it more meaningful. This was found to have a positive impact on their attitude towards the school self-evaluation process. For the potential success of school self-evaluation to be realised, this study has demonstrated therefore, the importance of giving staff members the opportunity to collectively engage in a meaningful process of coming to an agreeable and clear definition of school self-evaluation which they own. This provided them with a clear and shared sense of purpose in the process.

Regardless of having a collectively agreed definition of school self-evaluation however, my analysis of the data showed school staff to be complying with the external mandate of school self-evaluation in a contrived way, similar to conclusions drawn in other research (; O'Day,

2002; Ball, 2003; Webb, 2006; Vanhoof et al. 2009; Perryman, 2009; NcNamara and O’Hara, 2012; Beaver and Weinbaum, 2015; O’Brien et al., 2019). My findings also support the views of other research which has shown school staff being able to name most of the evaluation activities undertaken in their school but struggling to identify if they have an accountability or improvement focus (Mutch, 2013). This distinction matters, as international research shows most school staff in general to have a negative bias towards accountability mechanisms (O’Connor, 2001; Oluwatomi, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Ofsted, 2019). However, my analysis of the data from this study showed the majority of staff members to be both unclear and confused as to whether school self-evaluation was a process of improvement or accountability, with no clear understanding of how it differed in relation to other evaluation activities undertaken in our school, such as inspection. Just under half of staff members saw school self-evaluation as an accountability exercise by an external source, where school self-evaluation was something ‘imposed’ on them from outside as a means of judgement on their school.

In addition to these findings, an analysis of the data unearthed a perception held by some staff members of a convergent relationship between the role of the inspectorate and school self-evaluation and accountability and improvement. Whilst the findings of this study do not confirm or refute what other researchers have found in regard to a negative bias towards school inspection amongst school staff in general (O’Connor, 2001; Oluwatomi, 2007; Dillon, 2012; Ofsted, 2019), this study was distinctive in that it demonstrated a belief amongst staff members that their engagement in the school self-evaluation process was equivalent to doing the job of the inspectorate. Staff members saw both the process of external inspection and self-evaluation as interchangeable with no difference between them, seeing them as both one and the same. All the inner beliefs, attitudes and emotions associated by most staff members with inspection were being applied to school self-evaluation. My analysis of the data revealed that this was having a negative impact on their attitude towards the implementation of school self-evaluation.

Other research however has suggested that when school staff are given the opportunity to list, categorise and portray every general activity undertaken in their school for accountability and improvement, into a clear and coherent diagram explaining who carries them out, for whom and why, highlighting its benefits, it gave staff members greater clarity and a more cohesive understanding regarding the name and purpose of each evaluation activity undertaken in the school (Mutch, 2013). The results of this study support this conclusion. In addition to this finding, my analysis of the data also showed that such an exercise significantly motivated and

encouraged staff members to engage with the school self-evaluation process in a more positive, authentic and uncontrived way as a process of improvement. Similar to other research, this study found that producing the necessary evidence to change the inner beliefs of staff members provided them with the motivation to change their practice (Kise, 2004). This study has demonstrated that to increase the potential success of school self-evaluation, it is important that staff members understand its purpose in relation to all other evaluation activities undertaken in their school.

9.3 The next step

These findings were sent to staff members and my critical friend for feedback and comment. At a follow up online meeting of school staff, it was suggested by some members that we should identify another area of focus for improvement and implement another cycle of school self-evaluation, employing all the new resources at our disposal, which we had developed in the study to date. These included the school self-evaluation timeline which we created in the first phase, showing what had to be done and when. It also included from the second phase, our recently created definition of school self-evaluation and our explanatory diagram of all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school.

At the end of this second cycle of school self-evaluation it would be interesting to survey staff to see if there were any further movements in attitude towards the process. Throughout this study, complexity theory has shown us that outcomes are not always predictable and therefore further reconnaissance and investigation may be required. Whilst another phase of action research was beyond the time constraints of this study, the question that needed to be asked was, ‘does school staff defining the process of school self-evaluation and how it differs from other forms of evaluation undertaken in the school, improve the potential success of the process?’

Staff also suggested that we revisit our school’s handwriting policy and assess if the policy is meeting its aims of

- developing and improving fine motor skills in the early years
- ensuring good letter formation from Junior Infants to Sixth Class
- encouraging all children to use the correct pencil grip
- ensuring legibility and neat presentation of all written work
- helping to develop speed, accuracy and writing fluency

- ensuring uniformity and consistency in letter formation from class to class
- providing children with a relevant life skill
- helping in the improvement of spelling

This study will be of interest to researchers from the fields of school evaluation and school leadership. From a school evaluation perspective, this work provides the reader with a deeper understanding of school self-evaluation in practice. The various cycles of study which are presented, address a gap in the literature by demonstrating and analysing the implementation of school self-evaluation in practice by school staff in an Irish primary school (McNamara et al., 2021). The study expands our knowledge and understanding of the conditions which enable school staff to implement the process of school self-evaluation in a successful and meaningful way. At a school leadership level, this thesis examined the impact of values and reflective practice on a school principal's ability to lead the school self-evaluation process. For these reasons, this research and its findings will be disseminated in multiple ways. I will write and submit an article to the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) outlining the research and its findings for potential publication in its monthly magazine for primary school teachers in Ireland. In addition, the same article will be submitted to the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) for potential publication in 'Leadership+', their monthly magazine for primary school principals in Ireland. I will also submit a paper on my research for potential presentation to both the Community of Action Research Network (CARN) and the Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI). Finally, it is my intention to offer to present my work at any of IPPN's county or national meetings.

9.4 Limitations

The limitations of this study were related to the research design, including the challenges of conducting insider research and limited transferability due to a small sample size and a single research site. In this study, each of the cycles were conducted with a cohort of school staff in a medium sized rural primary school, with a maximum potential sample size of fourteen people in any of the cycles. Steps were taken to ensure the dependability of both the data and my conclusions. However, the transferability of the results and the potential to extrapolate them to a wider context was limited by the sample population and size. The fourteen participants represented a range of class levels and came from diverse backgrounds, but half of them have all worked in this same school over the past ten years, and therefore, their experiences with

implementing change may reflect the particulars of this school and how it initiates and supports reform for improvement.

My role as an insider was a potential limitation because of my dual role as principal in the participating school. There is always the danger of significant power differentials emerging and threats that (a) school staff feel compelled to engage because of my role and (b) see it as a way for me to get them to take on work that I am doing. Being principal of the school for over eight years I experienced the same reforms in school improvement policy that participants described in the surveys and interviews conducted as part of this research. As such, the potential existed for a biased interpretation of the data. In order to address this potential bias, I used specific strategies such as reflexivity to improve the trustworthiness of this study by maintaining a reflective journal. I also paid careful attention to statements and attitudes that were discrepant from my own experiences in order to ensure that I fully represented them in the analysis and discussion of the findings. By using the strategy of member checking, I confirmed that transcripts were accurate and that respondents agreed with my description and analysis of the findings. My critical friend too played a very important role at salient moments throughout the research. The thesis is replete with many examples of moments where conversations with my critical friend formatively impacted my thinking and subsequent actions. In addition, participants self-selected, raising the possibility that they were motivated by a desire to express strongly held views which may not have been typical of the views held by their peers. It must be acknowledged that different participants would likely have expressed different perceptions, drawing on their own experiences of and attitudes towards school self-evaluation. The intention of this study was to conduct an in-depth pragmatic, action research study of the implementation of school self-evaluation in an Irish primary school setting, supported by school leadership. However, larger scale studies may be needed if claims are to be made about the viability of the approaches and mechanisms used in wider contexts.

Due to the action research approach adopted for this study, the concern I had regarding my leadership of the school self-evaluation process was chosen as the focus of research so that cycles could be implemented, evaluated and changes made in practice. The result of this is that the study was context specific with insights relevant to the issues pertinent to my school. It focused on the implementation of school self-evaluation in practice, examining its implementation by school staff in my school. In the nature and spirit of action research, a wider study with a more diverse range of staff from alternative educational settings may yield different results and experiences.

Another limitation is the fact that data for this study was gathered at a fixed point in time following the experiences of staff members engaging with the school self-evaluation process and so its findings are limited by that. However, action research, by its nature does not come to an abrupt end and there is always a next step to take as listed in section 9.3. Noteworthy too of course, was the challenge of conducting insider research during the worst pandemic in our lifetime and the many challenges it posed for our school.

Finally, academic literature on the implementation of school self-evaluation in Irish schools is growing (McNamara and O'Hara, 2005; McNamara and O'Hara, 2006; McNamara et al., 2008; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; McNamara et al., 2011; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2015; Gustafsson et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2017; O'Brien et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2018; O'Brien et al. 2019). As research in the area progresses, new alternative themes for study may emerge which were not addressed in this thesis. However, while the above limitations have been noted, the purpose of this study was to carry out an action research inquiry into the implementation of school self-evaluation in a natural context based within my own school environment. It is my hope that that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of school self-evaluation in Ireland and be a spur to further research.

9.5 Recommendations for future work

Throughout the cycles of this research thesis, many questions were raised and answered. However, as is the nature of any research, the results identified and posed many new questions for future research. Throughout the study I was concerned that the views and experiences of my staff as they implement school self-evaluation would be at the core of the research, determining the conclusions I would draw. The centrality of their voices to the discussion in this report indicates how successfully I have addressed that concern. The themes which have emerged from their experiences have identified a number of areas for further research as follows:

1. More school-based action research is needed to tease out the complexities, difficulties and opportunities that school self-evaluation presents. From such research, school leaders will be better placed to initiate and sustain more effective and practicable methods of self-evaluation in their schools.
2. The small size of this study enabled me to gain a deeper insight into the implementation of school self-evaluation in a primary school. However, it would be valuable to carry out the research across a greater number of schools to strengthen the validity of the

findings. It would allow stronger inferences to be drawn from the conclusions and the capacity to make generalisations from the findings.

3. Throughout this study, complexity theory has shown that outcomes are not always predictable and therefore further reconnaissance and investigation may be required. Whilst another phase of action research was beyond the time constraints of this study, further investigation into staff members collectively defining school self-evaluation and how it differs from other forms of evaluation undertaken in their school, would be worthwhile, in order to evaluate its impact, if any, to the potential success of the process.
4. One of the limitations of the study was that an evaluation of the actions taken and their impact on teaching and learning outcomes was beyond the scope of the research. A longitudinal study to evaluate the impact of the process on the performance of both pupils and staff over a number of years would be very worthwhile.
5. This study focused on obtaining the views of school staff implementing school self-evaluation in a primary school. Insights from teaching staff were sought through interviews. The views of other school personnel, particularly those of special needs assistants, is largely unexplored and would add significantly to further developing an understanding of the process in schools.
6. In section 4.6 I outline how action research underpins the model of school self-evaluation espoused in Irish primary schools. Action research is based on a 'bottom-up' collaborative approach to change, putting key stakeholders at the centre of all efforts to improve in a spirit of partnership. Yet in a contradiction, schools are mandated to engage with school self-evaluation in a 'top-down' edict from the DES. In addition, the inspectorate are key stakeholders tasked to advise and oversee the implementation of this action research-based process. Yet as key stakeholders and partners, they are generally absent in the practical implementation of the process itself (McNamara et al., 2021a). This is contradictory to the participative collaborative spirit of action research and school self-evaluation. According to complexity systems theory, these connections and relationships are critical to a school's success. This warrants further discussion and research into revising or reforming the role that Ireland's Inspectorate plays in school self-evaluation as an action research methodology.

9.6 Final thoughts

In many educational systems, school self-evaluation has become a key mechanism for school improvement and accountability and a necessary mechanism to manage changes in the school organisation (Hopkins, 2005; MacBeath, 2006; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008; Vanhoof et al., 2011; DES, 2012). Many education systems have recently applied newly developed evaluation methods at school level in the form of internal or self-evaluation (Nevo, 2010), evident by the fact that it is now compulsory in two thirds of European education systems (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). Research indicates that the quality of a school self-evaluation process and its impact on pupil learning outcomes is strongly determined by how that evaluation process is carried out (Vanhoof et al., 2011). In this endeavour, principals play a key role in setting the direction and creating a positive school culture, including a proactive mindset, and supporting and enhancing the motivation and commitment needed from staff to foster improvement (Day and Sammons, 2014). In this area I have focused my research.

The study showed a positive change in staff members' attitudes, commitment, and capacity to implement school self-evaluation when the school leadership itself was reflexive and positive towards the process and provided plenty of opportunities for staff members to collectively talk, reflect and make decisions regarding the process in a spirit of collegiality and collaboration.

The study would urge school leaders to be cautious however of school staff complying with school self-evaluation in a contrived way. The research showed the process of improvement and change needed to be at a substantive and deep level rather than a simple overlay of existing practices and beliefs. The study unearthed an assumption amongst staff members that their engagement in school self-evaluation was equivalent to doing the job of the inspectorate. A negative bias towards inspection was in turn having a negative impact on their attitude towards school self-evaluation. Yet, the study showed school staff continuing to comply with the process in a contrived way. However, when school leadership (i) provided opportunities for staff members to collectively come to an agreeable and clear definition of school self-evaluation which they owned and (ii) produced evidence to show them its purpose in relation to all other evaluation activities undertaken in the school, it significantly motivated and encouraged school staff to engage with school self-evaluation in a more positive and meaningful way as a process of improvement. Whether this actually led to an improvement in pupil outcomes however, is beyond the scope of this study, as it will take time for the results of these processes to become apparent.

There is still much work to be done, and room for development in the area. School self-evaluation requires further investigation in practice in order to bridge the gap between policy and implementation, as described in the literature (McNamara et al., 2002; Meuret and Morlaix, 2003; Howlett and Raynor, 2006; ; Fullan et al., 2006; Ngan et al., 2010; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012; Terhart, 2013; McNamara and Nayir, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 2019; Skerritt et al., 2021) and achieve its stated aim of contributing to school improvement.

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Definitions of School Self-Evaluation found in a review of the literature
<p><i>“a systematic process, largely initiated by the school itself, where participants describe and evaluate the functioning of the school for the purposes of making decisions or undertaking initiatives in the context of (aspects of) overall school (policy) development”</i></p> <p>(Van Petegem, 2005, pg.104; Vanhoof and Van Petegem, 2010, pg.20)</p>
<p><i>“SSE can be described as a process, in large part initiated by the school, whereby highly eligible participants systematically describe and judge the functioning of the school in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives within the framework of school development”</i></p> <p>(Vanhoof and Petegem, 2010, cited in Faddar et al., 2017, pg.398)</p>
<p><i>“SSE is considered as an attempt involving various changes made by the schools in order to ensure a better teaching and learning environment, improve students’ academic achievement and also strengthen the schools’ ability to implement those changes”</i></p> <p>(Hopkins, 2005, cited in Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.50)</p>
<p><i>“SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”</i></p> <p>(Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.51)</p>
<p><i>“School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”</i></p> <p>(Hofman et al., 2009, cited in O’Brien et al., 2019, pg.2)</p>
<p><i>“School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self-Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of</i></p>

school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”

(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005, pg.239; Smith, 2012, cited in Setlalto, 2014, pg.525)

“To arrive at an appraisal of their current functioning (strengths and weaknesses) as a point of departure for a plan or vision for the future. Self-evaluation is a procedure which is initiated and carried out by the school in order to describe and evaluate its own functioning”

(Vanhoof et al., 2009, pg.21) (Blok et al., 2005, pg.3)

“The primary purpose of the school is student learning. Evaluation, a tool that promotes and supports both the individual and the system, can be very helpful.....to have a sound basis for decision-making about potential developments to increase student learning. It can provide the school with clear guidelines and parameters to follow in order to make positive changes that facilitate this learning.... Moreover, the school can develop and improve through a reflective practice which can help stimulate the decision-making processes”

(Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Sivesend et al., 2006, cited in Emstad, 2011, pg.271-272)

“a situated analysis of educational quality”

(Simons, 2013, pg.9)

“School self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analysing and communicating information to: (i) inform decision-making within a school (ii) ascribe value or worth (iii) establish public confidence in the school (iv) demonstrate professional self-accountability (v) to meet the purposes of accountability, development, knowledge and encourage creativity in schools”

(Simons, 2013, pg.16-17)

“Evaluation for accountability purposes involves reporting on goals and standards (including checking on compliance matters) while an improvement focus involves assisting schools to improve through their self-review”

(Mutch, 2013, pg.83)

“Self-review involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed”

(Ministry of Education, 2003, cited in Mutch, 2013, pg.84)

“a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”

(Schildkamp, 2007, pg.4)

“a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make decisions that provide recommendations”

(Devos, 1998, pg.51-52, cited in Demetriou et al., 2012, pg.150)

“Teachers and schools are encouraged to formulate their own development plan, to discuss their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, thus fostering collegiality and cohesiveness in terms of the school’s own mission and aspirations for improvement”

(Brady, 2016, pg.524)

“School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning”

(Chapman and Sammons, 2013, pg.2)

“Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”

(MacBeath, 2005, pg.4)

“School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements. All of this with a view to bring about improvements in students’ learning.”

(DES, 2016, pg.10)

“Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice”

Survey

Thank You for taking the time to complete this questionnaire regarding:

School Self-Evaluation

Your help is most appreciated.

DES = Department of Education and Skills

SSE = School Self-Evaluation

Instructions:

In each question, please tick the box that feels most right to you and please fill in as best you can the description boxes. If you need more space, please write your answer on another piece of paper with the question number beside it.

1. The existing resources provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are useful for School Self-Evaluation (SSE)
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**
 - Indifferent**
 - Agree**
 - Agree Strongly**

2. More resources are required from the DES on how to conduct SSE
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**
 - Indifferent**
 - Agree**
 - Agree Strongly**

3. Rather than each school spending time and resources developing their own internal evaluation procedures, schools should be provided with a generic set of tools to assist with the implementation of SSE
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**

- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

4. Staff at this school have the necessary skills required to carry out SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

5. Principals and Deputy Principals need more training on how to conduct SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

6. Teachers need more training on how to conduct SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

7. Staff at this school have the capacity to analyse quantitative data

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

8. Staff at this school have the capacity to analyse qualitative data

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

9. The Principal and Deputy Principal of this school have the necessary training required to carry out peer review (teacher observation)

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

10. Teachers of this school have the necessary training to carry out peer review (teacher observation)

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

11. The Board of Management of this school have the necessary skills required to carry out evaluation and planning duties required of Board of Managements.

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

12. Results from externally devised standardised tests (e.g., literacy and numeracy tests) should be used as part of the self-evaluation process of schools.

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

13. Peer review is used as part of the SSE process in this school

- Yes**
- No**

14. Does your school have a set of procedures for carrying out SSE?

- Yes**
- No**

15. Does your school have an SSE policy?

- Yes
- No

16. The process of SSE is easy to understand

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

17. The SSE guidelines developed by the DES are easy to understand

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

18. The Principal and Deputy Principal conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

19. Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

20. SSE involves all staff

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

21. SSE reports should be published on the internet

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

22. SSE results in better management

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

23. SSE results in better teaching and learning

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

24. SSE places a lot of stress on staff

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

25. SSE increases staff morale

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

26. SSE takes up a lot of time

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

27. SSE is popular with the majority of staff in this school

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

28. How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general?

- Positive**
- Negative**
- Indifferent**
- Other**

If '**Other**' please describe:

29. Please describe briefly, in the box below, what you think is the purpose of SSE

30. Please list, in the box below, any useful policy documents that you know of regarding SSE

31. Please describe in the box below, what in your opinion are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy

32. Please describe below, what in your opinion are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy

33. In the box below, please describe any other opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations or comments you have in relation to your experience of SSE to date in your educational career. *(if any)*

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

Please click the three definitions of School Self-Evaluation below which you most agree with:

- “a systematic process, largely initiated by the school itself, where participants describe and evaluate the functioning of the school for the purposes of making decisions or undertaking initiatives in the context of (aspects of) overall school (policy) development”
- “SSE can be described as a process, in large part initiated by the school, whereby highly eligible participants systematically describe and judge the functioning of the school in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives within the framework of school development”
- “SSE is considered as an attempt involving various changes made by the schools in order to ensure a better teaching and learning environment, improve students’ academic achievement and also strengthen the schools’ ability to implement those changes”
- “SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”
- “School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”
- “School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”

- “To arrive at an appraisal of their current functioning (strengths and weaknesses) as a point of departure for a plan or vision for the future. Self-evaluation is a procedure which is initiated and carried out by the school in order to describe and evaluate its own functioning”

- “The primary purpose of the school is student learning. Evaluation, a tool that promotes and supports both the individual and the system, can be very helpful.....to have a sound basis for decision-making about potential developments to increase student learning. It can provide the school with clear guidelines and parameters to follow in order to make positive changes that facilitate this learning.... Moreover, the school can develop and improve through a reflective practice which can help stimulate the decision-making processes”

- “a situated analysis of educational quality”

- “school self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analysing and communicating information to: (i) inform decision-making within a school (ii) ascribe value or worth (iii) establish public confidence in the school (iv) demonstrate professional self-accountability (v) to meet the purposes of accountability, development, knowledge and encourage creativity in schools”

- “Evaluation for accountability purposes involves reporting on goals and standards (including checking on compliance matters) while an improvement focus involves assisting schools to improve through their self-review”

- “Self-review involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed”

- “a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”

- “a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make decisions that provide recommendations”

- “Teachers and schools are encouraged to formulate their own development plan, to discuss their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, thus fostering collegiality and cohesiveness in terms of the school’s own mission and aspirations for improvement”

- “School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning”

- “Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”

- “School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements. All of this with a view to bring about improvements in students’ learning.”

- “Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice”

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

Please click the one definition of School Self-Evaluation below which you most agree with:

- “SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”
- “School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”
- “School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”
- “Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”
- “a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

The following definition of school self-evaluation has come from a process of reducing nineteen definitions down to five definitions using your votes. The key words and phrases from the final five definitions have been interwoven into the one definition below. Please read the definition of school self-evaluation offered below and then answer the questions which follow.

Thank you.

An agreed statement of what “School Self-Evaluation” means to us for our school
<p><i>“School Self-Evaluation is a cyclical procedure we do to ourselves, by ourselves and for ourselves. It provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and systematically gather information to examine, assess and make decisions on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster quality, improved teaching and learning and enhanced professional and organisational performance”</i></p>
<p>1. Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure</p>
<p>2. Have you any comments, thoughts or ideas on this statement?</p>
<p>3. Have you any comments, thoughts or ideas on the way we reached this statement? <i>(i.e., involving all teaching staff, voting from a list of definitions, combining the common words etc.)</i></p>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

The following definition of school self-evaluation has come from a process of reducing nineteen definitions down to five definitions using your votes. The key words and phrases from the final five definitions were interwoven into the one definition and then adjusted based on your feedback. Please read the definition of school self-evaluation offered below and then answer the questions which follow. Thank you.

An agreed statement of what “School Self-Evaluation” means to us for our school
<p><i>“In [our school name] school self-evaluation is a cyclical procedure, which provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and systematically gather information to examine, assess and make decisions on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster quality, improved teaching and learning and enhanced professional and organisational performance”</i></p>
<p>4. Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure </p>
<p>5. Have you any further comments, thoughts or ideas on the agreed statement? (if you cannot think of anything please just write ‘pass’)</p>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Appendix 7

Question 1	What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that are driven or conducted externally for accountability purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>
Question 2	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for self-accountability purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>
Question 3	What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for school self-improvement purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>
Question 4	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that are conducted or supported externally for improvement purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

**A graphic diagram to communicate and explain
all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school**

The following diagram has come from a process of listing all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school based on its purpose (i.e., improvement or accountability) and who conducts it (i.e., internally or externally). Please read the diagram and then answer the questions which follow. Thank you.

A graphic diagram to communicate and explain all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school
6. Do you agree with this diagram? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure
7. Have you any further comments, thoughts or ideas on the agreed diagram? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. *What is your attitude to School Self-Evaluation? Why do you think this is?*
2. *What skills do you think are needed to engage or partake in School-Self Evaluation?*
3. *What emotions come to your mind when you think of School Self-Evaluation?*
4. *Who should be responsible for School Self-Evaluation in a school?*
5. *What in your opinion is the purpose of School Self-Evaluation?*
6. *Does School Self-Evaluation, in your opinion, bring improvement at school level or classroom level? Or both? And if so...How?*
7. *In your opinion, should School Self-Evaluation be aimed at school level improvement or classroom level improvement? Or both? Why do you think this?*
8. *From your teaching career experience to date, has the School Self-Evaluation process led to an improvement at school level that you can describe to us?*
9. *From your teaching career experience to date, has the School Self-Evaluation process led to an improvement in classroom teaching and learning that you can describe to us?*
10. *Of the two outcomes above, was one of more value than the other? If so...Why? If not...Why?*
11. *How do you feel about your capacity to engage with School Self-Evaluation? What is enabling this? (e.g., training, leadership, enthusiasm, school climate) What is disabling this? (e.g., time, resources, training, skill set, your ability, apathy)*

Appendix 10

Author	Vinny's Reflective Journal				
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation <i>(what did you observe? Can you describe it?)</i>	Reaction <i>(how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)</i>	Judgement <i>(what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)</i>	Intervention <i>(what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)</i>
					<p>This box is crucial Vinny</p> <p>(i) to show how you're learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice.</p> <p>(ii) to show how your learning influences new actions</p> <p>(iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking.</p> <p>You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research)</p>

Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
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Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	Focus Group Interview ①	<p>I was relaxed. Participants were relaxed. I gave ample time of going so I did not have to watch the clock. Having the Qs prepared was great but I found it hard not to lead + explore areas of interest to me. I do feel next time I will be more disciplined. As much as I had practiced the interview with my critical friend the real thing can be very different. You have to control your passion and not taint the data.</p>	<p>I really enjoyed it. It was great to see fellow colleagues being so passionate about teaching + learning. I felt confident but I could see where I was only dying to put the info I wanted from the process. Participants afterwards I was a bit annoyed with myself but I will learn from it for next time.</p>	<p>I learned to stick to script + not taint the interview. I must remain as objective as possible. It was great though not planned to have a 2nd opportunity to do it again. To be an effective researcher leads to being a better leader. My method technique must improve.</p>	<p>This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research) I will remain as objective as possible in my next focus group interview. Reflective journaling and my EdD training is allowing me to note these things and adapt and improve as a practitioner researcher + school leader.</p>

Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	we met as a whole staff to conduct a SNOT analysis of the T+L of handwriting in our school.	I was very excited for this meeting. This was another opportunity to address as a staff teaching and learning issues. The D.P. agreed to be the scribe happily. Again this allowed me the time and space to share leadership and observe and listen more carefully and attentively. The debate was lively, staff seemed enthusiastic. The chosen facilitation method was simple and therefore did not infringe on momentum. Knowledge was openly shared and created.	I felt it went well. I engaged it. I was tired after it.	I judged the staff to have engaged and enjoyed the opportunity for open discussion and debate, deterring by participation and their SNOT analysis responses. I am improving my listening skills as I certainly picked up on how people can view and interpret data differently. That is not something I would have noticed or picked up on before. As a practitioner researcher I can see that people (and myself) can see & interpret data with our own lens. The ability to realise & see this is important in leading SSE.	This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research) As part of the As part of the An. cycle feedback stage, it will be important that I analyse the data, unbiased, whilst acknowledging my lens. Theory will be important here to minimize skewed analysis

Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	<p>During Jan 27th - Jan 31st I showed all teachers and SNAs the SSE circular guidelines and LAOS. This was done on an individual basis. This was Action Step 2. Each member was met individually with sub cover provided by the Df. + SETS</p>	<p>I felt it was important to meet each member individually to allow them ask individual questions in a safe + secure environment i.e. not in front of anyone. It also allowed me the opportunity to reach and confirm consensus on the SSE focus topic in a confidential way and uncough dry group think. Personal ethical standards were followed. all members seemed comfortable. Most were surprised at the amount & depth of documents re: SSE from the Dept.</p>	<p>I found this action great as a researcher and a leader. For some it was their first time to see the SSE documents. In terms of AR this was a very real practical intervention. I found it exciting but that reason.</p>	<p>later I felt confused upon reflection this was a poor way to explore these documents. I was delivered as a knowledgeable expert whilst the staff member was in a passive role. This in essence was what I sought to change in undertaking the A.R. However, I was aware that the purpose of the conversation was to simply introduce the documents. It was not intended to</p>	<p>This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research)</p>

we were leaving for
me here was on the
value of being a
reflective practitioner
and how it can
improve my leadership.
as is evident by
what I learned and
my judgements. I
am more aware of
power relations and
staff being vulnerable.
I am more aware
as a research
practitioner
regarding ethics.
I have also
learned the
important role
a critical
friend could
play in teasing
out these
issues before
another action
is taken.

* also on reflection, was this a wise thing to do re: power relations?
Did I put them in a vulnerable position? The tally was useful
(as majority wanted it) so that helps alleviate that worry I suppose! → P.T.O.

Appendix 12

Phase 1 – Becoming familiar with the data

I immersed myself in this data to become familiar with the depth and breadth of its content. This involved repeated reading of the data in an active way by making notes and searching for meanings and patterns.

Phase 2 – Data coding

This phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. This initial coding was undertaken by using gerunds and keeping the codes active and as close to the original statements as possible (Charmaz, 2006, pg.42-71). To begin, I underlined what I felt was every key word and phrase in both the survey data and the interview transcripts. I then combined every underlined word and phrase into colour coded group. For example, any words or phrases associated with making improvements were colour coded pink, whilst any words or phrases associated with paperwork were colour coded dark green etc., for example:

Survey part 1 (multiple-choice questions)	
Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: The <u>existing resources</u> provided by the DES are <u>useful</u> for SSE (80% indifferent, 10% agree) •
Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>More resources are required</u> from the DES on how to conduct SSE (70% yes, 20% indifferent) •
Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Schools should be provided with generic tools for SSE</u> rather than creating their own (yes 60%, indifferent 20%, no 10%) •
Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have the necessary skills</u> to carry out SSE (80% yes, 10% indifferent, 10% no) •
Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Management needs more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (yes 50%, indifferent 50%) <u>indifferent result may be due to power relations</u> •
Question 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff need more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (70% yes, 20% indifferent, 10% no) •

Question 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse quantitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse qualitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: School <u>management have</u> the necessary <u>training required to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>40% yes, 30% no, 30% indifferent</u>)
Question 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have</u> the necessary <u>training to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>60% no, 10% yes, 30% indifferent</u>)
Question 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>BOM have the skills to do SSE (no 50%, indifferent 30%, agree 20%)</u>
Question 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Standardised test should be used as part of SSE (90% yes, 10% no)</u>
Question 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Peer review is</u> used as <u>part of the SSE process</u> in this school (<u>100% no</u>)
Question 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school a set of procedures for doing SSE (60% yes, 10% no, indifferent 30%)</u>
Question 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school an SSE policy (90% yes, 10% no)</u>
Question 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>process of SSE is easy to understand</u> (no 40%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 10%</u>)
Question 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>SSE guidelines</u> developed by the DES re <u>easy to understand (no 80%, 10% indifferent, 10% yes)</u>
Question 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: School <u>management conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OUTPUT: <u>SSE involves all staff (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>SSE reports</u> should be <u>published on the internet (no 90%, indifferent 10%)</u>

Question 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: SSE results in better management (no 30%, indifferent 50%, yes 20%) •
Question 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: SSE results in better teaching and learning (yes 60%, indifferent 20%, 20% no) •
Question 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE places a lot of stress on staff (yes 90%, 10% no)
Question 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE increase staff morale (no 90%, 10% yes)
Question 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE takes up a lot of time (yes 90%, 10% indifferent)
Question 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE is popular with the majority of staff in our school (no 90%, 10% indifferent) •
Question 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general (positive 20%, indifferent 80%) •

Survey part 2 (open-ended questions)	
Question 29: What do you think is the purpose of SSE?	
S3 Respondent 1	<p>Give schools a sense of accountability</p> <p>Give a sense of agency to schools to work on what actually needs improvement</p> <p>Cut down on unnecessary investigations/ revisions in schools where they aren't needed</p> <p>Take pressure off Department</p>
S3 Respondent 2	To look at teaching and learning on our school: identify opportunities for improvement in practice and results
S3 Respondent 3	Another box ticking exercise
S3 Respondent 4	I think it's a tick the box exercise and I am not really sure to be honest
S3 Respondent 5	A whole school plan to evaluate what areas we as a school need to improve on and start to facilitate in our daily school lives, for both teachers and learners alike

<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	For a school to identify an area of weakness and put a plan into action of how to improve the area
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	To identify areas of weakness and improve as needed. Can be helpful regarding whole-school planning
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	Illustrate good practice. Identify areas that need improvement . Schools to identify and develop their own improvement areas.
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	To improve all aspects of the school to lead to enhanced learning
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	To identify an area of weakness to improve on as a school. Target specific areas – improved outcomes for the better of each pupil and school as a whole
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	The purpose of SSE is to enable schools to critically evaluate teaching and learning within their organisation and to put improvement plans in place based on their findings
Question 30: Any useful policy documents that you know of regarding SSE?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	No
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	None
<i>S3 Respondent 4</i>	None
<i>S3 Respondent 5</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	SSE guidelines (Purple book)
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	LAOS – looking at our schools School self-evaluation guidelines
Question 31: What are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	Allows schools to make practical changes
<i>S3 Respondent 2</i>	Allows time for staff to reflect and be objective and professional as we review all aspects of subject/strand in question
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	As an SNA I am unaware of SSE or its relevance to my role

S3 Respondent 4	As an SNA I don't really know the positive aspects of SSE, as my role and SSE have no relevance to each other
S3 Respondent 5	As a government policy the positive aspects are; it allows for a whole school review of our own personal teachings and going forward delivering the best possible outcomes for our learners
S3 Respondent 6	It is a positive way of improving a school, the teaching, learning and overall management
S3 Respondent 7	It does improve learning and management within a school. Provides opportunities for reflection and discussion.
S3 Respondent 8	Improvement of learning methodologies and strategies. Identify areas for development. Taking ownership of curriculum
S3 Respondent 9	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 10	Improvement of teaching, learning methodologies and enhancement of engagement
S3 Respondent 11	Improvement in learning overall. More focus on teaching areas of weakness. Methodologies and skills improved. Specific and easy to back by data and show improvements. SMART goals - attainable
S3 Respondent 12	All schools in the country are expected to partake. It allows schools the autonomy to choose areas of most concern to them and their organisation. It acknowledges the inbuilt desire of the vast majority of teachers to improve their schools teaching and learning.
Question 32: What are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 1	Policy includes very long term aims e.g., in 2023 we'll look at..., stage 2 of our English policy happens next year...etc. In that time teachers and principals change, move, retire, take leave. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year entirely Also, we had just got into it when it was paused for strike which was demoralising and took the energy out of the whole process.
S3 Respondent 2	Very time consuming; lots of abstract, repetitive 'splitting of hairs'; quite meaningless exercise at times
S3 Respondent 3	Additional paperwork on already stretched staff
S3 Respondent 4	Paper work. Time consuming
S3 Respondent 5	The negative aspects of SSE as a government policy are; paperwork to follow paperwork, stresses on teachers to over perform beyond their means where they are already over-stretched. Scare tactics used by inspectors to

	deliver outcomes by over worked and underappreciated teachers and not being realistic .
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	Added workload and time required to do it
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	Time consuming – takes a lot of meeting times. Increased paperwork equals increased stress which affects morale .
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	Negative stress , time for analysis (timetabling), time consuming , lot of meeting time, takes away from classroom planning time , increased paperwork
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	Time consuming , morale , work overload limits time for planning , stress
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	Time consuming . Unnecessary stress / staff morale . Taking away from teacher planning/class time
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	Continuous CPD regarding the process for teachers new to the profession has not been a feature. It is a (formal) addition to an already full workload .
Question 33: What emotions come to mind when you think of SSE?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	Calm, content, mostly positive, somewhat inattentive and detached. Irritated (with stop-start, training followed by strike) unenthusiastic but willing to participate, have input, follow instructions
<i>S3 Respondent 2</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 4</i>	Overwhelmed, stressed...where do I find the time? on one hand but on the other hand.... a feeling of achievement and happy knowing that I was involved in the teamwork to try and make the school better
<i>S3 Respondent 5</i>	Inspired, motivated, determined but at the same time overwhelmed, tense and anxious
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	Uncertainty, interest, fear, satisfaction, scepticism
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	

S3 Respondent 9	Frustration, dissatisfaction, disappointment, annoyance
S3 Respondent 10	
S3 Respondent 11	At Dept. level..... Vague, unclear, uncertainty, bewilderment, complex, time consuming, work overload, unsupported, lack of communication, under resourced, inconsistent, lack of staff morale, paperwork.... but with the possibility at our own level of..... Potential, achievement, success, positivity, focus, guidance, support, attainable, boost in staff morale when progress and figures in areas improve
S3 Respondent 12	Don't have any strong emotions positive or negative really
Question 34: Please describe any other opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations or comments you have in relation to your experience of SSE to date in your educational career	
S3 Respondent 1	Happy to participate in SSE but also happy to be told what to do at times if it saves on time/discussion/meetings
S3 Respondent 2	I find it quite tiresome in general and would welcome a directive from the Dept. of Ed outlining what to do/how and when in each subject – “there’s great freedom in having no choice”
S3 Respondent 3	SSE does not seem to be a ‘whole school process’ and as an SNA it seems irrelevant to me
S3 Respondent 4	I don't have any thoughts other than SNAs are not involved in SSE and I don't know whether or not it would be beneficial for an SNA to be included or not
S3 Respondent 5	I do feel it would be more beneficial to discuss pressing matters regarding planning, schemes etc. going forward rather than policy.

S3 Respondent 6	I think it's great for management to involve everyone in the process (and that this will always draw things out and make it hard to please everyone) At the end of the day once the target subject area improves that's the main thing.
S3 Respondent 7	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 8	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 9	SSE is added pressure from the Department. Taking time out to discuss items with staff could be more valuable if a sub was provided to ensure work is still covered as teachers (SET and class) return
S3 Respondent 10	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 11	Aware of SSE in a whole school approach and its benefits. Unaware of resources/further information to enhance the benefits of SSE. I feel as though it is seen as an approach of something that just 'has to be done' as a school approach overall, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.
RS3 respondent 12	When SSE was first introduced, the inspectorate made themselves available to their own schools to explain the process to staff as a whole. There was no compulsion to invite the inspector to deliver the seminar, but in our school, we did and it was most beneficial in terms of the clarity it brought.

The colour coded words and phrases were then combined into one master document for ease of thematic analysis. They were then each assigned an alphanumeric code and description title. This removed the need for colour coding. Identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extracts that demonstrate that code is an important part of phase two.

Actual data extract quotes	Code	Description title
Purpose/Reason		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accountability</i> • <i>Box ticking exercise</i> • <i>Tick the box exercise</i> 	R1	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improvement</i> • <i>Improvement in teaching and learning</i> • <i>A need to improve a school for both teachers and learners</i> • <i>To improve</i> • <i>Improve</i> 	R 2	Improvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify areas that need improvement</i> • <i>Improve the school to enhance learning</i> • <i>Improve outcomes for the better of each pupil and the whole school</i> • <i>Improvement plans based on findings</i> 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To evaluate for improvement</i> • <i>Identify an area of weakness</i> • <i>Identify areas of weakness</i> • <i>Illustrate good practice</i> • <i>Identify area of weakness</i> • <i>Critically evaluate teaching and learning</i> 	R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Put a plan into action</i> • <i>Whole school planning</i> • <i>Improvement plans</i> 	R4	Planning
Positive aspects of SSE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practical changes</i> 	P1	Practical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To reflect</i> • <i>Reflection and discussion</i> 	P2	Reflect and discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Professional</i> 	P3	Professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA I am unaware of SSE</i> • <i>As an SNA my role and SSE have no relevance to each other</i> 	P4	SNA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whole school review</i> • <i>Focus on teaching in areas of weakness</i> 	P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Delivering the best possible outcomes</i> 	P6	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improving the teaching, learning and management of a school</i> • <i>Improvement of learning</i> • <i>Improve learning and management</i> • <i>Improvement of teaching and learning</i> • <i>Improvement in learning</i> • <i>To improve the school's teaching and learning</i> 	P7	Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking ownership</i> • <i>Autonomy</i> 	P8	Autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engagement</i> 	P9	Engagement

		(with teaching and learning improvement)
Negative aspects of SSE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very long term aims</i> • <i>Staff turnover is high. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year</i> 	N1	Too long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Roll out of SSE was paused and took the energy out of the process</i> 	N2	No momentum/energy in the process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time required to do it</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> 	N3	No time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Abstract and quite meaningless</i> 	N4	Meaningless
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over stretched staff</i> • <i>Over stretched staff to over perform beyond their means</i> 	N5	Overstretched staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Additional paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> 	N6	More paper work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Staff stress</i> • <i>Increased stress</i> • <i>Negative stress</i> • <i>Unnecessary stress</i> • <i>stress</i> 	N7	More stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over worked</i> • <i>Added workload</i> • <i>Addition to an already full workload</i> 	N8	Over worked staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not realistic</i> 	N9	Not realistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Affects morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> 	N10	Lowers morale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Takes away from classroom planning time</i> 	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and planning time

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking away from teacher planning/class time</i> 		
Other comments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to participate in SSE</i> 	OC 1	Participate... yes!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to be told what to do if it saves on time/discussion/meetings</i> • <i>Would like a directive from Dept. saying what to do/how and when in each subject</i> 	OC 2	Tell me what to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I find it quite tiresome in general</i> 	OC3	Tiresome process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA it seems irrelevant to me</i> • <i>SNAs are not involved in SSE. I don't know whether or not it would be beneficial for an SNA to be included</i> 	OC4	Irrelevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It would be more beneficial to discuss planning rather than policy</i> 	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Great for management to involve everyone in the process</i> 	OC6	Involve everyone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Once the target subject area improves that's the main thing</i> 	OC7	Once target area improves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SSE is added pressure</i> 	OC8	Pressure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Valuable if a sub was provided to ensure work is still covered as teachers return from meetings</i> 	OC9	Proper sub cover
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is seen as an approach of something that just 'has to be done' as a school approach, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.</i> 	OC10	SSE has to be done but not sure why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When SSE was first introduced, we invited the inspector to deliver the seminar, most beneficial in terms of the clarity it brought</i> 	OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good
Emotions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confused</i> • <i>Frustrated</i> • <i>Calm</i> • <i>Annoyed</i> 	E1	All references to emotions
Leadership		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve</i> 	L1	All references specific to leadership
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As can be seen from the example above, identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extract quote that demonstrate that code was an important part of phase two.

With these new alphanumeric codes, I now turned my attention to coding the illustrative graph data from the questionnaire

Survey part 1 (multiple-choice questions)		
Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: The <u>existing resources</u> provided by the DES are <u>useful</u> for SSE (<u>80%</u> <u>indifferent</u>, 10% agree) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • Anti OC11
Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>More resources are required</u> from the DES on how to conduct SSE (<u>70% yes</u>, 20% indifferent) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • OC9 • OC11
Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Schools should be provided with generic tools for SSE</u> rather than creating their own (<u>yes 60%</u>, indifferent 20%, no 10%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • N6
Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Staff have the necessary skills</u> to carry out SSE (<u>80% yes</u>, 10% indifferent, 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • Anti OC11
Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Management needs more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (<u>yes 50%</u>, <u>indifferent 50%</u>) <u>indifferent result may be due to power relations</u> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • P3 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC11
Question 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Staff need more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (<u>70% yes</u>, 20% indifferent, 10% no) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • P3 • P8 • P9 • OC11

Question 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse quantitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3
Question 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse qualitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3
Question 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: School <u>management have</u> the necessary <u>training required to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>40% yes, 30% no, 30% indifferent</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have</u> the necessary <u>training to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>60% no, 10% yes, 30% indifferent</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>BOM have the skills to do SSE (no 50%, indifferent 30%, agree 20%)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9
Question 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Standardised test should be used as part of SSE (90% yes, 10% no)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P5 P1 R3
Question 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Peer review is</u> used as <u>part of the SSE process</u> in this school (<u>100% no</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school a set of procedures for doing SSE (60% yes, 10% no, indifferent 30%)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3
Question 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school an SSE policy (90% yes, 10% no)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3 R4 OC10
Question 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>process of SSE is easy to understand</u> (no 40%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 10%</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC11
Question 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>SSE guidelines</u> developed by the DES re <u>easy to understand (no 80%, 10% indifferent, 10% yes)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
Question 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: School <u>management conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school</u> (<u>90% yes</u>, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • R3 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC10
Question 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: <u>Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school</u> (<u>90% yes</u>, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • R3 • P8 • P9 • OC10
Question 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTPUT: <u>SSE involves all staff</u> (<u>90% yes</u>, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • P9 • R4 • OC6 • Anti OC9 • OC10
Question 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: <u>SSE reports</u> should be <u>published on the internet</u> (<u>no 90%</u>, indifferent 10%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1
Question 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: <u>SSE results in better management</u> (no 30%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 20%</u>) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N9 • L1
Question 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: <u>SSE results in better teaching and learning</u> (<u>yes 60%</u>, indifferent 20%, 20% no) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P7
Question 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE places a lot of <u>stress</u> on staff (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • E1 • OC8
Question 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE <u>increase staff morale</u> (<u>no 90%</u>, 10% yes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N10 • E1
Question 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE <u>takes up a lot of time</u> (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3 • N1

Question 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE is popular with the majority of staff in our school (no 90%, 10% indifferent) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC3 • OC10
Question 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general (positive 20%, indifferent 80%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10

My attention now turned to the interview transcriptions. I proceeded to underline what I felt was every key word and phrase. For ease of analysis, I also assigned each interviewee's voice a colour code of red, green, yellow and purple. These key words and phrases were then combined into one master interview document for ease of analysis. The alphanumeric codes were then applied to each keyword and phrase.

Focus Group Interview One	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attitudes are one of confusion to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was taken off the table. hard to get that momentum back, to get back into the swing of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N2 • E1 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a lot of confusion wasn't much clear guidance in the first place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something very broad, I know is what we were told at one stage, and don't go too specific. well, how broad do we go, how specific do we get. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the level of engagement from school to school varies greatly, just from speaking to my own friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • N4 • N1 • P9 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think, what they're supposed to be doing mostly, across the board is the big part of the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one other thing that was being thrown at schools from the department, as if there wasn't really enough already. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • N6 • N5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than, the Department coming in and doing their WSE and deciding, this area, you need to improve, and this is what we want you to do. They were just saying, okay schools, you need to do this yourselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • R2 • R1 • Anti OC11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • own attitude is, I suppose one of indifference, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there's so much going on between new language curriculum already being talks of a maths one, different programmes being introduced the whole time, So, you're constantly running around, doing this, doing that, and then I just feel it's one extra thing being added into the equation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on board with doing whatever I have to do, but I'm not over interested in it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • R1 • OC10 • OC2 • P3 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to identify areas of weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what the school needs to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a particular two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • R4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pick something and improve it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools are doing anyway, because in our job, that's what we do every day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P3 • P9 • P8 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting everyone on the same – singing off the same hymn sheet, school-wide, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P6 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do that day to day in your own classroom and in your setting that we're watching, and seeing what children need to work on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P8 • P9 • P3 • R2 • R3 • R4

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do see the benefit of it having one specific thing that the school overall has a focus on, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • R4 • R2 • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school self-evaluation then is more aimed at school level, or is it aimed at classroom level..... aimed at both, but..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's happening anyway, on a classroom level. on a band level, within classes, teachers talk about things..... we know the areas of strengths and weaknesses.....and look at our own test results, or their own assessment, and see where a class needs to go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P8 • P9 • P3 • R2 • R3 • R4 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it pulls all that together and gives focus to the school of where to go. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • starts at class level, individual classes,, strength can become a whole school thing. For example, with the handwriting; if people start to implement changes within their rooms, then that's shown throughout the school, whether that's in displays or handwriting competitionsbecomes a whole school result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anything we've certainly looked at would have been areas that even we would all have said, oh yeah, that's definitely an area. And I think that's what got is started on the handwriting, was that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • P8 • P5 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we had all identified that ourselves. So, I suppose you're first identifying things from your own experience, before you look at it as a whole school thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all have our own little zone, then when we come together then in staff meetings or in discussions, then it becomes a whole school issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certainly, anything that we've looked at, has been something that certainly I, in my own experience, would have flagged in my own classes as areas that would have needed things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P3 • P9 • P8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it forces you, we need to improve this, what can we do, you mightn't necessarily get around to doing it. it does force you to do something about an issue that exists. especially the handwriting I think I would always have been something that was always on the back burner, I must try and improve that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • R2 • R1 • P7 • P9 • OC7 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it's like everything else, you've only so many hours in the week, and trying to get everything done, that I suppose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3 • OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> this probably brings it to the forefront and makes you actually focus on it a bit more than you would have done otherwise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R2 • P7 • P9 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> what are we actually doing well first, with a positive stand first. Would you ever see it like that? I always think of, what do we need to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we're so paperwork focused and paperwork driven at the minute, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we have to have this done, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you're constantly thinking, of inspectors and WSEs that the focus I suppose the focus externally would be on areas to improve. It's very rarely they come in and say, well, you did great on such a thing, you know. Then tend to come in and they will focus on the weaknesses, and they will pull you up on things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • N10 • R1 • R2 • R3 • P5 • E1 • Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a positive start, but if you started with it said, you're doing these things really, really they'd still be saying, but you need to improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC11 • N10 • R2 • R1 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If we were to choose an area that's really strong, but step it up one more notch, would probably change people's attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R4 • P7 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with that mind set. You're kind of automatically, looking to improve something, you're thinking of it as an area that you're falling down on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe the attitudes would be different board if you came in looking from a point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7

<p>of, we're doing really well in this, so let's try to maintain that, or keep developing it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a few years ago, in specific areas of maths, and part of it was to raise the overall score, say in maths and standardised tests, and we put focus on the areas that would have been traditionally weaker. And we definitely did see a huge improvement. At school level, we did see a big improvement as a result. when you're focused on something, you get more results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • P7 • P9 • P1 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we'd said aside time every week to do a little bit on that. Kind of stuck it to the more practical areas of maths, every week we'd take one day and touch on that. it helped to focus everyone, if you touched on it throughout the term every week, you were actually teaching it properly and coming back and revisiting things. saw an improvement? Absolutely, definitely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P1 • P7 • P9 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from a school level, I need to pick it up in the area, or I need to focus on this. nobody wants to be seen to be letting the side down, and you want to pull your weight, if it's on a whole school level. So, it does impact your classroom teaching, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think there's an accountability as well, when it's a whole school thing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • P8 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do feel that we do have so much going on, it's so easy to forget about something. to be implemented successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think if it's interesting, I have the enthusiasm; it depends on what the topic is, what the area is. There are certain subject areas I'd be much more interested in than others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1 • OC1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would need a lot of encouragement and a lot of support. it really does come down to staff, myself and staff enthusiasm and interest in what the area is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just having time for it, because I think time is a massive issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would have the enthusiasm to do it once something is up and running and started. I would need that little bit of push. I definitely would need a targeted time or a targeted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • E1 • OC1

<p>reminder that this is our evaluation and this is what we're working towards, one slot a week or two times a week where we're going to work on this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do very little taking out school self-evaluation documents and reading them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think if there was a department directive coming out to everybody,something very specific, and told, this is the area you're going to improve on, we're going to be in to check it in the next two months, that that would push me motivate me to say, right, this is something I have to work on, they want this done.that motivation, that push would drive me a lot more, I need motivation, I need a target, and I need something to focus myself on, and to know that it's going to be assessed and it's going to be looked at further. Not that you're going to put work into something and nothing ever come of it, or nobody ever give you feedback on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R1 • E1 • OC3 • OC11 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I just think it's putting the onus back on us, whereas it should be more coming from above,, this is where we saw your school had a weakness, or, pick a strength and say we want you to improve on it. And that they should be deciding it, I feel, more so than the staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • N5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we are coming back to look at it. So that you really feel that motivation, that, okay, they're coming to look at poetry or oral Irish, or handwriting – right, I need to up my game. So that you have that kind of motivation to drive you on, because sometimes it can be hard..... to find motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • E1 • OC3 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You've so much more going on, and so much to teach throughout the day, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's follow-through as well for them, isn't it?you're living off your nerves, Everyone is putting their best foot forward, and the whole school is making such an effort. you're trying to show off all the work you've been doingto show the school to the best of your ability. They come in, you're doing grand here, but this, this and this needs work – and then they go off and they leave you to it,come back at some stage to follow up, more often than not, they don't. So, it's just coming in, I feel, they come in criticising, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • N10 • N8 • R1 • E1 • Anti OC11

<p>and go. it's the magical 'work on that', and then they go, it's left to us to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they say, you know your school best,, when they're putting work back on schools. And then, they're very quick at the same time to turn around and say, well, we know best when it comes to, this new curriculum, new documents, new everything to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • Anti OC11 • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I certainly think we have the capacity, but I think schools are very busy places, and quite stressful places. school management, teachers, everyone is working flat out, all the days we're here, and the days we're at home. you don't leave here at three o'clock and leave it all behind you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • N8 • P3 • E1 • L1 • OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there's a tendency to kind of pass things off onto the schools. it's felt that everything in the last few years all put back onto the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if they could come once a year for half a day, in an inspector could come in and sit down with the school, or even for a Croke Park hour, and look through where we're at now, and talk with the teachers and the staff and work together on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • R4 • OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think we all have the capability to engage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we're all professionals everyone here is here with the best of intentions, works hard and wants the best, for our students. pride in our school we want the school to be best that it can be. staff are willing and are enthusiastic and care enough about the school as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We certainly have the means to assess within our own school and to know, assess our own classrooms and to know the children that we're teaching, I think we all know our children very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • P8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the main thing schools are missing is just guidance and someone to come in to sit with a staff and look through and think, right, what is the best way for you to use this time, and use this effort to get the best results for your specific school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC11 • OC10 • N4 • R1 • R4 • L1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think sometimes when we're left to it ourselves, it's very hard to see, when you're one step back from any situation, it's easier to see it clearly. I think sometimes we're so into it, and so involved, and you're kind of protective of your school, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E1 • OC6 • OC7 • OC11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that sometimes you need someone to come in and even to look through and say, right, I see where you're going in this area, but maybe you're being..... just, an hours' chat, I think, would make the world of difference..... <i>If they were to give very clear directives on what they want to see</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E1 N4 OC11 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>we could analyse it ourselves and say, well, we think we need to improve this, and what could we do, and decide ourselves. And they could still come back in and say, oh, well that's not really good enough, because we've seen a lot better in other schools. Whereas, as a school, we might feel, oh, we've changed it up and it's much better, it still mightn't necessarily be what they wanted us to improve.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 R2 P3 P8 P2 Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional enoughtostand over what we say?..... I think we would,it has to be a whole school thing. if we're all in, we all have to be on the same page. And if everyone feels confident enough to be able to say that, it would be great. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3 P8 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> but I think that's a confidence thing, and I think that's probably something that comes back from when you're starting your teaching career, you have the dip year, or most of us did, where they come in and you're nearly afraid to breathe too loudly, because whatever they say goes. And it's completely rewiring that, and rewiring that almost fear. I mean, we go back to like children in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 E1 Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'd say confidence is the main thing.a belief that you know you've got the backing of the rest of your staff, and that everyone is on the same page..... <i>being a member of a team,to team player. It's all or nothing, everybody has to get on board with it and implement it,, or it won't work.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3 P8 E1 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you'd need to have some evidence to show them. concrete evidence.....assessment, evidence. this all the timeit's the skillsets that we use every day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC7 P8 P3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it's probably ingrained in us since we were training,you live in fear of the inspector coming in. And they come in then, and criticise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 E1 Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We definitely seek praise, and you seek positive reinforcement..... are you doing it to the best of your ability,identifying a</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R3 N10 E1

<p><i>weakness or an area to develop, and you want to do it, and be told, yes, you've done an amazing job....., when you're analysing it yourself,, we could pick it out, but it's more about this person that's going to come in from the outside, and maybe knock you down, even though you've done the best that you can do. there's always a constant fear there that you're not going to get the appraisal and the gratitude for what you've put in. you are left open to criticism.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC11 • P3 • P8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • important that everyone, certainly engages and comes together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who keeps everyone together, and rounds it up, and mediates, I.....? I suppose the leadership has to come from the top, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but then equally, everyone has to row in and support each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is that tendency to focus on your own little department and your own classroom, but I think it's really important that teachers build each other up as well, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think we need to build each other up a little bit more, and to give each other a bit of praise when we need it, and stand over each other and give each other a help when we need it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • P5 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's important that everyone has an active part, and everyone probably feels that they have a voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • P2 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the areas that you need a little bit of support in, that there's someone there to give it to you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working in smaller teams, and then feeding back – probably like we did with the handwriting. I did feel that was helpful, kind of funnelling it through, so it's not just one big staff meeting and everyone's sitting there, the voices who are confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P2 • P9 • P5

<p>in speaking probably, and probably the people who have been doing it longer feel a little bit more confident in doing it. I think for younger teachers, it's quite difficult in that setting to put themselves forward, even though they might have a lot of newer ideas, maybe, if they can bring fresh things to the table.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC6 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it absolutely has to be a whole school approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hear of schools where the principal decides, we're doing this, and this is happening, and then the teachers are all left scurrying around trying to do it and trying to implement it in the classroom, and it just fails because everyone isn't in it together. So, I think it is really important that everyone just is on the same page and everyone is part of the team that works on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do believe that leadership, whether it's principal and vice-principal, the main push comes from them, but that everybody needs to be on board. It has to be a whole... everybody has to be a team. everything that happens in a school, the staff have to be a team. everybody needs to get on board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think with the school self-evaluation that we've been doing, everybody has been involved, everybody has been asked an opinion, whether they want to or not. I think from that regard, it's been operating very successfully where everyone has been involved in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • P2 • L1 • OC6 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But I do believe that the leadership, I prefer the main drive to come from the leadership side of things, once staff are involved and know what's happening, right, this is where we're going with it, this is the direction we're going to take. We're going to do this once a week, we're going to do this on a daily, and then that the push comes from management, from a leadership....., I need that driver, that motivation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P8 • L1 • OC6 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can split, and go different directions, where some people are doing more, and other people are doing a lot less. Whereas, I think if everybody knows, this is what's expected, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear guidelines. So, if it isn't to come from the Department, and it was to come from the leaders in school,, I think that would work very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • P8 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone has to do their own little part. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R1 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you still need someone reining everybody in, as you do in everything else,, in teams or anything else you need a leader to focus, channel the focus, I think, it stops everyone just going around in circles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • OC10 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC6
Focus Group Interview Two	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive without being enthusiastic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that I think it makes sense that schools can identify their own problems and you know go from there but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P8 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't enjoy the process I don't enjoy that kind of work in terms of policies, policies and paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not an area of personal interest to me but I still think it's a fairly good idea for schools to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P7 • E1 • OC1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's not something I would enjoy,I have to do with work I'd have no feelings of excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it'swhat schools do or should be doing anyway all the time, seeing how we can improve things but – I wouldn't get excited about it now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • R2 • P7 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An awful lot of investment for a very little a very specific little area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and I can see the point of it and I can see the democratic element of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I often think,just tell me what to do, I'll do it, that's what I'd like but then maybe I wouldn't like it, maybe you know if the management team is dictating all the time, maybe..... I can't go wrong if I'm told what to do, you tell me what to do and I'll do it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • N4 • OC2 • OC6 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve the learning process for our childrento improve our practice and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7

<p>.....to help childrenachieve more or achieve their potential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any good school with a positive atmosphere, this happens, you see we've a little weakness, it's mentioned at a staff meeting and we do something to change it, the purpose of it is for if there are schools who are failing? it forces them to get on board with it and I guess then you need proof in the form of paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • P7 • P2 • P1 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • N6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have always done it as in we see something, lower results in tests or some attitude problem on the kid or something and we kind of naturally focus in, next year let's try to do a bit better on that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P1 • P5 • P6 • P7 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement at school level or classroom level I'd say both,it depends on the topics you chose, we've picked something very practical....., handwriting, it's good for the school because we've all had a look at ourselves and said it's something we can improve as a school and then the kids will definitely feel it in class because it's very practical. this time next year we could look at the copies and say, 'Look at that' There's the result, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P1 • P5 • P7 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • OC7 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I find it hard to engage with When there was a meeting, it was SSE, then I go out and it's kind of, 'Oh gone', you know unless I'm reminded again about it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like I'm always so against the clock I believe in the decisions made, I want to do it in the classroom,the day just goes by, so I guess that's why I did like that we did something simple, like handwriting, I think maybe if it was perhaps more classroom specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say there is scope for a whole school use of it like we were just talking about a lovely schoolhad a general feeling and attitude that people in the classroom benefited from so I guess we could look at things like, uniforms or punctuality and...Politeness, manners.issues on yard, so I'd say there is scope for tangible whole school improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say potential for it for using both, so far, it's been classroom based and I'd it has led to improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R4 • P7 • P5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm always a little nervous about plans that are operate over a few years,you've a changeover of teachers, you could have a new principal, maternity leaves, you've everything and those things get lost and so I just love when something can be implemented between September and June and done and it's there..... Anything that's a little longer term I am starting to lose enthusiasm for because I've started to realise, they just fade away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC6 • Anti OC5 • L1 • E1 • N4 • N1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the intention is very good I think it has to be a positive thing you know because we're always trying to improve, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it can be a bit vague if it's too big, I think small concise areas or maybe an overall general thing in the school if you say for year 1, 2, 3, and 4, we're going to implement thisit starts off great but inevitably people come and go and puff..... we forget. But the intention is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N4 • OC10 • P7 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's good to keep looking at ourselves and looking at our practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • P2 • P9 • P3 • OC6 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we do get to suggest those weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • R3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a very supportive environment here in this school..... I think nobody's afraid to ask for help if they need help people have different strengths..... And no one's afraid to say, 'I'm bad at something'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R2 • P5 • P8 • P9 • E1 • OC6 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one feed into the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say for SSE classroom based probably works better because it's hard to find a practical measurable way of add to school culture or atmosphere, when you talk about SSE....., it's more suitable for classroom teaching and it's probably more likely more effective..... Because they're more precise measurableharder within the bounds of school self-evaluation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable you to do school self-evaluation?.....one thing that's very practical is the time out that we had from the classroom to be able to talk in focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P2 • P9

<p>about, the handwriting it's very hard as you know if you're trying to do that at lunchtime or after school. Like we were given time and plenty of time to – so that helped to engage and we could all agree in our group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • P1 • L1 • OC6 • OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long time ago. I just remember the cold in the library, that's what I remember about 'Pick a very small area'..... That's all I remember, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10 • OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we were trained we were ready but you know the strike then it was called..... I felt like I'd emotionally invested in it and then it was gone, then it came back, This is just another thing that will come and go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N2 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the topics we picked had been topics I feel I can talk about. any of our topics so far actually I've had opinions on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • P8 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know there's an effort to have every voice heard there was so much talk and discussion and meetings to get to a few quite basic points you know so I guess that's the part of it that if an instinct to resist. it's just the time and the all the democracyOn the flip side, if we weren't given all that time, we'd all be moaning wouldn't we. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3 • P5 • P9 • P8 • P2 • L1 • OC3 • Anti OC6 • Anti OC7 • OC8 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wouldn't be keen to get more training on it really. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I assume you go off to these places and you know what's required and it filters down to us in terms of what you know what we have to do so I'm comfortable enough with that process, I'm probably not eager enough to go and study those things myself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • L1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • my lack of enthusiasm about the whole thing,. , I'm very happy to do whatever. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a kind of an apathy towards it, where do you think that stemmed from, I think people want to become a teacher Ipicture myself as a teacher whenyou've got a book in your hand and you're talking to the class and they're answering questions and next thing the conversation moves on, you're down with the map and next thing you're talking about Brazil and that's when I feel really good in my job and I like to be in the classroom anything that goes into a folder for me is just the stuff I have to do to get paid, people became teachersthey didn't chose office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10 • N9 • E1 • R1 • P5 • P8 • P9 • OC3 • OC7

<p>work they saw themselves doing nature walks I feel best when I do something like I read a book see something in an art gallery I'm doing it in school I actually feel – blissful moments everything else I try to argue to have it as minimum as possible and I'm being paid for being here so I accept that I should have to do this stuff but I don't know if I could ever really feel enthusiastic about that. only thing that would encourage enthusiasm is that if it's something you would personally do next year, like the handwriting, I do feel positive about that next year, I feel good that we'll all be doing the same thing or that we all know how to rule our copies the same way but I think the general apathy is just if maybe if you asked a pile of accountants to do this kind of work you might get some enthusiasm.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • things we have to write down that I feel like you write it down and probably it will never ever be read but you're doing it in case some legal thing comes up or someone comes in and there's no soul in it, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this I wouldn't feel negative about this because it is, actually, going to be used next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 • P9 • P8 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something I have to write downand away it goes in a folder and probably eyes will never be cast on it again, that frustrates me, anything to do with legal, you know the whole world of insurance and compo culture and all that and everything to do to prevent that is just a very negative area in my mind you know. If you were to think about that you wouldn't teach really. You'd change your job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • N9 • E1 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, I love teaching. I love my job. I love the children. I love being in there, getting you know making a difference in their lives and getting them enthused about something, that I'm enthusiastic, bringing out of them – bringing out what's the best in them that's real to me and I really love that and this ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Box ticking exercise dusty old doesn't do anything for me. I do it because I have to do it because that's my terms and conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • R1 • E1 • OC2 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like integrated learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know where you put that in boxes, I'm not a box ticking person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • N9 • R1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> every form or folder reduces the time you have in the day to do those things. she's done nothing up there because you know what I mean I haven't ticked all the boxes but yet I feel I have done a lot but you can't quantify a lot of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9 R1 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> your best teaching moments are the things when you veer offSpontaneous. It's not really worth it to go back and change your plans you know what happened and you know and I'd say as well the parents anything they value that you do, none of that's in your folders either 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a good – a positive approach, a positive outlook really, open-mindedgood social skills to be able to engage and to listen and to take on new things and a fresh prepared to look at things in a different way really. positive attitude to you know engage with the processnot a negative approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P9 E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you need a leader who's able to go and do the research, fill in the forms, someone who's good at, making the tables and charts and working it all out, I think you need one person like that and the other people compliant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 L1 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good interpersonal relationships..... prepare to engage with each other be honest no point in pretending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P9 E1 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> would lean more towards positive than negative anyway. a little resistant I feel a sense of resistance,to anything that has to go into a folder you know documents, and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 E1 OC3 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole thing can be a little distasteful not very appealing to me, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC3 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptance Acquiescence. Resignation but I like the group thing we can all you know share ideas and you know not get too het up about it and start small you know and I like the idea of it, I can see on paper the whole idea of it but I would be no good to do it on my own you know I might as well be looking into a pool of deep water. the words I'd be using, stressed and negative and worried and overwhelmed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 R4 P5 E1 OC3 OC6 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I could think of ways in my own class to do a thing but not....Yeah but you do all the time don't you?.....And every – after Halloween and every January and after Easter I always come back with this new thing I'm going to do and change because you know you look back and say, 'God that was so wrong', you know.....It's interesting you should say that though, we're doing it all the time.....We don't reflect on it. We don't stop and say...This is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P5 P7 P9 P8 P1 P2 P3

<p>evaluation.....That’s what teaching is though isn't it? You're improving all the time.</p>	
<p>• who should be responsible for school self-evaluation in a school?..... I think the principal, with the help of the deputy head I'd say and filter it down from there. You know to structure it, ‘You guide it and steer it and then everybody else come in on board’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • L1 • OC10
<p>• I think it's managementit would start with you Vinnie and then the likes of the Vice and then if you could whittle it down to the tangible choices as in, here’s the three handwriting books, staff have a look at them, chat to your partner, have a vote, again this process we’ve done here so far and there were times where I didn’t think we all need to be part of it, that you or you and Catherine might have got that bit done and then you know sometimes just too many cooks can just slow a whole process down and especially as management are more clued into these things anyway and possibly care more you know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L1 • OC6 • Anti OC9 • N4 • OC10

Phase 3 – Generating initial themes

This phase involved sorting the different codes (and the actual data extract quotes) into potential themes. To help analyse the codes and consider how they might combine to form overarching themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the use of a visual representation (p.89). I therefore listed all the codes with their title description into a table as follows:

Code	Title description	Code	Title description
R1	Accountability	N1	Too long term
R2	Improvement	N2	No momentum/No energy in process
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	N3	No time
R4	Planning	N4	Meaningless
		N5	Overworked staff
P1	Practical	N6	More paperwork
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	N7	More stress
P3	Promotes professionalism	N8	Staff overworked

P4	SNA	N9	Not realistic
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	N10	Lowers morale
P6	Focus on better outcomes	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time
P7	Focus on improvement		
P8	Autonomy	OC1	Participate yes!
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	OC2	Tell me what to do
		OC3	Tiresome
E1	Emotions	OC4	Irrelevant
L1	Leadership	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
		OC6	Involves everyone
		OC7	Once target area improves
		OC8	Pressure
		OC9	Proper sub cover
		OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why
		OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good

The next task involved thinking about the relationship between the codes. I used colour coding once again to link codes I felt had something in common, collating them then into their own thematic box for ease of analysis and further refinement as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
R2	Improvement	
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	
OC7	Once target area improves	
R1	Accountability	
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	

N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	
N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	
N3	No time	
N5	Overworked staff	
N6	More paperwork	
N7	More stress	
N8	Staff overworked	
N10	Lowers morale	
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time	
OC3	Tiresome	
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please	
OC8	Pressure	
OC9	Proper sub cover	
E1		

L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	

The orange codes represented what school self-evaluation gives to a school. The yellow codes I felt were representative of the perceived reality of school self-evaluation on the ground by those implementing it. The purple codes represented what, according to the literature, school self-evaluation in theory gives to school staff. I felt the blue codes represented the attitude of staff members to school self-evaluation, whilst the green code represented the leadership of school self-evaluation.

Phase 4 – Reviewing and developing themes

This phase involved the refinement of potential themes. To do this I revisited the actual data extracts and the literature, to thus ensure, that the themes worked in relation to our data set and that we had accurate representations for the purposes of this study. The outcome of this process was as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal accountability
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	

R2	Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate for improvement
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
OC7	Once target area improves	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school approach
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External accountability
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	
N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SNA
N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workload

N3	No time		
N5	Overworked staff		
N6	More paperwork		
N8	Staff overworked		
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time		
OC3	Tiresome		
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please		
OC9	Proper sub cover		
N7	More stress		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions
N10	Lowers morale		
OC8	Pressure		
E1	Emotions		
L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and staff motivation 	

Phase 5 – Refining, defining and naming themes

In this phase Braun and Clarke (2006) say we must identify the essence of what recognised themes are about and determine what aspect of the data set each theme captures (pg.92). They contend it is important to identify the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to each other and how it fits into the overall story of the research question. Using this approach in my analysis of the data, I generated two key themes to frame a thematic analysis of the data.

The first theme ‘*Attitudes to school self-evaluation*’, is about the people tasked with implementing the school self-evaluation process to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes

in teaching and learning. Whilst the second theme, '*Leadership and staff motivation*' describes the important role school leaders play in motivating and sustaining staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process.

Appendix 13

Colour codes

Yellow	<u>accountability</u>
Dark-purple	<u>Attitudes</u>
Red	<u>Reflection</u>
Pink	<u>improvement</u>
Purple	<u>whole school review v class room work</u>
Sky-blue	<u>whole school planning</u>
Grass-green	<u>practical change and best outcomes</u>
Dusty-pink	<u>Professionalism and autonomy</u>
Grey	<u>SNA</u>
Light-orange	<u>Time consuming</u>
Dark-green	<u>Paperwork</u>
Light-blue	<u>over-stretched staff</u>
Dark-orange	<u>Workload</u>
Light-green	<u>Stress</u>
Salmon	<u>Not realistic.</u>
Dark-blue	<u>Morale</u>

Appendix 14

Actual data extract quotes	Code	Description title
Reason/Purpose of school self-evaluation?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accountability</i> • <i>Box ticking exercise</i> • <i>Tick the box exercise</i> 	R1	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improvement</i> • <i>Improvement in teaching and learning</i> • <i>A need to improve a school for both teachers and learners</i> • <i>To improve</i> • <i>Improve</i> • <i>Identify areas that need improvement</i> • <i>Improve the school to enhance learning</i> • <i>Improve outcomes for the better of each pupil and the whole school</i> • <i>Improvement plans based on findings</i> 	R 2	Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To evaluate for improvement</i> • <i>Identify an area of weakness</i> • <i>Identify areas of weakness</i> • <i>Illustrate good practice</i> • <i>Identify area of weakness</i> • <i>Critically evaluate teaching and learning</i> 	R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Put a plan into action</i> • <i>Whole school planning</i> • <i>Improvement plans</i> 	R4	Planning
Positive aspects of school self-evaluation?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practical changes</i> 	P1	Practical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To reflect</i> • <i>Reflection and discussion</i> 	P2	Reflect and discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Professional</i> 	P3	Professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA I am unaware of SSE</i> • <i>As an SNA my role and SSE have no relevance to each other</i> 	P4	SNA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whole school review</i> • <i>Focus on teaching in areas of weakness</i> 	P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Delivering the best possible outcomes</i> 	P6	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improving the teaching, learning and management of a school</i> • <i>Improvement of learning</i> • <i>Improve learning and management</i> • <i>Improvement of teaching and learning</i> • <i>Improvement in learning</i> 	P7	Improvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To improve the school's teaching and learning</i> 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking ownership</i> • <i>Autonomy</i> 	P8	Autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engagement</i> 	P9	Engagement (with teaching and learning improvement)
Negative aspects of school self-evaluation?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very long term aims</i> • <i>Staff turnover is high. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year</i> 	N1	Too long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Roll out of SSE was paused and took the energy out of the process</i> 	N2	No momentum/energy in the process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time required to do it</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> 	N3	No time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Abstract and quite meaningless</i> 	N4	Meaningless
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over stretched staff</i> • <i>Over stretched staff to over perform beyond their means</i> 	N5	Overstretched staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Additional paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> 	N6	More paper work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Staff stress</i> • <i>Increased stress</i> • <i>Negative stress</i> • <i>Unnecessary stress</i> • <i>stress</i> 	N7	More stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over worked</i> • <i>Added workload</i> • <i>Addition to an already full workload</i> 	N8	Over worked staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not realistic</i> 	N9	Not realistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Affects morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> 	N10	Lowers morale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Takes away from classroom planning time</i> • <i>Taking away from teacher planning/class time</i> 	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and planning time

Other comments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to participate in SSE</i> 	OC 1	Participate... yes!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to be told what to do if it saves on time/discussion/meetings</i> • <i>Would like a directive from Dept. saying what to do/how and when in each subject</i> 	OC 2	Tell me what to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I find it quite tiresome in general</i> 	OC3	Tiresome process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA it seems irrelevant to me</i> • <i>SNAs are not involved in SSE. I don't know whether or not it would be beneficial for an SNA to be included</i> 	OC4	Irrelevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It would be more beneficial to discuss planning rather than policy</i> 	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Great for management to involve everyone in the process</i> 	OC6	Involve everyone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Once the target subject area improves that's the main thing</i> 	OC7	Once target area improves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SSE is added pressure</i> 	OC8	Pressure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Valuable if a sub was provided to ensure work is still covered as teachers return from meetings</i> 	OC9	Proper sub cover
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is seen as an approach of something that just 'has to be done' as a school approach, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.</i> 	OC10	SSE has to be done but not sure why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When SSE was first introduced, we invited the inspector to deliver the seminar, most beneficial in terms of the clarity it brought</i> 	OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good
Emotions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confused</i> • <i>Frustrated</i> • <i>Calm</i> • <i>Annoyed</i> 	E1	All references to emotions
Leadership		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve</i> 	L1	All references specific to leadership



Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. I am Vincent Thorpe, a doctoral student, in the Department of Education, Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education, I am undertaking a research study` under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Malone.

The study is concerned with organisational change and improvement. I believe our school can do self-evaluation better. By leading the school to engage with the process in more collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist ways, the process could become more meaningful with genuine school improvement possible.

What will the study involve? The study will involve research participants carrying out an Action Research cycle to improve school self-evaluation in our school. This will involve gathering data, generating strategies for action, implementing the action, monitoring and gathering data on the action, evaluating the evidence gathered, reflecting on the outcomes and generating strategies for action or modified enquiry questions for another cycle.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because I greatly value working in collaboration with you to improve the leadership of school self-evaluation in our school. Having worked with you all over the past 6 years, I am very aware of just how knowledgeable and talented you are. Your input can only be seen as a positive thing as you bring a wealth of in-depth experience, skills and insight to the project. I am therefore adopting a collaborative, dialogical and co-constructivist approach where you, my fellow work colleagues are invited to be co-researchers and share in the ownership and direction setting of this thesis.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, we hope that you will agree to take part and give us some of your time to (i) complete a questionnaire regarding your attitude towards school self-evaluation (ii) take part in a taped focus group interview to explore your experience of and relationship with school self-evaluation to date (iii) carry out an Action Research cycle to improve school self-evaluation in our school and (iv) reflect on your thinking and learning over the duration of the project. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at

any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised by January 31st 2021. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with the school.

What information will be collected? (i) Your attitude towards school self-evaluation (ii) Your experience of and relationship with school self-evaluation to date (iii) accounts of your reflective critical thinking and learning over the duration of the project.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all data that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Vincent Thorpe.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed (by the PI). Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the PI in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a summary report, discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part or it is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the taped interview/action research cycle/questionnaire, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress following the taped interview/action research cycle/questionnaire I will provide you with contact details for a counseling service. You may contact my supervisor Dr. Anthony Malone (Anthony.Malone@mu.ie) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Vincent Thorpe, (087)2663414, Vincent.Thorpe.2018@mu.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Vincent Thorpe’s research study titled “A living Theory of Leading School Self-Evaluation”.

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview to be audio recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to anonymization on January 31st 2021

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

[Select as appropriate]

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects and subsequent publications

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects and subsequent publications

Signed.....

Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher Name in block capitals

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection>.

Phase 1 – Becoming familiar with the data

I immersed myself in this data to become familiar with the depth and breadth of its content. This involved repeated reading of the data in an active way by making notes and searching for meanings and patterns.

Phase 2 – Data coding

This phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. This initial coding was undertaken by using gerunds and keeping the codes active and as close to the original statements as possible (Charmaz, 2006, pg.42-71). To begin, I underlined what I felt was every key word and phrase in the survey data. I then combined every underlined word and phrase into a colour coded group. For example, any words or phrases associated with staff relationships were colour coded yellow, whilst any words or phrases associated with time were colour coded blue etc., for example:

The process of school self-evaluation in our school	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff relationships, motivation and interest • Manageability of school size • Frequent meetings and communication amongst staff • Involving everyone • Works well • Specific Focus on learning and teaching • Knowledgeable and professional staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions with exceptional events • Turnover of staff • perceived lack of confidence in staff members • I'm not sure there are weaknesses, a great job is being done • Time consuming • Extra stress and the feeling of 'just another area of work that has to be done' • Lack of interest due to constant moving of goalposts regarding SSE

Opportunities	Threats (obstacles)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to organise more teams to help with each area of school planning Great opportunity to identify and agree on areas that need our focus and attention Works well Clearer layout from the Department of Education Increased supports for schools Good opportunity to harness staff energy and interest if led well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness of staff Availability of sub cover to do it Not having all staff on board Time Support from Department of Education Lack of interest Feelings that teachers' voices won't be heard and respected

The colour coded words and phrases were then combined into one master document for ease of thematic analysis. They were then each assigned an alphanumeric code and description title. This removed the need for colour coding. Identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extracts that demonstrate that code is an important part of phase two, as can be seen below.

The process of school self-evaluation in our school		
Strengths	Code	Description title
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff relationships Manageability of school size Frequent meetings and communication amongst staff Involving everyone 	S1	Staff involved due to school size, with good communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivation and interest 	S2	Staff are motivated and interested
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works well 	S3	Works well
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific focus on learning and teaching 	S4	Focus on teaching and learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledgeable and professional staff 	S5	Motivation and interest are there
Weaknesses	Code	Description title

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions with exceptional events 	W1	Events taking away from teaching and learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover of staff • Lack of confidence in staff members 	W2	Lack of interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great job is being done 	W3	Great job being done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming 	W4	Lack of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra stress 	W5	Stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The feeling of just another area of work that has to be done 	W6	Increased workload
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest 	W7	Lack of interest
Opportunities	Code	Description title
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise more teams 	O1	Increase staff involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify and agree on areas that need our focus and attention 	O2	To focus on agreed areas needing attention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works well 	O3	Works well
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer layout from the department of education • Increased supports for schools 	O4	Increased support from the Department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to harness staff energy and interest 	O5	Potential of staff energy and interest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If led well 	O6	Leadership can influence motivation of staff
Threats (obstacles)	Code	Description title
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness of staff • Not having all staff on board • Lack of interest 	T1	Lack of interest and willingness of staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of sub cover • Support from department of education 	T2	Lack of support from the Department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time 	T3	Lack of time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings that teachers voice won't be heard and respected 	T4	Staff won't be listened to

As can be seen from the example above, identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extract quote that demonstrate that code was an important part of phase two.

With these new alphanumeric codes, I now turned my attention to coding the illustrative graph data from the survey

Phase 3 – Generating initial themes

This phase involved sorting the different codes (and the actual data extract quotes) into potential themes. To help analyse the codes and consider how they might combine to form overarching themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the use of a visual representation (p.89). I therefore listed all the codes with their title description into a table as follows:

Code	Title description	Code	Title description
S1	Staff involved due to school size, with good communication	O1	Increase staff involvement
S2	Staff are motivated and interested	O2	To focus on agreed areas needing attention
S3	Works well	O3	Works well
S4	Focus on teaching and learning	O4	Increased support from the Department
S5	Motivation and interest are there	O5	Potential of staff energy and interest
W1	Events taking away from teaching and learning	O6	Leadership can influence motivation of staff
W2	Lack of interest	T1	Lack of interest and willingness of staff
W3	Great job being done	T2	Lack of support from the Department
W4	Lack of time	T3	Lack of time
W5	Stress	T4	Staff won't be listened to
W6	Increased workload		
W7	Lack of interest		

The next task involved thinking about the relationship between the codes. I used colour coding once again to link codes I felt had something in common, collating them then into their own thematic box for ease of analysis and further refinement as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
S1	Staff involved due to school size, with good communication	
O1	Increase staff involvement	
T4	Staff won't be listened to	

W6	Increased workload	
S2	Staff are motivated and interested	
W7	Lack of interest	
O5	Potential of staff energy and interest	
T1	Lack of interest and willingness of staff	
W5	Stress	
W4	Lack of time	
O4	Increased support from the Department	
T2	Lack of support from the Department	
T3	Lack of time	
S3	Works well	
W3	Great job being done	
O3	Works well	
S5	Motivation and interest are there	
W2	Lack of interest	
S4	Focus on teaching and learning	
W1	Events taking away from teaching and learning	
O2	To focus on agreed areas needing attention	
O6	Leadership can influence motivation of staff	

The yellow codes represent the involvement of school staff in the school self-evaluation process, whilst the dark green code represents the perceived workload involved. The light green codes refer to the motivation of school staff to engage in the school self-evaluation process, whilst the red code represents their emotional state. The orange codes represent the perceived resources a school needs (including time) to implement school self-evaluation, whilst the pink codes represent school staff who believe that the current process of school self-evaluation in

our school is more than adequate. The professionalism and knowledge of school staff is represented by the purple codes, whilst the light blue codes represent the desire of school staff to focus on teaching and learning in any school self-evaluation process. The dark blue code represents the leadership of school self-evaluation and the leader’s ability to motivate school staff to engage with the process.

Phase 4 – Reviewing and developing themes

This phase involved the refinement of potential themes. To do this I revisited the actual data extracts and the literature, to thus ensure, that the themes worked in relation to our data set and that we had accurate representations for the purposes of this study. The outcome of this process was as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
S1	Staff involved due to school size, with good communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff involvement
O1	Increase staff involvement	
T4	Staff won't be listened to	
S2	Staff are motivated and interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation
W7	Lack of interest	
O5	Potential of staff energy and interest	
T1	Lack of interest and willingness of staff	
S5	Motivation and interest are there	
W2	Lack of interest	
W4	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources
O4	Increased support from the Department	
T2	Lack of support from the Department	
T3	Lack of time	
W6	Workload	
S3	Works well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion
W3	Great job being done	
O3	Works well	
W5	Stress	

S4	Focus on teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning
W1	Events taking away from teaching and learning	
O2	To focus on agreed areas needing attention	
O6	Leadership can influence motivation of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership

Phase 5 – Refining, defining and naming themes

In this phase Braun and Clarke (2006) say we must identify the essence of what recognised themes are about and determine what aspect of the data set each theme captures (pg.92). They contend it is important to identify the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to each other and how it fits into the overall story of the research question. Using this approach in my analysis of the data, I generated three key themes to frame a thematic analysis of the data.

The first, entitled ‘*Staff involvement in whole school decision-making*’, was about the people who drive the implementation of school self-evaluation to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes in teaching and learning.

The second theme ‘*Resourcing school self-evaluation*’, was about the daily experiences of people working in a school doing school self-evaluation and all that entails, physically, mentally and emotionally.

The potential outcomes of both of these themes are grounded in the effective enactment of the final and third theme, ‘*Leadership and staff motivation*’. School leadership plays an important role in motivating staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process by facilitating the development and provision of any resources required and tapping into the energy and interest of staff members.

Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken form Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	Focus Group Interview ①	<p>I was relaxed. Participants were relaxed. I gave ample time of going so I did not have to watch the clock. Having the Qs prepared was great but I found it hard not to lead + explore areas of interest to me. I do feel next time I will be more disciplined. As much as I had practiced the interview with my critical friend the real thing can be very different. You have to control your passion and not taint the data.</p>	<p>I really enjoyed it. It was great to see fellow colleagues being so passionate about teaching + learning. I felt confident but I could see where I was only dying to put the info I wanted from the process. Participants afterwards I was a bit annoyed with myself but I will learn from it for next time.</p>	<p>I learned to stick to script + not taint the interview. I must remain as objective as possible. It was great though not planned to have a 2nd opportunity to do it again. To be an effective researcher leads to being a better leader. My method technique must improve.</p>	<p>This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research) I will remain as objective as possible in my next focus group interview. Reflective Journaling and my EdD training is allowing me to note these things and adapt and improve as a practitioner researcher + school leader.</p>

Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	we met as a whole staff to conduct a SNOT analysis of the T+L of handwriting in our school.	I was very excited for this meeting. This was another opportunity to address as a staff teaching and learning issues. The D.P. agreed to be the scribe happily. Again this allowed me the time and space to share leadership and observe and listen more carefully and attentively. The debate was lively, staff seemed enthusiastic. The chosen facilitation method was simple and therefore did not infringe on momentum. Knowledge was openly shared and created.	I felt it went well. I engaged it. I was tired after it.	I judged the staff to have engaged and enjoyed the opportunity for open discussion and debate, deterring by participation and their SNOT analysis responses. I am improving my listening skills as I certainly picked up on how people can view and interpret data differently. That is not something I would have noticed or picked up on before. As a practitioner researcher I can see that people (and myself) can see & interpret data with our own lens. The ability to realise & see this is important in leading SSE.	This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research) As part of the As part of the A.R. cycle feedback stage, it will be important that I analyse the data, unbiased, whilst acknowledging my lens. Theory will be important here to minimize skewed analysis

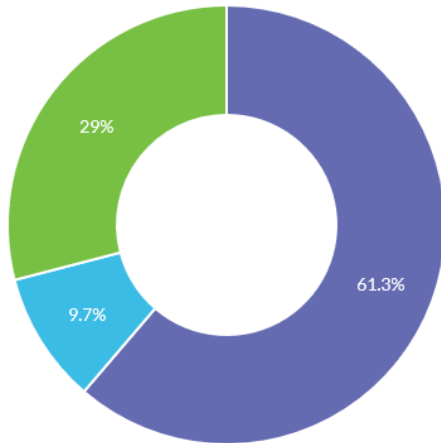
Vinny's Reflective Journal					
Whitehead	Action	Reflection		Significance	New Action (Leads you back to the start/Left side of the grid)
McNiff		Thoughts/Thinking		What I learned	
Schein (taken from Coghlan)		Observation (what did you observe? Can you describe it?)	Reaction (how did you react? What feelings were aroused in you?)	Judgement (what was your judgement about what happened? What thoughts or evaluations did the event trigger?)	Intervention (what did you do about it? How did you intervene? Remember: doing nothing or remaining silent is also an intervention)
	<p>During Jan 27th - Jan 31st I showed all teachers and SNAs the SSE circular guidelines and LAOS. This was done on an individual basis. This was Action Step 6. Each member was met individually with sub cover provided by the Df. + SETS</p>	<p>I felt it was important to meet each member individually to allow them ask individual questions in a safer secure environment i.e. not in front of anyone. It also allowed me the opportunity to reach and confirm consensus on the SSE focus topic in a confidential way and encourage group think. Personal ethical standards were followed. all members seemed comfortable. Most were surprised at the amount + depth of documents re: SSE from the Dept.</p>	<p>I found this action great as a researcher and a leader. For some it was their first time to see the SSE documents. In terms of AR this was a very real, practical intervention. I found it exciting for that reason.</p>	<p>later I felt confused upon reflection. This was a poor way to explore these documents. I was delivering as a knowledgeable expert whilst the staff member was in a passive role. This in essence was what I sought to change in undertaking the A.R. However, I was aware that the purpose of the conversation was to simply introduce the documents. It was not intended to</p>	<p>This box is crucial Vinny (i) to show how your learning from one episode of action reflection feeds back into new practice. (ii) to show how your learning influences new actions (iii) to show you taking action based on your thinking. You could regard the new action as the beginning of a new cycle. This process emphasises the cyclical nature of 'action-reflection' (A core aspect of action research)</p>

we were leaving for me here was on the value of being a reflective practitioner and how it can improve my leadership. As is evident by what I learned and my judgements, I am more aware of power relations and staff being vulnerable. I am more aware as a research practitioner regarding ethics. I have also learned the important role a critical friend could play in teasing out these issues before another action is taken.

* also on reflection, was this a wise thing to do re: power relations? Did I put them in a vulnerable position? The tally was useful (as majority wanted it) so that helps alleviate that worry I suppose! → P.T.O.

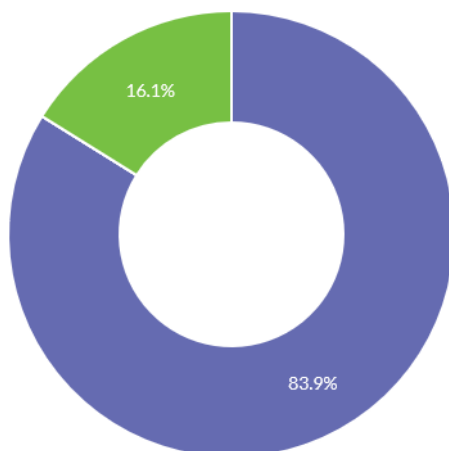
Handwriting Survey for Parents (and results)

Q1 My child enjoys handwriting.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	19
No	3
Sometimes	9

Q2 My child has opportunities to use their handwriting for real reasons at home e.g. shopping lists, thank you letters, greeting cards etc.
Multiple Choice

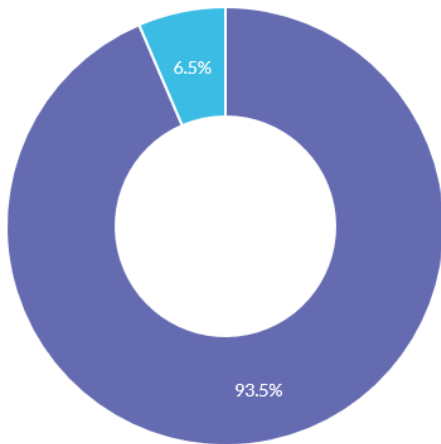


Choice	Total
Yes	26
No	0
Sometimes	5

Q3

I know what style of handwriting my child uses at school.

Multiple Choice

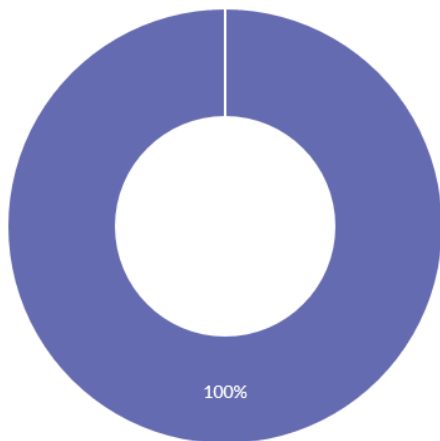


Choice	Total
Yes	29
No	2

Q4

I know what writing implement (e.g. pencil/pen) my child should be using in class.

Multiple Choice

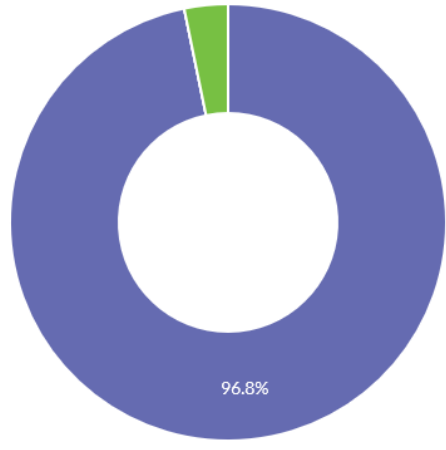


Choice	Total
Yes	31
No	0
Sometimes	0

Q5

I give feedback to my child regarding the standard of their handwriting.

Multiple Choice

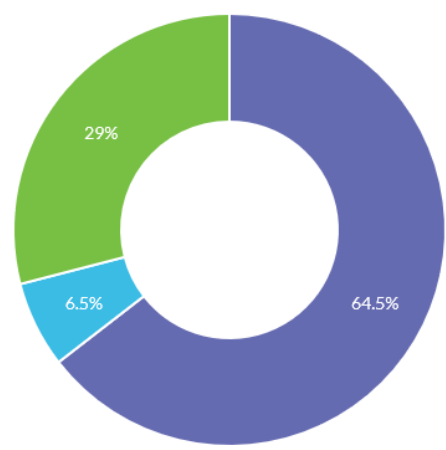


Choice	Total
Yes	30
No	0
Sometimes	1

Q6

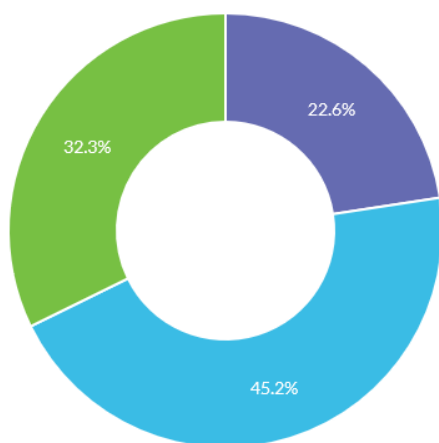
My child knows how to improve their handwriting.

Multiple Choice



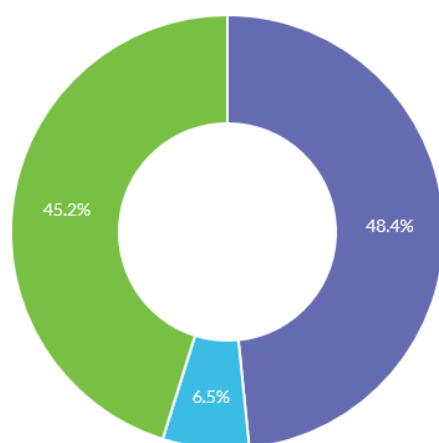
Choice	Total
Yes	20
No	2
Sometimes	9

Q7 My child needs help with their handwriting.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	7
No	14
Sometimes	10

Q8 My child is good at handwriting.
Multiple Choice

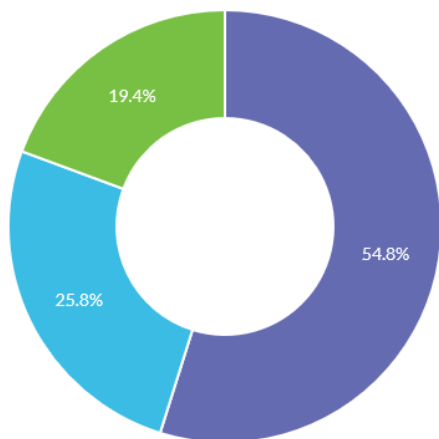


Choice	Total
Yes	15
No	2
Sometimes	14

Q9

I receive feedback from my child's teacher regarding my child's handwriting.

Multiple Choice

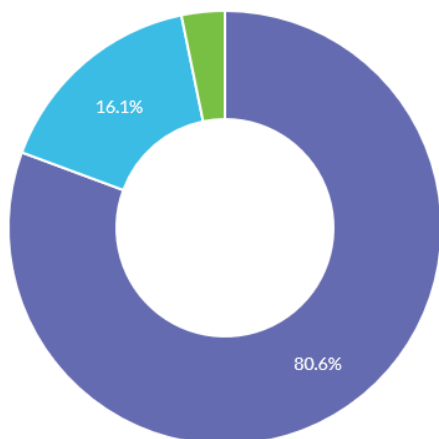


Choice	Total
Yes	17
No	8
Sometimes	6

Q10

I know what I can do to help my child improve their handwriting.

Multiple Choice

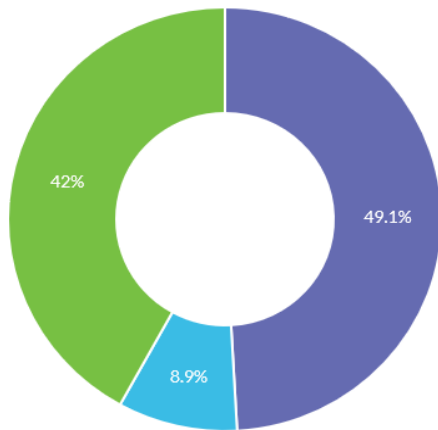


Choice	Total
Yes	25
No	5
Sometimes	1

Handwriting Survey for Pupils (and results)

Q1

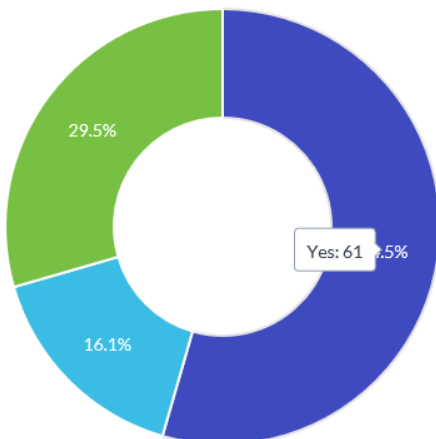
I enjoy handwriting.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	55
No	10
Sometimes	47

Q2

I have opportunities to use my handwriting at home e.g. shopping lists, thank you letters, greeting cards etc.
Multiple Choice

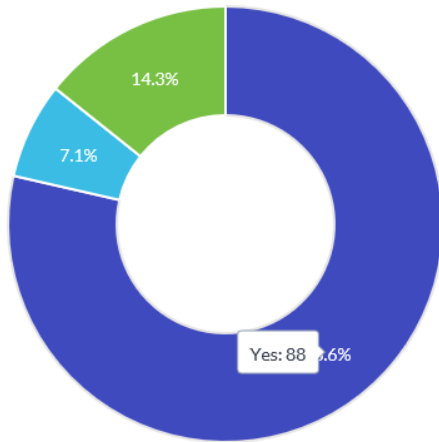


Choice	Total
Yes	61
No	18
Sometimes	33

Q3

I know what style of handwriting my teacher would like me to use in class.

Multiple Choice

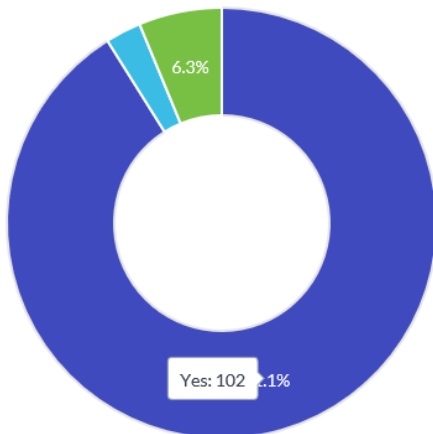


Choice	Total
Yes	88
No	8
Sometimes	16

Q4

I know what writing implement (e.g. pencil/pen) my teacher would like me to use.

Multiple Choice

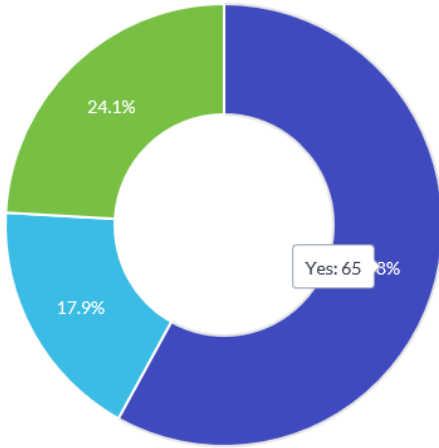


Choice	Total
Yes	102
No	3
Sometimes	7

Q5

I get feedback from my parents about my handwriting.

Multiple Choice

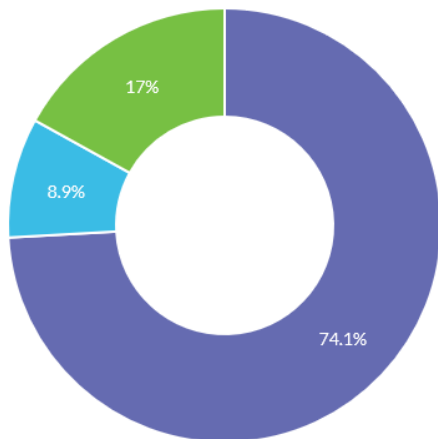


Choice	Total
Yes	65
No	20
Sometimes	27

Q6

I know how to improve my handwriting.

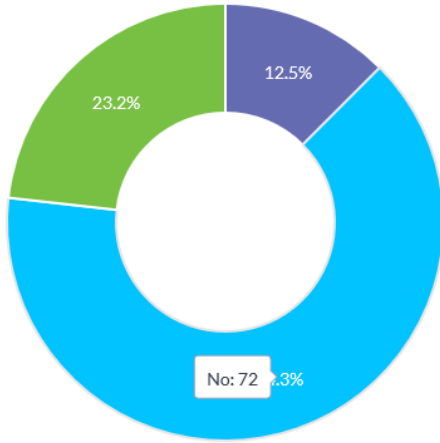
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	83
No	10
Sometimes	19

Q7

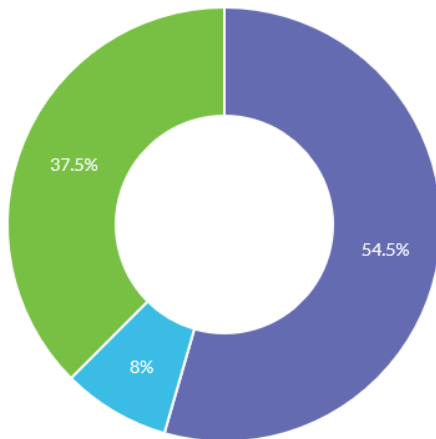
I need help with my handwriting.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	14
No	72
Sometimes	26

Q8

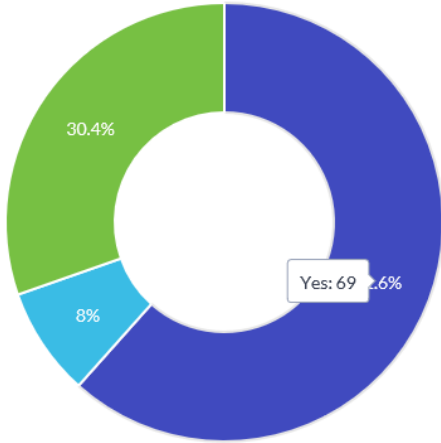
I am good at handwriting.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	61
No	9
Sometimes	42

Q9

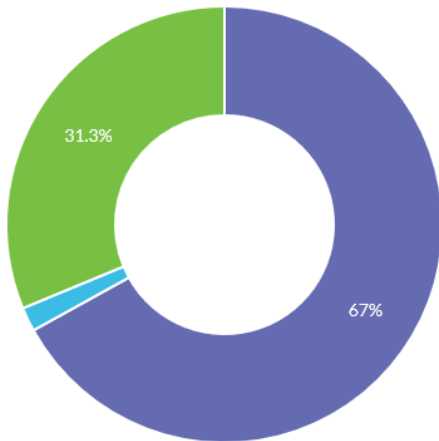
When I am handwriting, I make and form my letters the way teacher has shown me
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	69
No	9
Sometimes	34

Q10

I do my best handwriting in all my school work.
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	75
No	2
Sometimes	35

Handwriting Survey for Teachers (and results)

Survey Tally Sheet

School Self-Evaluation 2020

Focus: Handwriting in our school – What does it look like now at this moment in time in your class?

Q. 1	<p>A. Is there a handwriting book/scheme in use? 5 Yes 1 No</p> <p>B. If yes...Please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Cursive script 1- Handwriting today 1- Handwriting made easy 1- Don't use a book 1
Q. 2	<p>A. Are the children required to write using a specific style? 6 Yes 0 No</p> <p>B. If yes...Please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Jolly phonics style 1- Cursive style 4- Jr. infants pre-writing activities and letter formation 1- Sr. infants development and capitals 1- 3rd class cursive introduced 1- 4th class cursive 1- 5th and 6th class fluent personal style 1
Q. 3	<p>A. Do you, the teacher, write on the whiteboard etc. using the same style as the children? 5 Yes 0 No</p> <p>B. If yes...Please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Doesn't always happen, but I try to 5- I use print also 1- Jolly phonics 1

<p>Q. 4</p>	<p>A. Do the children write with specific writing tools/implements? 4 Yes 3 No</p> <p>A. If yes...Please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pencils 4 - Pencil grip 2 - Pen 3 - Chubby pencil 1
<p>Q. 5</p>	<p>A. Do you teach handwriting formally? 3 Yes 2 No</p> <p>B. If yes...How often?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal lessons once a week 2 - Formal lessons once a month 1
<p>Q. 6</p>	<p>A. Do you use any additional resources to teach/improve handwriting? (<i>e.g., pencil grippers, H.W. copies etc.</i>) 4 Yes 1 No</p> <p>B. If yes...Please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sound copy letter formation 4 - Pencil grips 3 - Jolly phonics 1 - Posture 1 - IWB/software 1 - Instruction/assessment letter formation sheets 1
<p>Q. 7</p>	<p>A. Are you aware of the stages of handwriting development in our school? (<i>i.e., what is taught and when</i>) 1 Yes 2 No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsure 3

<p>Q. 8</p>	<p>A. Please comment/suggest any improvements you feel could be made to benefit the teaching and learning of handwriting in our school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers should model at all times the style being taught 2 - Uniformity of style and stages across the school 5 - A book handwriting program for all stages 1 - A scheme of detailed proof of progression 3
<p>Q. 9</p>	<p>A. Any other comments?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less focus on book 1 - School/class handwriting awards 1 - Correct handwriting to be used by pupils in everyday work 2

Question 1:

Please indicate

a) What would be your preferred Style(s)?

b) Should there be a change of style and when, at what point?

c) What would be your preferred writing implement(s)?

d) What would be your preferred resources i.e., school wide handwriting workbook or handwriting copies?

Question 2:

Would you prefer a school wide, age-appropriate approach to the following;

• Pre-writing activities: Yes No

What would this look like to you?

• Language used when teaching or assessing handwriting: Yes No

What would this look like to you?

• Presentation: Yes No

What would this look like to you? Where would this be done?

• What type of copy? Yes No

What would this look like to you?

- What type of writing implement(s) used? Yes No

What would this look like to you?

Question 3:

Do we want to adopt a publisher's handwriting scheme? Why? Who's scheme?

Please indicate your preference:

Question 4:

What aspects of our current policy would you like to retain?

Handwriting Policy

Introductory Statement & Rationale:

This policy is formulated in line with the Primary Language Curriculum and it will be implemented with immediate effect.

In Scoil Bhríde Nurney we acknowledge that the developments of handwriting skills are important in our pupils' education. We support the current research, which outlines the benefits of teaching cursive handwriting. These include that it:

- Prevents reversals and confusion of letters
- Enhances spelling ability
- Diminishes potential for errors
- Enforces the skills for patterns in reading and writing
- Prevents erratic spaces between letters and words
- Helps left-handed children
- Is quicker and easier to use than print.

Aims of the Handwriting Policy:

- To develop and improve fine motor skills in the early years
- To ensure good letter formation from Junior Infants to Sixth Class
- To encourage that all children are using the correct pencil grip
- To ensure legibility and neat presentation of all written work
- To help develop speed, accuracy and writing fluency
- To ensure uniformity and consistency in letter formation from class to class
- To provide children with a relevant life skill
- To help in the improvement of spelling.

General Writing Guidelines:

Children will be encouraged to remember the **Four P's**- Preparation, Pencil Grip, Posture and Practice.

All classrooms should have a continuous cursive handwriting frieze displayed in their room. All classrooms should have a Literacy/Numeracy presentation sample displayed in their room.

All children should hold the pen or pencil at least 2 cm away from the tip so that they can see what they are writing. For left-handers, writing from left to right can be difficult. It is important that the class teacher ensures that the child is seated on the left side of the desk.

Triangular grip pencils are to be used in the infant classes.

Regular grip pencils are to be used in 1st – 4th class.

Pens are to be used in 5th – 6th class.

In all classes, pencil must be used to complete all Maths activities.

Teachers should model good hand writing at all times.

Handwriting Programme:

Scoil Bhríde Nurney has adopted the Educational Company Handwriting scheme “Ready to Write” for all classes.

Copies for Literacy and Numeracy

Class	Literacy	Numeracy
6 th	Normal lined	Small square
5 th	Normal lined	Small square
4 th	Normal lined	Small square
3 rd	Normal lined	Small square
2 nd	Normal lined	1cm sq.
1 st	Thick lined (15mm J09) moving to Normal lined	1cm sq.
Senior infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project copies 15A• Thick lined (15mm J09)	20mm square
Junior infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blue project copies (preformed)• Plain project copies (no lines)	Maths folder

Children with Special Needs

This handwriting policy aims to meet the needs of all the children in the school. This will be achieved by teachers differentiating the content, outcome and process to ensure learning for all pupils. The requirements of children with special needs will be taken into account when planning class lessons and related activities.

Pencil Grip

The pencil is grasped between the tips of the thumb and the index finger and is supported against the side of the middle finger (tripod grip). The last two fingers are curved and rested against the table surfaces. The wrist is bent back slightly and the pencil is held about 2cm” from the tip (slightly more for left-handed children). The ‘*counter held in the palm of the hand whilst writing*’ technique can be used.

Assessment and Success Criteria

- There will be constant teacher observation of pupils' handwriting in copy books at school and also in homework copies.
- There will be a focus on continual improvement.
- Teacher should display the children's writing – emphasis should be placed on improvement made in handwriting. Children should be encouraged to write final pieces of work in their best handwriting.
- The end of year handwriting should be compared with the handwriting the child was producing at the beginning of the year, for assessment purposes and for possible School Report comment.

Survey

Thank You for taking the time to complete this questionnaire regarding:

School Self-Evaluation

Your help is most appreciated.

DES = Department of Education and Skills

SSE = School Self-Evaluation

Instructions:

In each question, please tick the box that feels most right to you and please fill in as best you can the description boxes. If you need more space, please write your answer on another piece of paper with the question number beside it.

1. The existing resources provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are useful for School Self-Evaluation (SSE)
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**
 - Indifferent**
 - Agree**
 - Agree Strongly**

2. More resources are required from the DES on how to conduct SSE
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**
 - Indifferent**
 - Agree**
 - Agree Strongly**

3. Rather than each school spending time and resources developing their own internal evaluation procedures, schools should be provided with a generic set of tools to assist with the implementation of SSE
 - Disagree Strongly**
 - Disagree**

- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

4. Staff at this school have the necessary skills required to carry out SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

5. Principals and Deputy Principals need more training on how to conduct SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

6. Teachers need more training on how to conduct SSE

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

7. Staff at this school have the capacity to analyse quantitative data

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

8. Staff at this school have the capacity to analyse qualitative data

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

9. The Principal and Deputy Principal of this school have the necessary training required to carry out peer review (teacher observation)

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

10. Teachers of this school have the necessary training to carry out peer review (teacher observation)

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

11. The Board of Management of this school have the necessary skills required to carry out evaluation and planning duties required of Board of Managements.

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

12. Results from externally devised standardised tests (e.g., literacy and numeracy tests) should be used as part of the self-evaluation process of schools.

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

13. Peer review is used as part of the SSE process in this school

- Yes**
- No**

14. Does your school have a set of procedures for carrying out SSE?

- Yes**
- No**

15. Does your school have an SSE policy?

- Yes
- No

16. The process of SSE is easy to understand

- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Indifferent
- Agree
- Agree Strongly

17. The SSE guidelines developed by the DES are easy to understand

- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Indifferent
- Agree
- Agree Strongly

18. The Principal and Deputy Principal conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school

- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Indifferent
- Agree
- Agree Strongly

19. Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school

- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Indifferent
- Agree
- Agree Strongly

20. SSE involves all staff

- Disagree Strongly
- Disagree
- Indifferent
- Agree
- Agree Strongly

21. SSE reports should be published on the internet

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

22. SSE results in better management

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

23. SSE results in better teaching and learning

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

24. SSE places a lot of stress on staff

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

25. SSE increases staff morale

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

26. SSE takes up a lot of time

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

27. SSE is popular with the majority of staff in this school

- Disagree Strongly**
- Disagree**
- Indifferent**
- Agree**
- Agree Strongly**

28. How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general?

- Positive**
- Negative**
- Indifferent**
- Other**

If '**Other**' please describe:

29. Please describe briefly, in the box below, what you think is the purpose of SSE

30. Please list, in the box below, any useful policy documents that you know of regarding SSE

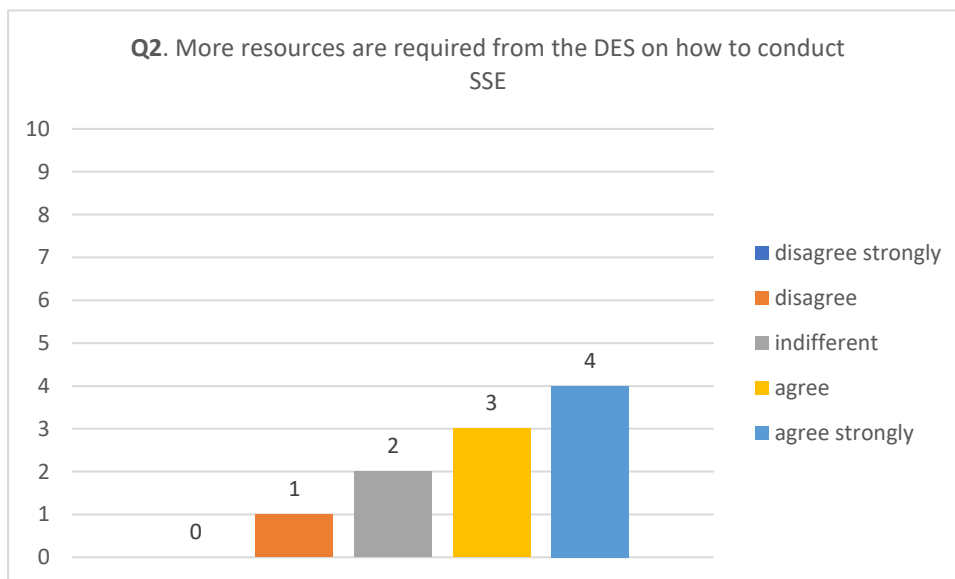
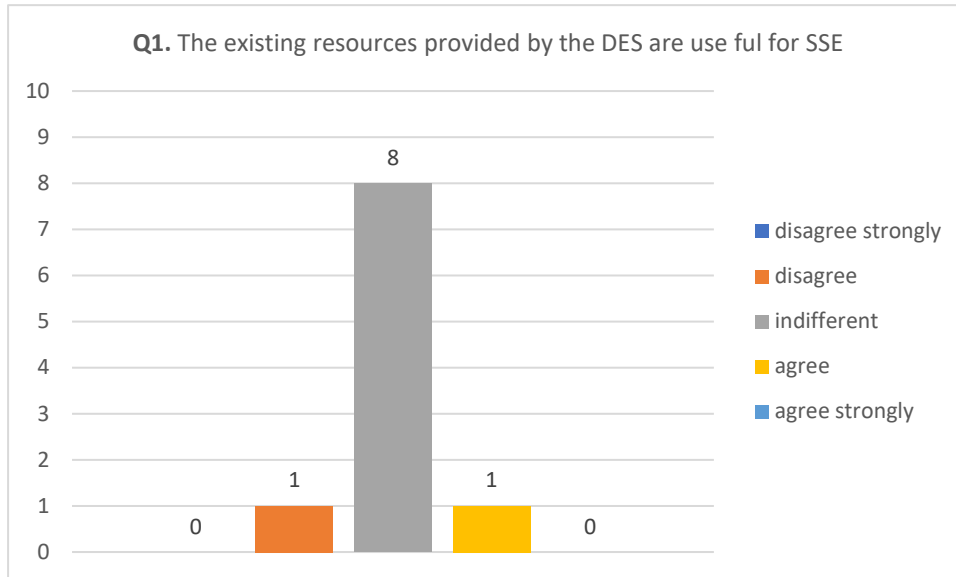
31. Please describe in the box below, what in your opinion are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy

32. Please describe below, what in your opinion are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy

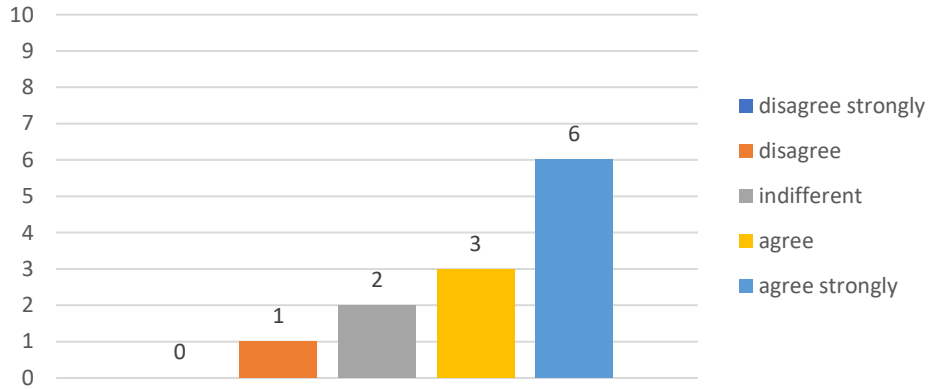
33. In the box below, please describe any other opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations or comments you have in relation to your experience of SSE to date in your educational career. *(if any)*

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

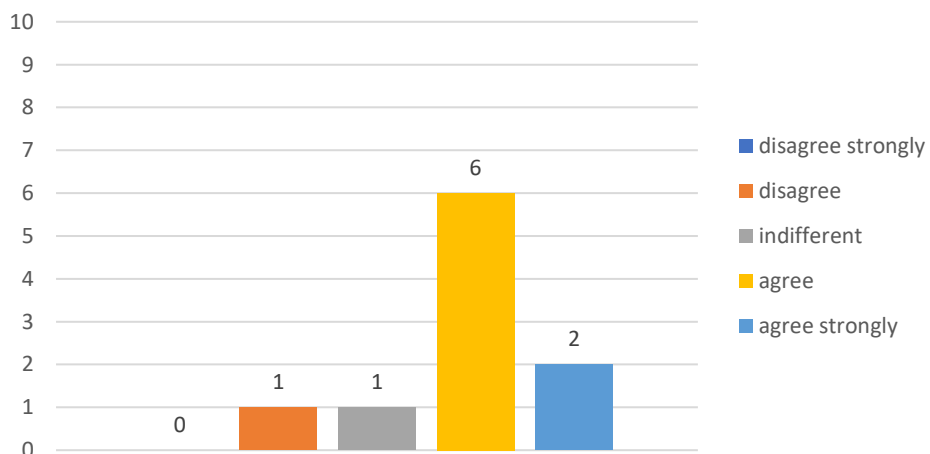
INPUT



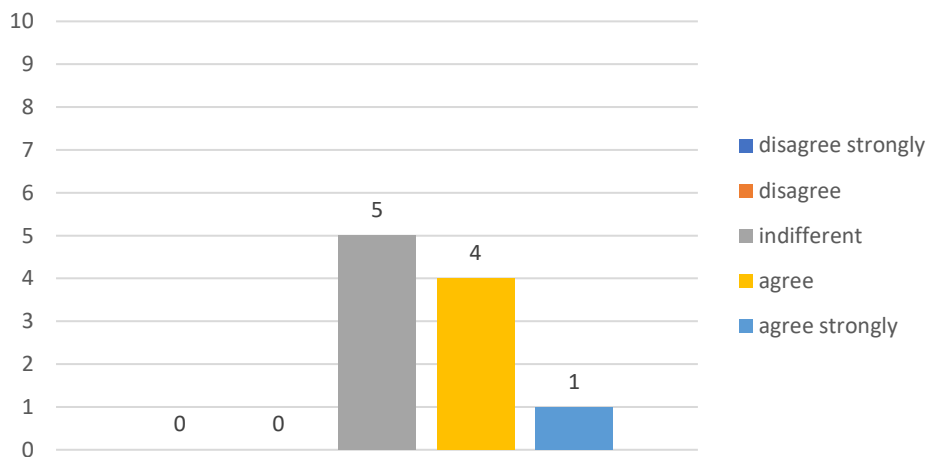
Q3. Rather than each school spending time and resources developing their own internal evaluation procedures, schools should be provided with a generic set of tools to assist with the implementation of SSE

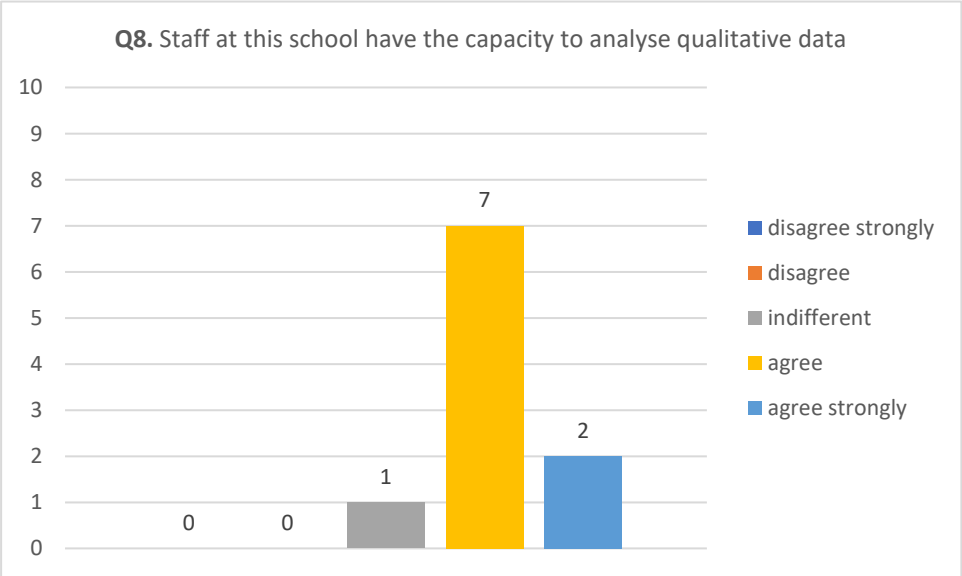
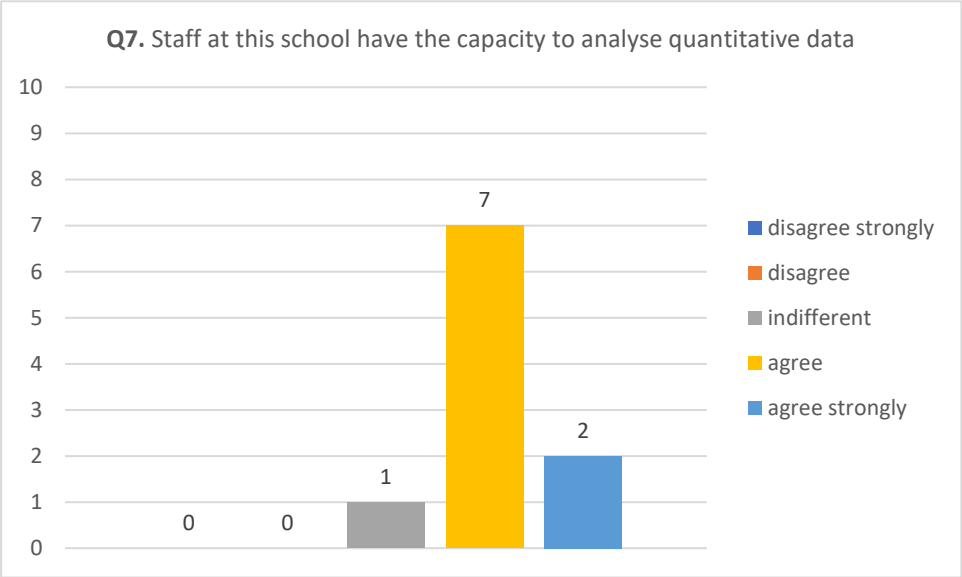
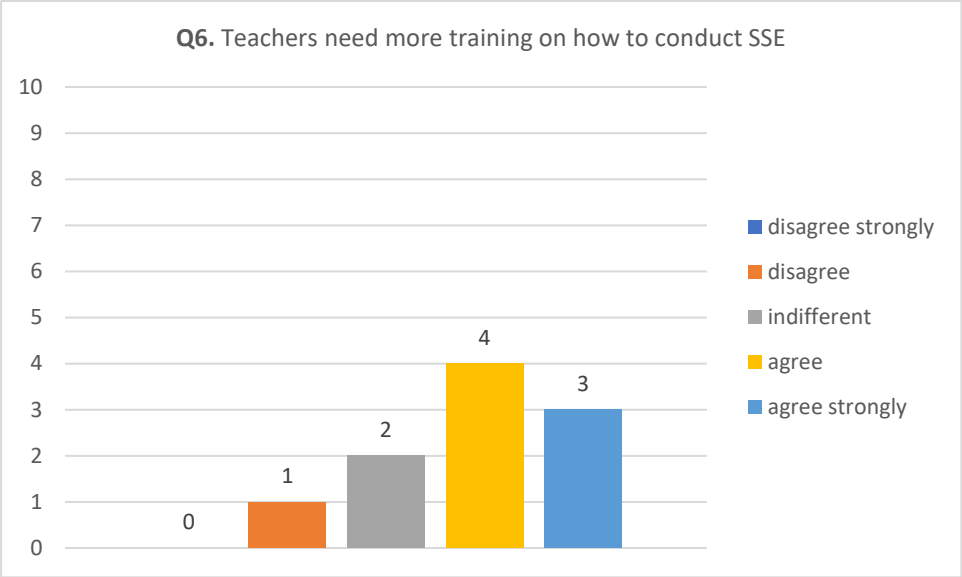


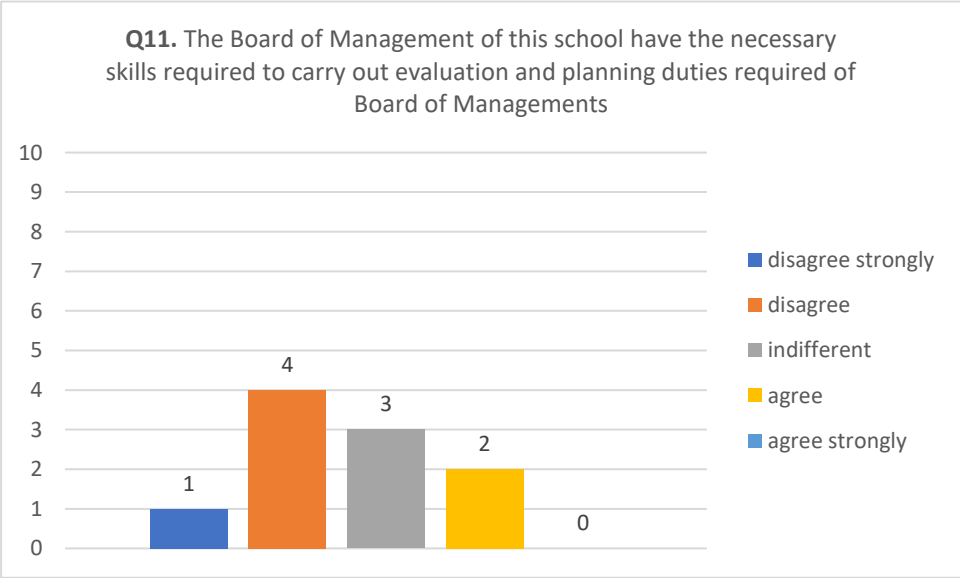
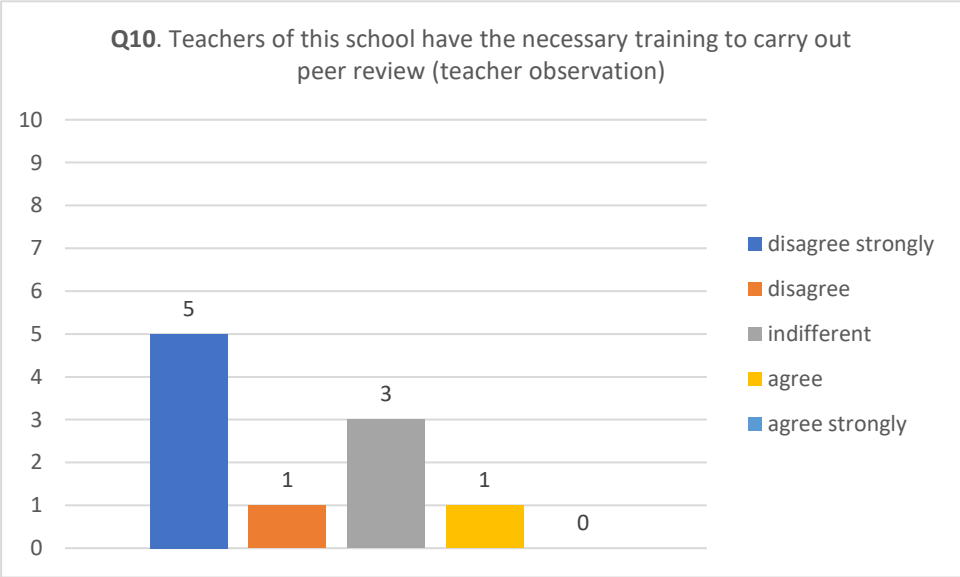
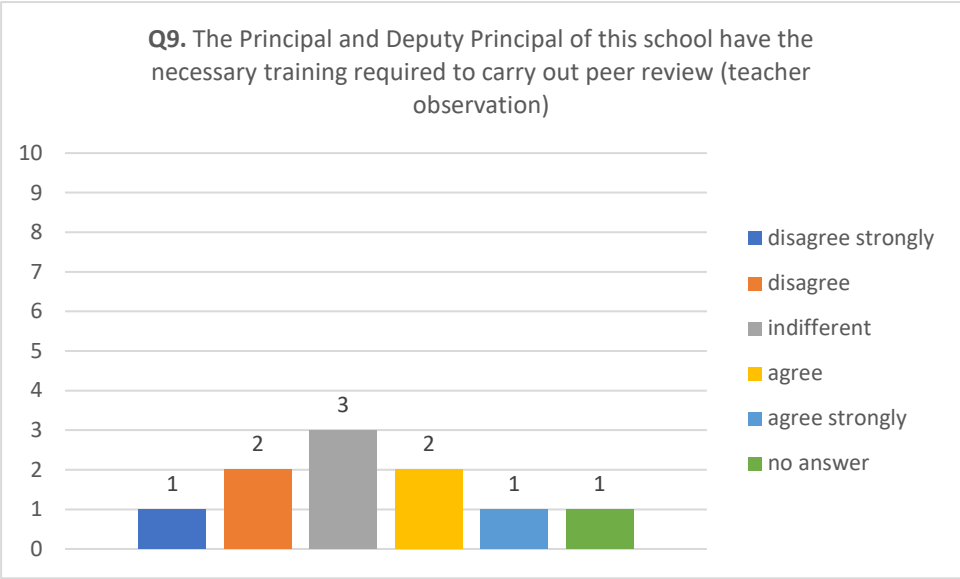
Q4. Staff at this school have the necessary skills required to carry out SSE



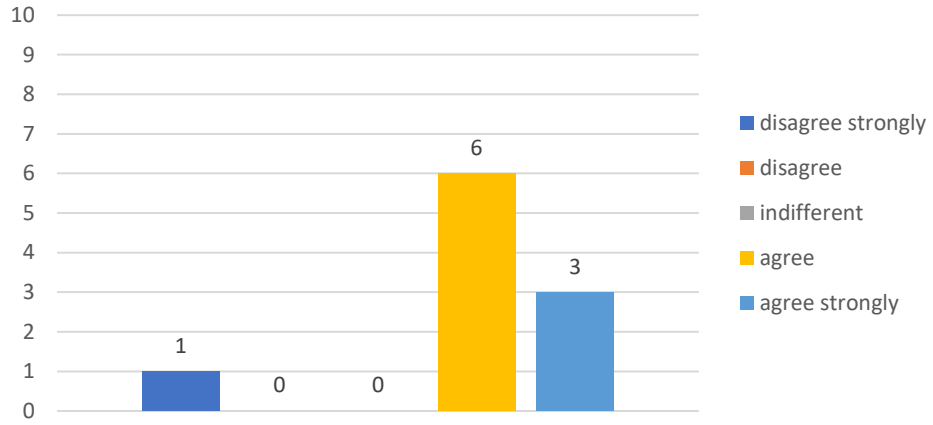
Q5. Principals and Deputy Principals need more training on how to conduct SSE



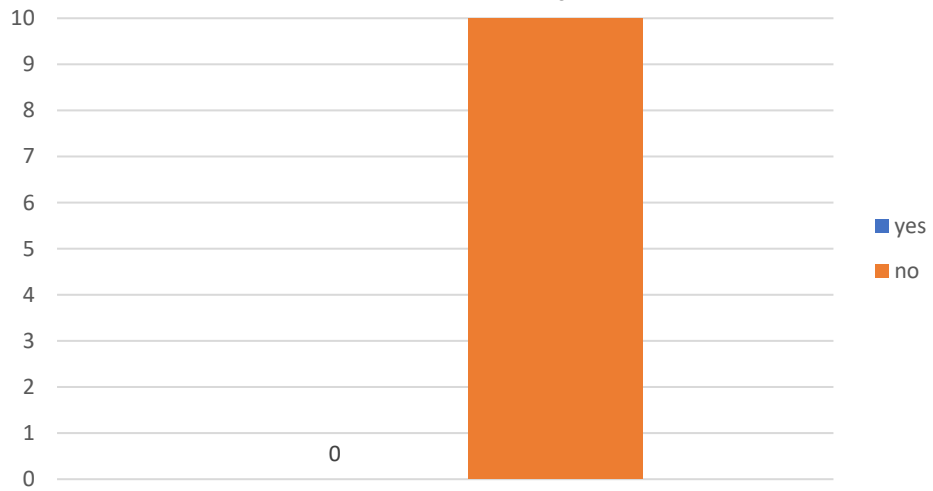




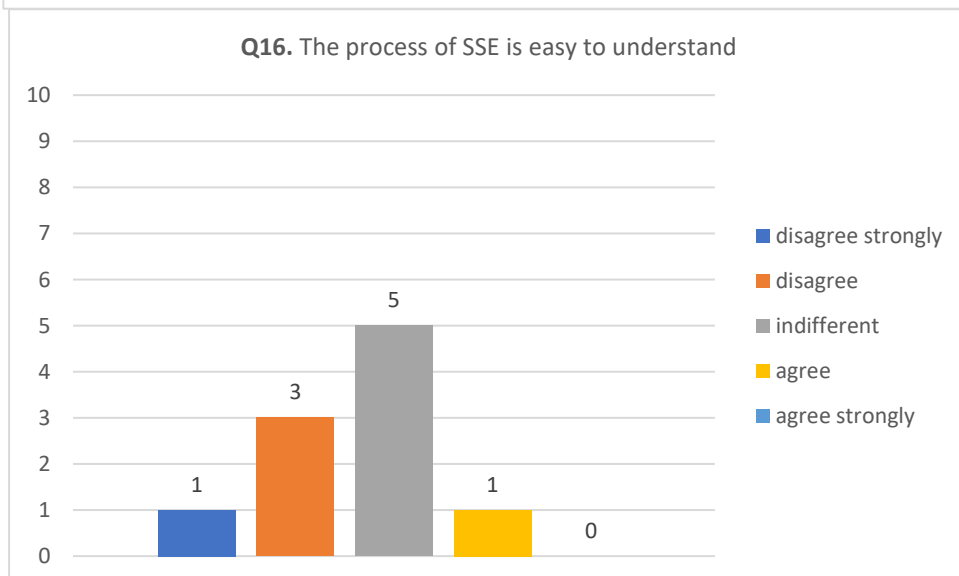
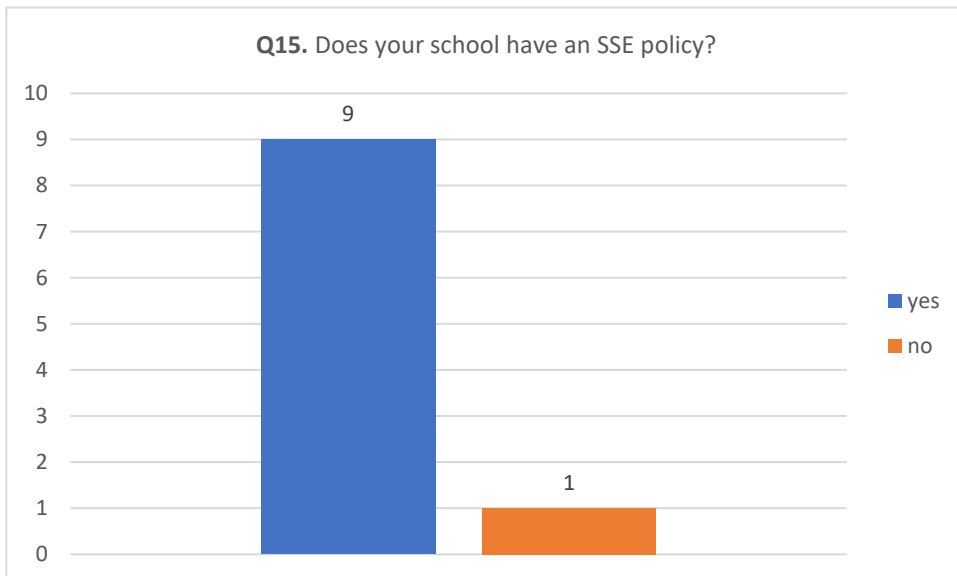
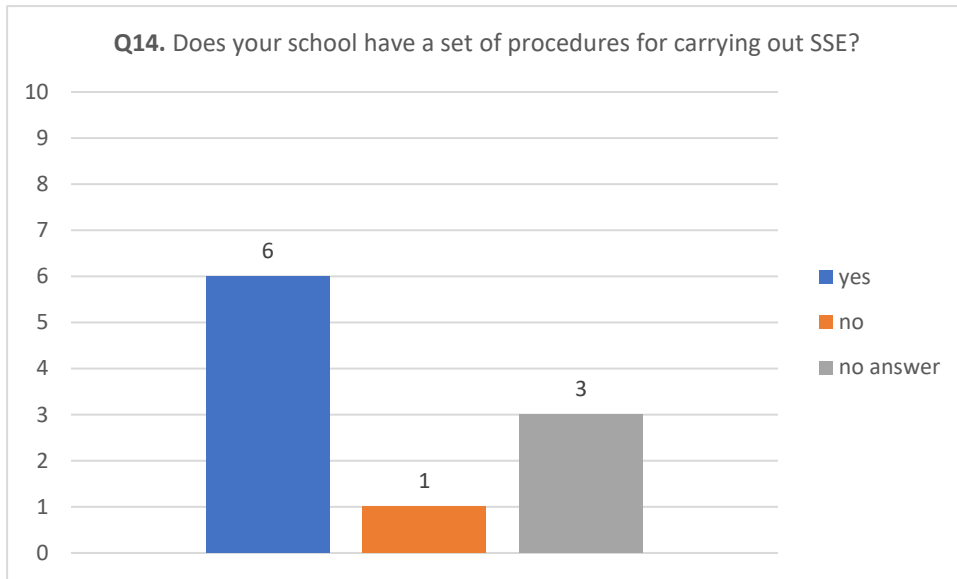
Q12. Results from externally devised standardised tests (e.g. literacy and numeracy tests) should be used as part of the self-evaluation process of schools

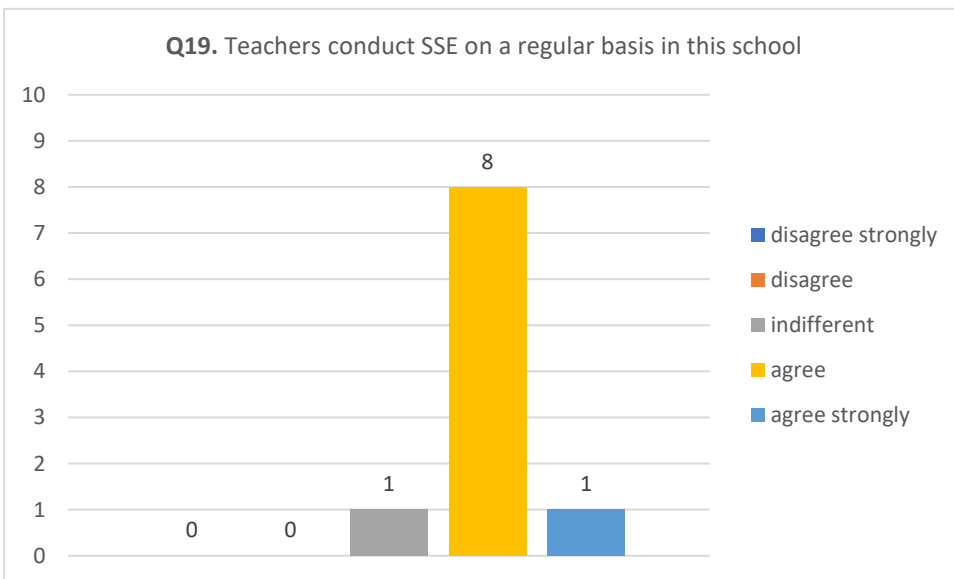
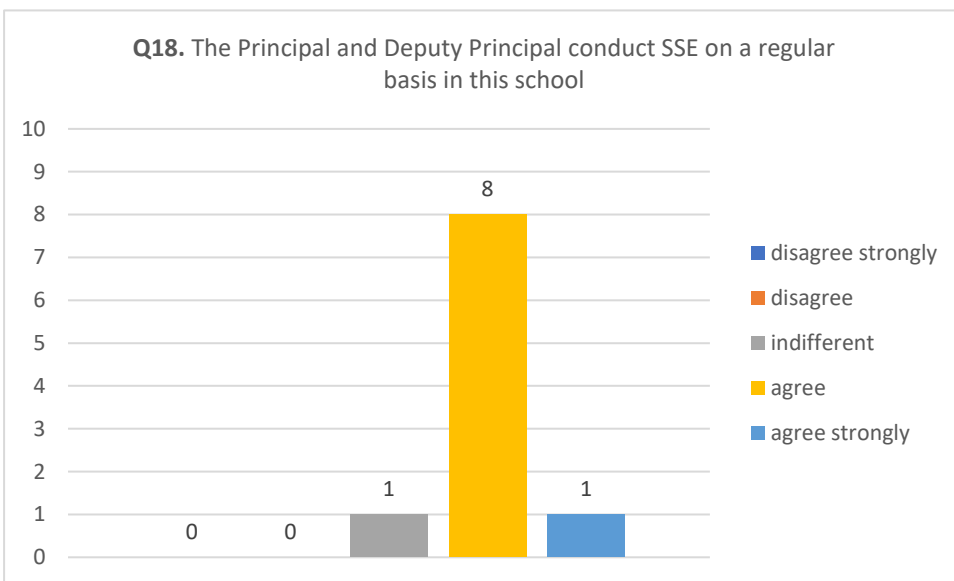
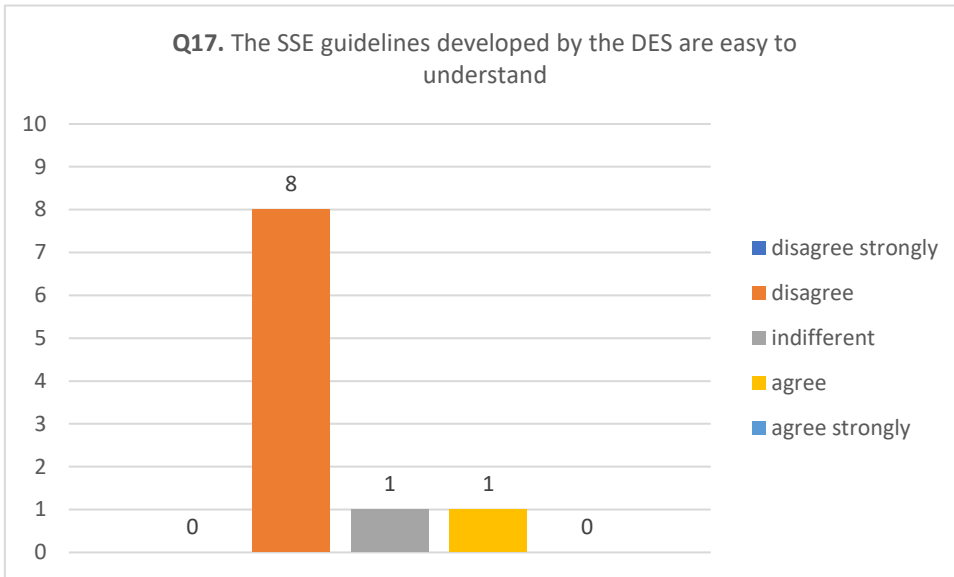


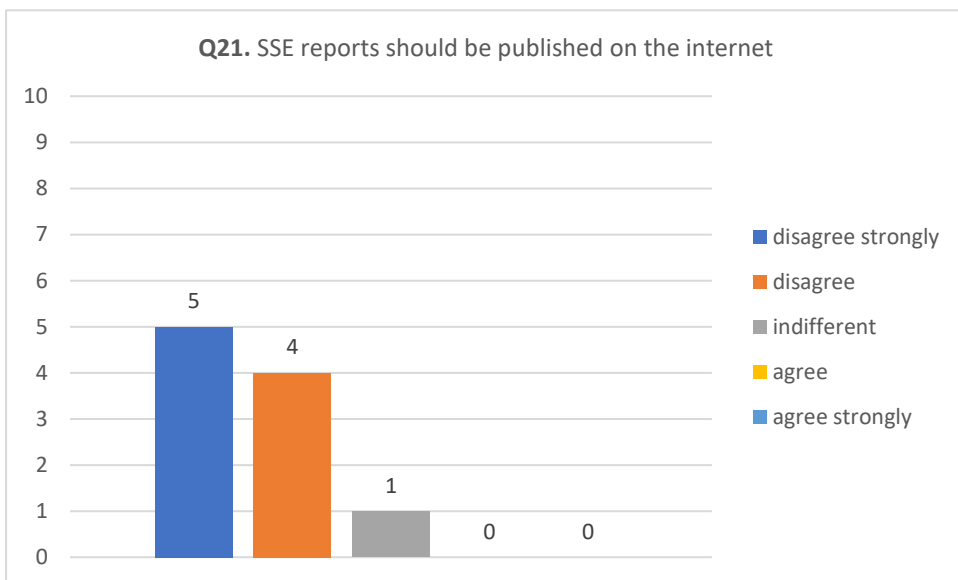
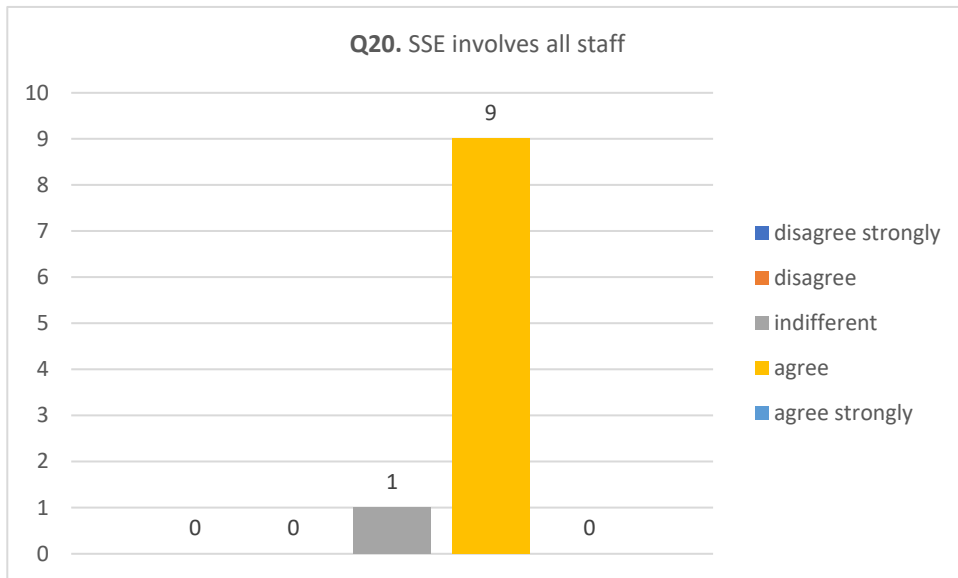
Q13. Peer review is used as part of the SSE process in this school



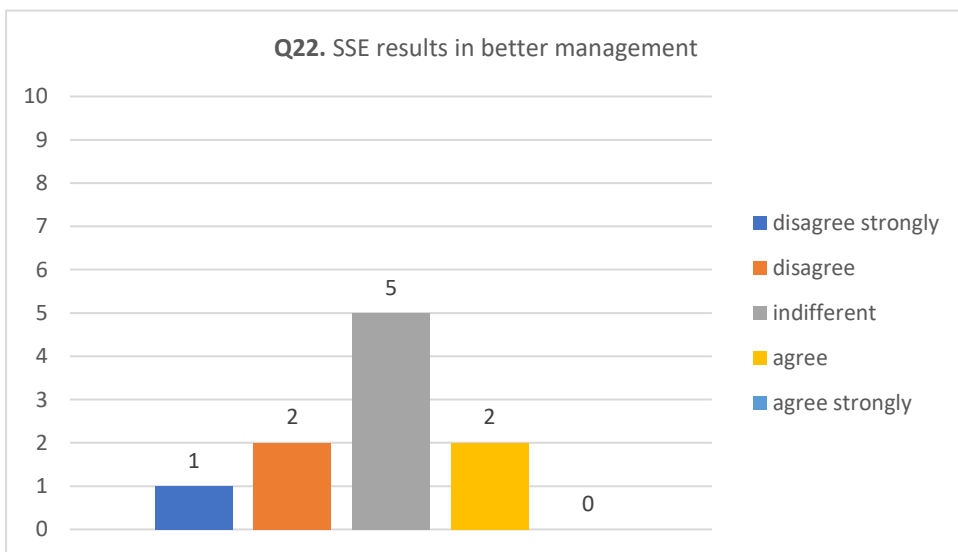
PROCESS

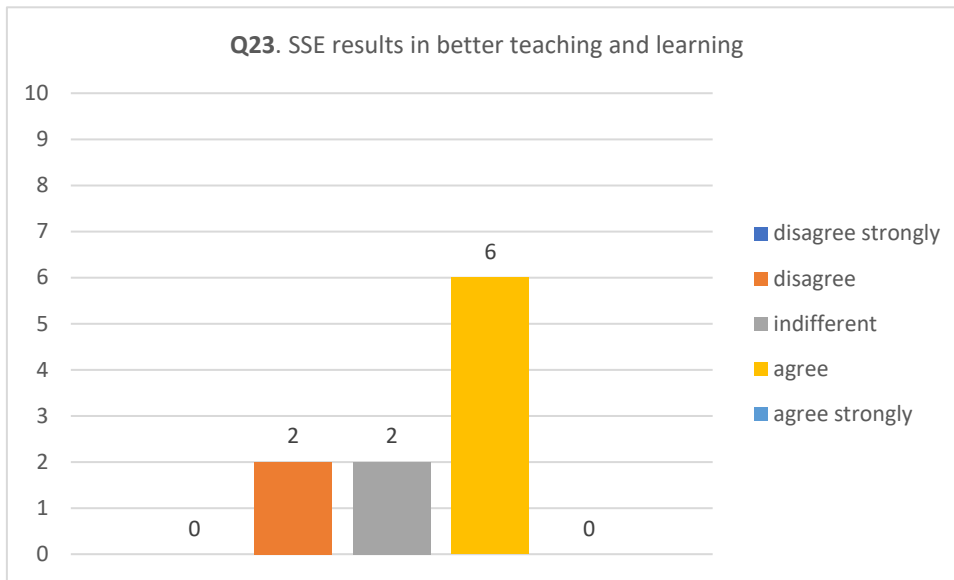




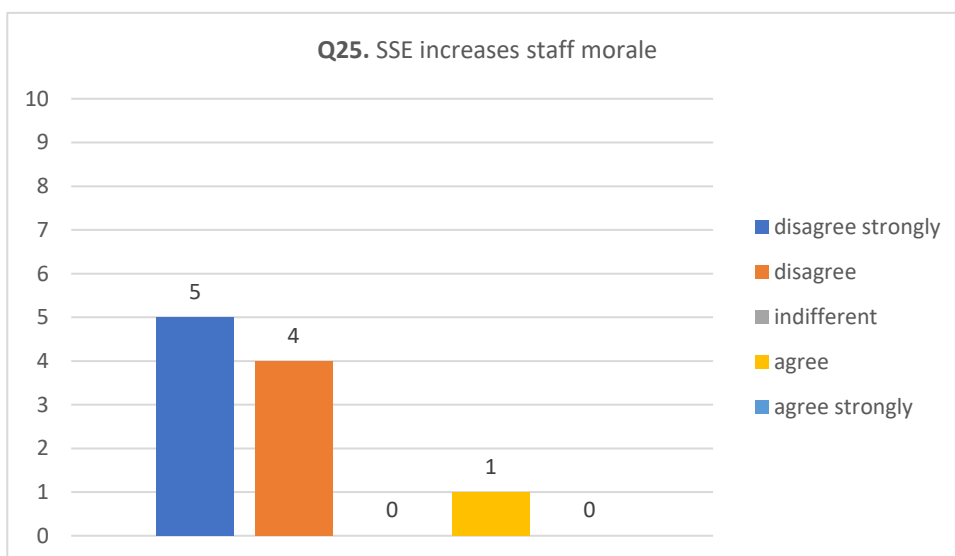
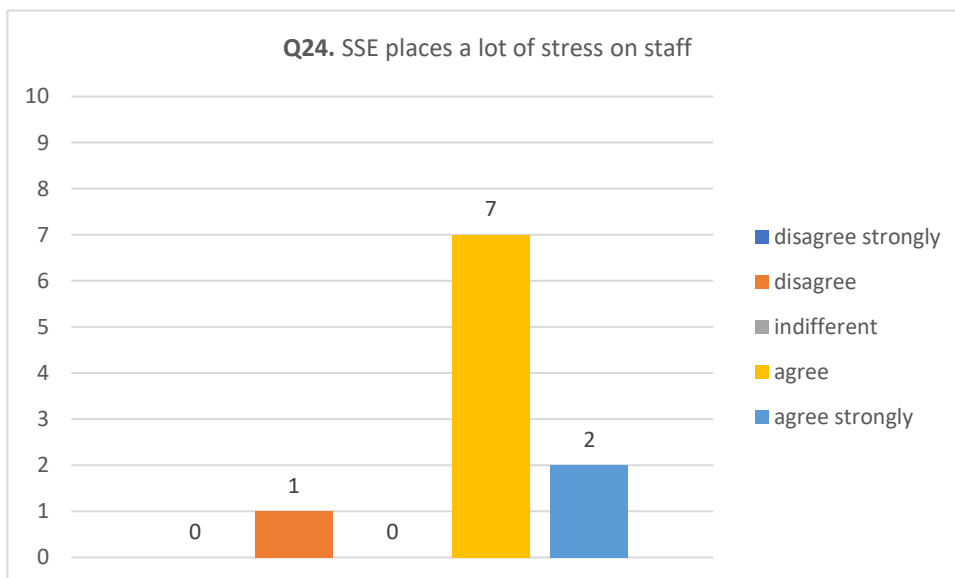


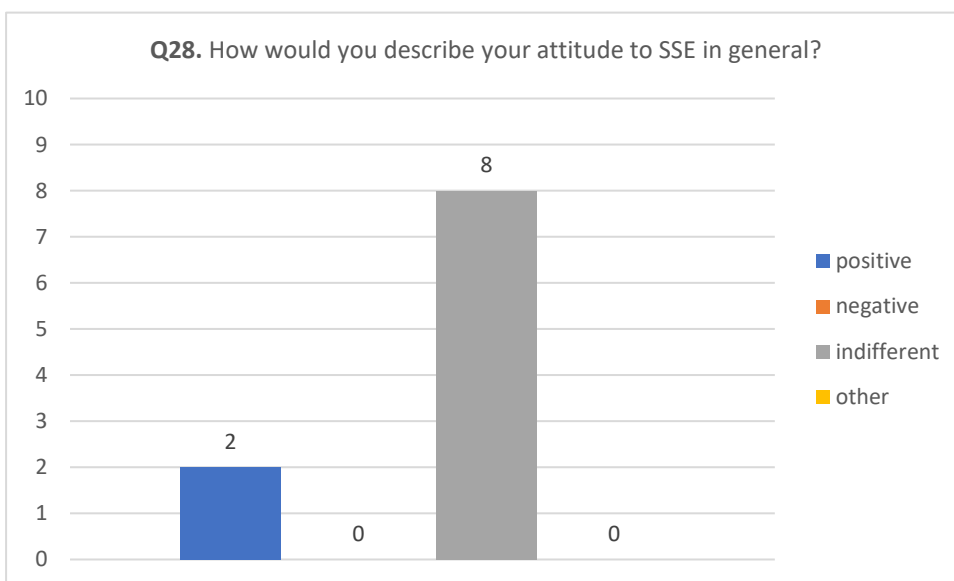
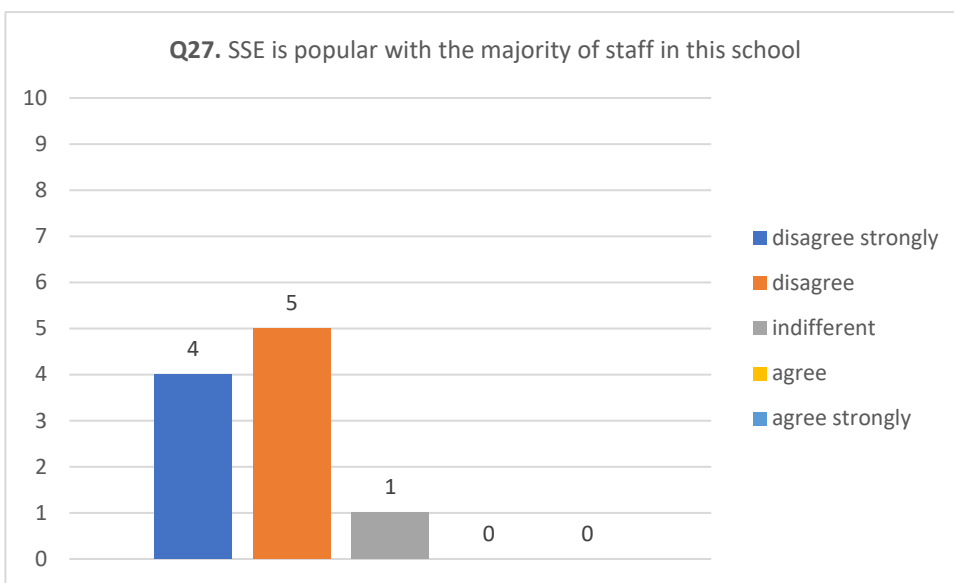
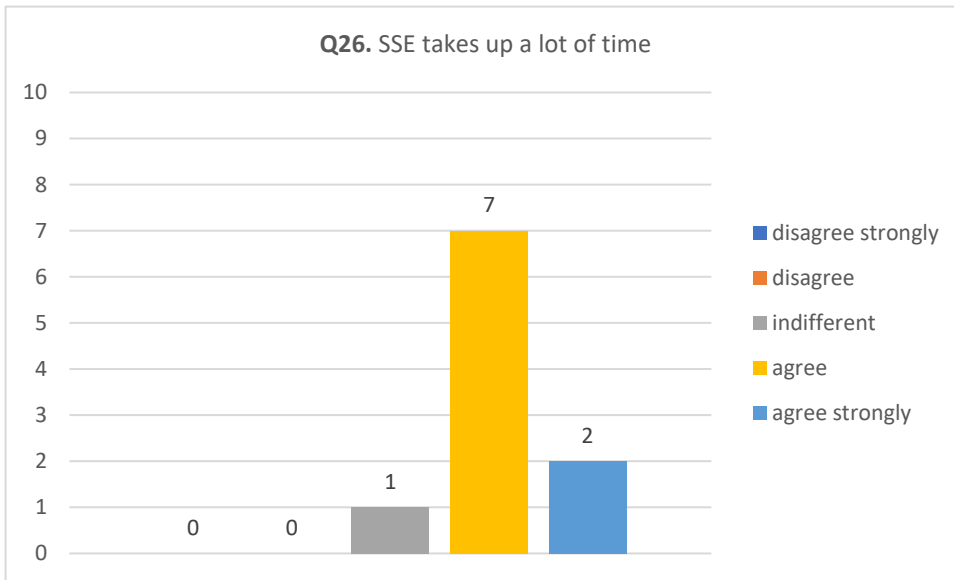
OUTCOMES





UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES





Focus Group Interview Questions

1. *What is your attitude to School Self-Evaluation? Why do you think this is?*
2. *What skills do you think are needed to engage or partake in School-Self Evaluation?*
3. *What emotions come to your mind when you think of School Self-Evaluation?*
4. *Who should be responsible for School Self-Evaluation in a school?*
5. *What in your opinion is the purpose of School Self-Evaluation?*
6. *Does School Self-Evaluation, in your opinion, bring improvement at school level or classroom level? Or both? And if so...How?*
7. *In your opinion, should School Self-Evaluation be aimed at school level improvement or classroom level improvement? Or both? Why do you think this?*
8. *From your teaching career experience to date, has the School Self-Evaluation process led to an improvement at school level that you can describe to us?*
9. *From your teaching career experience to date, has the School Self-Evaluation process led to an improvement in classroom teaching and learning that you can describe to us?*
10. *Of the two outcomes above, was one of more value than the other? If so...Why? If not...Why?*
11. *How do you feel about your capacity to engage with School Self-Evaluation? What is enabling this? (e.g., training, leadership, enthusiasm, school climate) What is disabling this? (e.g., time, resources, training, skill set, your ability, apathy)*

Phase 1 – Becoming familiar with the data

I immersed myself in this data to become familiar with the depth and breadth of its content. This involved repeated reading of the data in an active way by making notes and searching for meanings and patterns.

Phase 2 – Data coding

This phase involved the production of initial codes from the data. This initial coding was undertaken by using gerunds and keeping the codes active and as close to the original statements as possible (Charmaz, 2006, pg.42-71). To begin, I underlined what I felt was every key word and phrase in both the survey data and the interview transcripts. I then combined every underlined word and phrase into colour coded group. For example, any words or phrases associated with making improvements were colour coded pink, whilst any words or phrases associated with paperwork were colour coded dark green etc., for example:

Survey part 1 (multiple-choice questions)	
Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: The <u>existing resources</u> provided by the DES are <u>useful</u> for SSE (80% indifferent, 10% agree) •
Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>More resources are required</u> from the DES on how to conduct SSE (70% yes, 20% indifferent) •
Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Schools should be provided with generic tools for SSE</u> rather than creating their own (yes 60%, indifferent 20%, no 10%) •
Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have the necessary skills</u> to carry out SSE (80% yes, 10% indifferent, 10% no) •
Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Management needs more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (yes 50%, indifferent 50%) indifferent result may be due to power relations •
Question 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff need more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (70% yes, 20% indifferent, 10% no) •

Question 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse quantitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse qualitative data (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: School <u>management have</u> the necessary <u>training required to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>40% yes, 30% no, 30% indifferent</u>)
Question 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have</u> the necessary <u>training to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>60% no, 10% yes, 30% indifferent</u>)
Question 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>BOM have the skills to do SSE (no 50%, indifferent 30%, agree 20%)</u>
Question 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Standardised test should be used as part of SSE (90% yes, 10% no)</u>
Question 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Peer review is</u> used as <u>part of the SSE process</u> in this school (<u>100% no</u>)
Question 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school a set of procedures for doing SSE (60% yes, 10% no, indifferent 30%)</u>
Question 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school an SSE policy (90% yes, 10% no)</u>
Question 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>process of SSE is easy to understand</u> (no 40%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 10%</u>)
Question 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>SSE guidelines</u> developed by the DES re <u>easy to understand (no 80%, 10% indifferent, 10% yes)</u>
Question 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: School <u>management conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OUTPUT: <u>SSE involves all staff (90% yes, 10% indifferent)</u>
Question 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>SSE reports</u> should be <u>published on the internet (no 90%, indifferent 10%)</u>

Question 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: SSE results in better management (no 30%, indifferent 50%, yes 20%) •
Question 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: SSE results in better teaching and learning (yes 60%, indifferent 20%, 20% no) •
Question 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE places a lot of stress on staff (yes 90%, 10% no)
Question 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE increase staff morale (no 90%, 10% yes)
Question 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE takes up a lot of time (yes 90%, 10% indifferent)
Question 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE is popular with the majority of staff in our school (no 90%, 10% indifferent) •
Question 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general (positive 20%, indifferent 80%) •

Survey part 2 (open-ended questions)	
Question 29: What do you think is the purpose of SSE?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	<p>Give schools a sense of accountability</p> <p>Give a sense of agency to schools to work on what actually needs improvement</p> <p>Cut down on unnecessary investigations/ revisions in schools where they aren't needed</p> <p>Take pressure off Department</p>
<i>S3 Respondent 2</i>	To look at teaching and learning on our school: identify opportunities for improvement in practice and results
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	Another box ticking exercise
<i>S3 Respondent 4</i>	I think it's a tick the box exercise and I am not really sure to be honest
<i>S3 Respondent 5</i>	A whole school plan to evaluate what areas we as a school need to improve on and start to facilitate in our daily school lives, for both teachers and learners alike

<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	For a school to identify an area of weakness and put a plan into action of how to improve the area
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	To identify areas of weakness and improve as needed. Can be helpful regarding whole-school planning
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	Illustrate good practice. Identify areas that need improvement . Schools to identify and develop their own improvement areas.
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	To improve all aspects of the school to lead to enhanced learning
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	To identify an area of weakness to improve on as a school. Target specific areas – improved outcomes for the better of each pupil and school as a whole
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	The purpose of SSE is to enable schools to critically evaluate teaching and learning within their organisation and to put improvement plans in place based on their findings
Question 30: Any useful policy documents that you know of regarding SSE?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	No
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	None
<i>S3 Respondent 4</i>	None
<i>S3 Respondent 5</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	SSE guidelines (Purple book)
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	SSE guidelines
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	LAOS – looking at our schools School self-evaluation guidelines
Question 31: What are the positive aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	Allows schools to make practical changes
<i>S3 Respondent 2</i>	Allows time for staff to reflect and be objective and professional as we review all aspects of subject/strand in question
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	As an SNA I am unaware of SSE or its relevance to my role

S3 Respondent 4	As an SNA I don't really know the positive aspects of SSE, as my role and SSE have no relevance to each other
S3 Respondent 5	As a government policy the positive aspects are; it allows for a whole school review of our own personal teachings and going forward delivering the best possible outcomes for our learners
S3 Respondent 6	It is a positive way of improving a school, the teaching, learning and overall management
S3 Respondent 7	It does improve learning and management within a school. Provides opportunities for reflection and discussion.
S3 Respondent 8	Improvement of learning methodologies and strategies. Identify areas for development. Taking ownership of curriculum
S3 Respondent 9	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 10	Improvement of teaching, learning methodologies and enhancement of engagement
S3 Respondent 11	Improvement in learning overall. More focus on teaching areas of weakness. Methodologies and skills improved. Specific and easy to back by data and show improvements. SMART goals - attainable
S3 Respondent 12	All schools in the country are expected to partake. It allows schools the autonomy to choose areas of most concern to them and their organisation. It acknowledges the inbuilt desire of the vast majority of teachers to improve their schools teaching and learning.
Question 32: What are the negative aspects of SSE as a government policy?	
S3 Respondent 1	Policy includes very long term aims e.g., in 2023 we'll look at..., stage 2 of our English policy happens next year...etc. In that time teachers and principals change, move, retire, take leave. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year entirely Also, we had just got into it when it was paused for strike which was demoralising and took the energy out of the whole process.
S3 Respondent 2	Very time consuming; lots of abstract, repetitive 'splitting of hairs'; quite meaningless exercise at times
S3 Respondent 3	Additional paperwork on already stretched staff
S3 Respondent 4	Paper work. Time consuming
S3 Respondent 5	The negative aspects of SSE as a government policy are; paperwork to follow paperwork, stresses on teachers to over perform beyond their means where they are already over-stretched. Scare tactics used by inspectors to

	deliver outcomes by over worked and underappreciated teachers and not being realistic.
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	Added workload and time required to do it
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	Time consuming – takes a lot of meeting times. Increased paperwork equals increased stress which affects morale.
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	Negative stress , time for analysis (timetabling), time consuming , lot of meeting time, takes away from classroom planning time , increased paperwork
<i>S3 Respondent 9</i>	(no answer)
<i>S3 Respondent 10</i>	Time consuming , morale , work overload limits time for planning , stress
<i>S3 Respondent 11</i>	Time consuming . Unnecessary stress/ staff morale . Taking away from teacher planning/class time
<i>S3 Respondent 12</i>	Continuous CPD regarding the process for teachers new to the profession has not been a feature. It is a (formal) addition to an already full workload.
Question 33: What emotions come to mind when you think of SSE?	
<i>S3 Respondent 1</i>	Calm, content, mostly positive, somewhat inattentive and detached. Irritated (with stop-start, training followed by strike) unenthusiastic but willing to participate, have input, follow instructions
<i>S3 Respondent 2</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 3</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 4</i>	Overwhelmed, stressed...where do I find the time? on one hand but on the other hand.... a feeling of achievement and happy knowing that I was involved in the teamwork to try and make the school better
<i>S3 Respondent 5</i>	Inspired, motivated, determined but at the same time overwhelmed, tense and anxious
<i>S3 Respondent 6</i>	
<i>S3 Respondent 7</i>	Uncertainty, interest, fear, satisfaction, scepticism
<i>S3 Respondent 8</i>	

S3 Respondent 9	Frustration, dissatisfaction, disappointment, annoyance
S3 Respondent 10	
S3 Respondent 11	At Dept. level..... Vague, unclear, uncertainty, bewilderment, complex, time consuming, work overload, unsupported, lack of communication, under resourced, inconsistent, lack of staff morale, paperwork.... but with the possibility at our own level of..... Potential, achievement, success, positivity, focus, guidance, support, attainable, boost in staff morale when progress and figures in areas improve
S3 Respondent 12	Don't have any strong emotions positive or negative really
Question 34: Please describe any other opinions, thoughts, ideas, observations or comments you have in relation to your experience of SSE to date in your educational career	
S3 Respondent 1	Happy to participate in SSE but also happy to be told what to do at times if it saves on time/discussion/meetings
S3 Respondent 2	I find it quite tiresome in general and would welcome a directive from the Dept. of Ed outlining what to do/how and when in each subject – “there's great freedom in having no choice”
S3 Respondent 3	SSE does not seem to be a 'whole school process' and as an SNA it seems irrelevant to me
S3 Respondent 4	I don't have any thoughts other than SNAs are not involved in SSE and I don't know whether or not it would be beneficial for an SNA to be included or not
S3 Respondent 5	I do feel it would be more beneficial to discuss pressing matters regarding planning, schemes etc. going forward rather than policy.

S3 Respondent 6	I think it's great for management to involve everyone in the process (and that this will always draw things out and make it hard to please everyone) At the end of the day once the target subject area improves that's the main thing.
S3 Respondent 7	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 8	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 9	SSE is added pressure from the Department. Taking time out to discuss items with staff could be more valuable if a sub was provided to ensure work is still covered as teachers (SET and class) return
S3 Respondent 10	(no answer)
S3 Respondent 11	Aware of SSE in a whole school approach and its benefits. Unaware of resources/further information to enhance the benefits of SSE. I feel as though it is seen as an approach of something that just 'has to be done' as a school approach overall, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.
S3 Respondent 12	When SSE was first introduced, the inspectorate made themselves available to their own schools to explain the process to staff as a whole. There was no compulsion to invite the inspector to deliver the seminar, but in our school, we did and it was most beneficial in terms of the clarity it brought.

The colour coded words and phrases were then combined into one master document for ease of thematic analysis. They were then each assigned an alphanumeric code and description title. This removed the need for colour coding. Identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extracts that demonstrate that code is an important part of phase two.

Actual data extract quotes	Code	Description title
Purpose/Reason		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Accountability</i> • <i>Box ticking exercise</i> • <i>Tick the box exercise</i> 	R1	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improvement</i> • <i>Improvement in teaching and learning</i> • <i>A need to improve a school for both teachers and learners</i> • <i>To improve</i> • <i>Improve</i> 	R 2	Improvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify areas that need improvement</i> • <i>Improve the school to enhance learning</i> • <i>Improve outcomes for the better of each pupil and the whole school</i> • <i>Improvement plans based on findings</i> 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To evaluate for improvement</i> • <i>Identify an area of weakness</i> • <i>Identify areas of weakness</i> • <i>Illustrate good practice</i> • <i>Identify area of weakness</i> • <i>Critically evaluate teaching and learning</i> 	R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Put a plan into action</i> • <i>Whole school planning</i> • <i>Improvement plans</i> 	R4	Planning
Positive aspects of SSE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practical changes</i> 	P1	Practical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To reflect</i> • <i>Reflection and discussion</i> 	P2	Reflect and discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Professional</i> 	P3	Professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA I am unaware of SSE</i> • <i>As an SNA my role and SSE have no relevance to each other</i> 	P4	SNA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whole school review</i> • <i>Focus on teaching in areas of weakness</i> 	P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Delivering the best possible outcomes</i> 	P6	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improving the teaching, learning and management of a school</i> • <i>Improvement of learning</i> • <i>Improve learning and management</i> • <i>Improvement of teaching and learning</i> • <i>Improvement in learning</i> • <i>To improve the school's teaching and learning</i> 	P7	Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking ownership</i> • <i>Autonomy</i> 	P8	Autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engagement</i> 	P9	Engagement

		(with teaching and learning improvement)
Negative aspects of SSE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very long term aims</i> • <i>Staff turnover is high. Would prefer one item done and dusted each year</i> 	N1	Too long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Roll out of SSE was paused and took the energy out of the process</i> 	N2	No momentum/energy in the process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Very time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time required to do it</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> • <i>Time consuming</i> 	N3	No time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Abstract and quite meaningless</i> 	N4	Meaningless
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over stretched staff</i> • <i>Over stretched staff to over perform beyond their means</i> 	N5	Overstretched staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Additional paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> • <i>Increased paperwork</i> 	N6	More paper work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Staff stress</i> • <i>Increased stress</i> • <i>Negative stress</i> • <i>Unnecessary stress</i> • <i>stress</i> 	N7	More stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Over worked</i> • <i>Added workload</i> • <i>Addition to an already full workload</i> 	N8	Over worked staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not realistic</i> 	N9	Not realistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Affects morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> • <i>Morale</i> 	N10	Lowers morale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Takes away from classroom planning time</i> 	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and planning time

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking away from teacher planning/class time</i> 		
Other comments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to participate in SSE</i> 	OC 1	Participate... yes!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happy to be told what to do if it saves on time/discussion/meetings</i> • <i>Would like a directive from Dept. saying what to do/how and when in each subject</i> 	OC 2	Tell me what to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I find it quite tiresome in general</i> 	OC3	Tiresome process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As an SNA it seems irrelevant to me</i> • <i>SNAs are not involved in SSE. I don't know whether or not it would be beneficial for an SNA to be included</i> 	OC4	Irrelevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It would be more beneficial to discuss planning rather than policy</i> 	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Great for management to involve everyone in the process</i> 	OC6	Involve everyone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Once the target subject area improves that's the main thing</i> 	OC7	Once target area improves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>SSE is added pressure</i> 	OC8	Pressure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Valuable if a sub was provided to ensure work is still covered as teachers return from meetings</i> 	OC9	Proper sub cover
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is seen as an approach of something that just 'has to be done' as a school approach, rather than knowing the specific benefits overall for teaching and learning at a smaller scale.</i> 	OC10	SSE has to be done but not sure why
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When SSE was first introduced, we invited the inspector to deliver the seminar, most beneficial in terms of the clarity it brought</i> 	OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good
Emotions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confused</i> • <i>Frustrated</i> • <i>Calm</i> • <i>Annoyed</i> 	E1	All references to emotions
Leadership		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve</i> 	L1	All references specific to leadership
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As can be seen from the example above, identifying the codes and matching them with the actual data extract quote that demonstrate that code was an important part of phase two.

With these new alphanumeric codes, I now turned my attention to coding the illustrative graph data from the questionnaire

Survey part 1 (multiple-choice questions)		
Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: The <u>existing resources</u> provided by the DES are <u>useful</u> for SSE (<u>80%</u> <u>indifferent</u>, 10% agree) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • Anti OC11
Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>More resources are required</u> from the DES on how to conduct SSE (<u>70% yes</u>, 20% indifferent) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • OC9 • OC11
Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Schools should be provided with generic tools for SSE</u> rather than creating their own (<u>yes 60%</u>, indifferent 20%, no 10%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • N6
Question 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Staff have the necessary skills</u> to carry out SSE (<u>80% yes</u>, 10% indifferent, 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • Anti OC11
Question 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Management needs more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (<u>yes 50%</u>, <u>indifferent 50%</u>) <u>indifferent result may be due to power relations</u> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • P3 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC11
Question 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INPUT: <u>Staff need more training</u> on how to conduct SSE (<u>70% yes</u>, 20% indifferent, 10% no) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • P3 • P8 • P9 • OC11

Question 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse quantitative data (90% yes,</u> 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3
Question 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff can analyse qualitative data (90% yes,</u> 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3
Question 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: School <u>management have</u> the necessary <u>training required to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>40% yes,</u> 30% no, 30% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Staff have</u> the necessary <u>training to</u> carry out <u>peer review</u> (teacher observation) (<u>60% no,</u> 10% yes, 30% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>BOM have the skills to do SSE</u> (<u>no 50%,</u> indifferent 30%, agree 20%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9
Question 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> INPUT: <u>Standardised test should be used as part of SSE (90% yes,</u> 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P5 P1 R3
Question 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: <u>Peer review is</u> used as <u>part of the SSE process</u> in this school (<u>100% no</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 N5 N6 N8 N9
Question 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school a set of procedures for doing SSE (60% yes,</u> 10% no, indifferent 30%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3
Question 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: has the <u>school an SSE policy (90% yes,</u> 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P3 R4 OC10
Question 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>process of SSE is easy to understand</u> (no 40%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 10%</u>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC11
Question 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PROCESS: The <u>SSE guidelines</u> developed by the DES re <u>easy to understand (no 80%,</u> 10% indifferent, 10% yes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC11

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
Question 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: School <u>management conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school</u> (90% yes, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • R3 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC10
Question 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: <u>Teachers conduct SSE on a regular basis in this school</u> (90% yes, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • R3 • P8 • P9 • OC10
Question 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTPUT: <u>SSE involves all staff</u> (90% yes, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • P9 • R4 • OC6 • Anti OC9 • OC10
Question 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROCESS: <u>SSE reports</u> should be <u>published on the internet</u> (no 90%, indifferent 10%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1
Question 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: <u>SSE results in better management</u> (no 30%, indifferent 50%, <u>yes 20%</u>) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N9 • L1
Question 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUTCOMES: <u>SSE results in better teaching and learning</u> (yes 60%, indifferent 20%, 20% no) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P7
Question 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE places a lot of <u>stress</u> on staff (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • E1 • OC8
Question 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE <u>increase staff morale</u> (<u>no 90%</u>, 10% yes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N10 • E1
Question 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE <u>takes up a lot of time</u> (<u>yes 90%</u>, 10% indifferent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3 • N1

Question 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: SSE is popular with the majority of staff in our school (no 90%, 10% indifferent) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC3 • OC10
Question 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: How would you describe your attitude to SSE in general (positive 20%, indifferent 80%) • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10

My attention now turned to the interview transcriptions. I proceeded to underline what I felt was every key word and phrase. For ease of analysis, I also assigned each interviewee's voice a colour code of red, green, yellow and purple. These key words and phrases were then combined into one master interview document for ease of analysis. The alphanumeric codes were then applied to each keyword and phrase.

Focus Group Interview One	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attitudes are one of confusion to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was taken off the table. hard to get that momentum back, to get back into the swing of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N2 • E1 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a lot of confusion wasn't much clear guidance in the first place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something very broad, I know is what we were told at one stage, and don't go too specific. well, how broad do we go, how specific do we get. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the level of engagement from school to school varies greatly, just from speaking to my own friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N9 • N4 • N1 • P9 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think, what they're supposed to be doing mostly, across the board is the big part of the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one other thing that was being thrown at schools from the department, as if there wasn't really enough already. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • N6 • N5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than, the Department coming in and doing their WSE and deciding, this area, you need to improve, and this is what we want you to do. They were just saying, okay schools, you need to do this yourselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • R2 • R1 • Anti OC11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • own attitude is, I suppose one of indifference, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there's so much going on between new language curriculum already being talks of a maths one, different programmes being introduced the whole time, So, you're constantly running around, doing this, doing that, and then I just feel it's one extra thing being added into the equation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on board with doing whatever I have to do, but I'm not over interested in it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • R1 • OC10 • OC2 • P3 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to identify areas of weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's the principal or the whole staff, decide what the school needs to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what the school needs to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a particular two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • R4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pick something and improve it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools are doing anyway, because in our job, that's what we do every day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P3 • P9 • P8 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting everyone on the same – singing off the same hymn sheet, school-wide, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P6 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do that day to day in your own classroom and in your setting that we're watching, and seeing what children need to work on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P8 • P9 • P3 • R2 • R3 • R4

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do see the benefit of it having one specific thing that the school overall has a focus on, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • R4 • R2 • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school self-evaluation then is more aimed at school level, or is it aimed at classroom level..... aimed at both, but..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's happening anyway, on a classroom level. on a band level, within classes, teachers talk about things..... we know the areas of strengths and weaknesses.....and look at our own test results, or their own assessment, and see where a class needs to go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P8 • P9 • P3 • R2 • R3 • R4 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it pulls all that together and gives focus to the school of where to go. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • starts at class level, individual classes,, strength can become a whole school thing. For example, with the handwriting; if people start to implement changes within their rooms, then that's shown throughout the school, whether that's in displays or handwriting competitionsbecomes a whole school result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anything we've certainly looked at would have been areas that even we would all have said, oh yeah, that's definitely an area. And I think that's what got is started on the handwriting, was that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • P8 • P5 • P2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we had all identified that ourselves. So, I suppose you're first identifying things from your own experience, before you look at it as a whole school thing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all have our own little zone, then when we come together then in staff meetings or in discussions, then it becomes a whole school issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certainly, anything that we've looked at, has been something that certainly I, in my own experience, would have flagged in my own classes as areas that would have needed things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R3 • R4 • P3 • P9 • P8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it forces you, we need to improve this, what can we do, you mightn't necessarily get around to doing it. it does force you to do something about an issue that exists. especially the handwriting I think I would always have been something that was always on the back burner, I must try and improve that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 R2 R1 P7 P9 OC7 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it's like everything else, you've only so many hours in the week, and trying to get everything done, that I suppose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N3 OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> this probably brings it to the forefront and makes you actually focus on it a bit more than you would have done otherwise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 R2 P7 P9 OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> what are we actually doing well first, with a positive stand first. Would you ever see it like that? I always think of, what do we need to improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R2 P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we're so paperwork focused and paperwork driven at the minute, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> we have to have this done, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you're constantly thinking, of inspectors and WSEs that the focus I suppose the focus externally would be on areas to improve. It's very rarely they come in and say, well, you did great on such a thing, you know. Then tend to come in and they will focus on the weaknesses, and they will pull you up on things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N7 N10 R1 R2 R3 P5 E1 Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a positive start, but if you started with it said, you're doing these things really, really they'd still be saying, but you need to improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti OC11 N10 R2 R1 P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If we were to choose an area that's really strong, but step it up one more notch, would probably change people's attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R2 R4 P7 P9 E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with that mind set. You're kind of automatically, looking to improve something, you're thinking of it as an area that you're falling down on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R2 R3 P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe the attitudes would be different board if you came in looking from a point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R2 P7

<p>of, we're doing really well in this, so let's try to maintain that, or keep developing it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a few years ago, in specific areas of maths, and part of it was to raise the overall score, say in maths and standardised tests, and we put focus on the areas that would have been traditionally weaker. And we definitely did see a huge improvement. At school level, we did see a big improvement as a result. when you're focused on something, you get more results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • P7 • P9 • P1 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we'd said aside time every week to do a little bit on that. Kind of stuck it to the more practical areas of maths, every week we'd take one day and touch on that. it helped to focus everyone, if you touched on it throughout the term every week, you were actually teaching it properly and coming back and revisiting things. saw an improvement? Absolutely, definitely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P1 • P7 • P9 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from a school level, I need to pick it up in the area, or I need to focus on this. nobody wants to be seen to be letting the side down, and you want to pull your weight, if it's on a whole school level. So, it does impact your classroom teaching, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think there's an accountability as well, when it's a whole school thing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • P8 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do feel that we do have so much going on, it's so easy to forget about something. to be implemented successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think if it's interesting, I have the enthusiasm; it depends on what the topic is, what the area is. There are certain subject areas I'd be much more interested in than others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1 • OC1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would need a lot of encouragement and a lot of support. it really does come down to staff, myself and staff enthusiasm and interest in what the area is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • just having time for it, because I think time is a massive issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would have the enthusiasm to do it once something is up and running and started. I would need that little bit of push. I definitely would need a targeted time or a targeted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • E1 • OC1

<p>reminder that this is our evaluation and this is what we're working towards, one slot a week or two times a week where we're going to work on this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do very little taking out school self-evaluation documents and reading them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think if there was a department directive coming out to everybody,something very specific, and told, this is the area you're going to improve on, we're going to be in to check it in the next two months, that that would push me motivate me to say, right, this is something I have to work on, they want this done.that motivation, that push would drive me a lot more, I need motivation, I need a target, and I need something to focus myself on, and to know that it's going to be assessed and it's going to be looked at further. Not that you're going to put work into something and nothing ever come of it, or nobody ever give you feedback on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R1 • E1 • OC3 • OC11 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • . I just think it's putting the onus back on us, whereas it should be more coming from above,, this is where we saw your school had a weakness, or, pick a strength and say we want you to improve on it. And that they should be deciding it, I feel, more so than the staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • N5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we are coming back to look at it. So that you really feel that motivation, that, okay, they're coming to look at poetry or oral Irish, or handwriting – right, I need to up my game. So that you have that kind of motivation to drive you on, because sometimes it can be hard..... to find motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • E1 • OC3 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You've so much more going on, and so much to teach throughout the day, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's follow-through as well for them, isn't it?you're living off your nerves, Everyone is putting their best foot forward, and the whole school is making such an effort. you're trying to show off all the work you've been doingto show the school to the best of your ability. They come in, you're doing grand here, but this, this and this needs work – and then they go off and they leave you to it,come back at some stage to follow up, more often than not, they don't. So, it's just coming in, I feel, they come in criticising, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • N10 • N8 • R1 • E1 • Anti OC11

<p>and go. it's the magical 'work on that', and then they go, it's left to us to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they say, you know your school best,, when they're putting work back on schools. And then, they're very quick at the same time to turn around and say, well, we know best when it comes to, this new curriculum, new documents, new everything to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • Anti OC11 • N8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I certainly think we have the capacity, but I think schools are very busy places, and quite stressful places. school management, teachers, everyone is working flat out, all the days we're here, and the days we're at home. you don't leave here at three o'clock and leave it all behind you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N7 • N8 • P3 • E1 • L1 • OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there's a tendency to kind of pass things off onto the schools. it's felt that everything in the last few years all put back onto the schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N8 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if they could come once a year for half a day, in an inspector could come in and sit down with the school, or even for a Croke Park hour, and look through where we're at now, and talk with the teachers and the staff and work together on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • R4 • OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think we all have the capability to engage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we're all professionals everyone here is here with the best of intentions, works hard and wants the best, for our students. pride in our school we want the school to be best that it can be. staff are willing and are enthusiastic and care enough about the school as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We certainly have the means to assess within our own school and to know, assess our own classrooms and to know the children that we're teaching, I think we all know our children very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P3 • P8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the main thing schools are missing is just guidance and someone to come in to sit with a staff and look through and think, right, what is the best way for you to use this time, and use this effort to get the best results for your specific school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC11 • OC10 • N4 • R1 • R4 • L1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think sometimes when we're left to it ourselves, it's very hard to see, when you're one step back from any situation, it's easier to see it clearly. I think sometimes we're so into it, and so involved, and you're kind of protective of your school, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E1 • OC6 • OC7 • OC11

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> that sometimes you need someone to come in and even to look through and say, right, I see where you're going in this area, but maybe you're being..... just, an hours' chat, I think, would make the world of difference..... <i>If they were to give very clear directives on what they want to see</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E1 N4 OC11 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>we could analyse it ourselves and say, well, we think we need to improve this, and what could we do, and decide ourselves. And they could still come back in and say, oh, well that's not really good enough, because we've seen a lot better in other schools. Whereas, as a school, we might feel, oh, we've changed it up and it's much better, it still mightn't necessarily be what they wanted us to improve.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 R2 P3 P8 P2 Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional enoughtostand over what we say?..... I think we would,it has to be a whole school thing. if we're all in, we all have to be on the same page. And if everyone feels confident enough to be able to say that, it would be great. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3 P8 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> but I think that's a confidence thing, and I think that's probably something that comes back from when you're starting your teaching career, you have the dip year, or most of us did, where they come in and you're nearly afraid to breathe too loudly, because whatever they say goes. And it's completely rewiring that, and rewiring that almost fear. I mean, we go back to like children in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 E1 Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'd say confidence is the main thing.a belief that you know you've got the backing of the rest of your staff, and that everyone is on the same page..... <i>being a member of a team,to team player. It's all or nothing, everybody has to get on board with it and implement it,, or it won't work.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R4 P3 P8 E1 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you'd need to have some evidence to show them. concrete evidence..... assessment, evidence. this all the timeit's the skillsets that we use every day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OC7 P8 P3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it's probably ingrained in us since we were training,you live in fear of the inspector coming in. And they come in then, and criticise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 E1 Anti OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We definitely seek praise, and you seek positive reinforcement..... are you doing it to the best of your ability,identifying a</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R3 N10 E1

<p><i>weakness or an area to develop, and you want to do it, and be told, yes, you've done an amazing job....., when you're analysing it yourself,, we could pick it out, but it's more about this person that's going to come in from the outside, and maybe knock you down, even though you've done the best that you can do. there's always a constant fear there that you're not going to get the appraisal and the gratitude for what you've put in. you are left open to criticism.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC11 • P3 • P8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • important that everyone, certainly engages and comes together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who keeps everyone together, and rounds it up, and mediates, I.....? I suppose the leadership has to come from the top, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but then equally, everyone has to row in and support each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P8 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is that tendency to focus on your own little department and your own classroom, but I think it's really important that teachers build each other up as well, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think we need to build each other up a little bit more, and to give each other a bit of praise when we need it, and stand over each other and give each other a help when we need it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P9 • P5 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's important that everyone has an active part, and everyone probably feels that they have a voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • P2 • E1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the areas that you need a little bit of support in, that there's someone there to give it to you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working in smaller teams, and then feeding back – probably like we did with the handwriting. I did feel that was helpful, kind of funnelling it through, so it's not just one big staff meeting and everyone's sitting there, the voices who are confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P2 • P9 • P5

<p>in speaking probably, and probably the people who have been doing it longer feel a little bit more confident in doing it. I think for younger teachers, it's quite difficult in that setting to put themselves forward, even though they might have a lot of newer ideas, maybe, if they can bring fresh things to the table.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC6 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it absolutely has to be a whole school approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hear of schools where the principal decides, we're doing this, and this is happening, and then the teachers are all left scurrying around trying to do it and trying to implement it in the classroom, and it just fails because everyone isn't in it together. So, I think it is really important that everyone just is on the same page and everyone is part of the team that works on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do believe that leadership, whether it's principal and vice-principal, the main push comes from them, but that everybody needs to be on board. It has to be a whole... everybody has to be a team. everything that happens in a school, the staff have to be a team. everybody needs to get on board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • L1 • OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think with the school self-evaluation that we've been doing, everybody has been involved, everybody has been asked an opinion, whether they want to or not. I think from that regard, it's been operating very successfully where everyone has been involved in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9 • P2 • L1 • OC6 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But I do believe that the leadership, I prefer the main drive to come from the leadership side of things, once staff are involved and know what's happening, right, this is where we're going with it, this is the direction we're going to take. We're going to do this once a week, we're going to do this on a daily, and then that the push comes from management, from a leadership....., I need that driver, that motivation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P8 • L1 • OC6 • Anti OC8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can split, and go different directions, where some people are doing more, and other people are doing a lot less. Whereas, I think if everybody knows, this is what's expected, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P9

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear guidelines. So, if it isn't to come from the Department, and it was to come from the leaders in school,, I think that would work very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • P8 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone has to do their own little part. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R1 • P8 • P9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you still need someone reining everybody in, as you do in everything else,, in teams or anything else you need a leader to focus, channel the focus, I think, it stops everyone just going around in circles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • OC10 • P8 • P9 • L1 • OC6
Focus Group Interview Two	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive without being enthusiastic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that I think it makes sense that schools can identify their own problems and you know go from there but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P8 • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't enjoy the process I don't enjoy that kind of work in terms of policies, policies and paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is not an area of personal interest to me but I still think it's a fairly good idea for schools to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P7 • E1 • OC1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's not something I would enjoy,I have to do with work I'd have no feelings of excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it'swhat schools do or should be doing anyway all the time, seeing how we can improve things but – I wouldn't get excited about it now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • R2 • P7 • E1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An awful lot of investment for a very little a very specific little area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and I can see the point of it and I can see the democratic element of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I often think,just tell me what to do, I'll do it, that's what I'd like but then maybe I wouldn't like it, maybe you know if the management team is dictating all the time, maybe..... I can't go wrong if I'm told what to do, you tell me what to do and I'll do it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R1 • N4 • OC2 • OC6 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve the learning process for our childrento improve our practice and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7

<p>.....to help childrenachieve more or achieve their potential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any good school with a positive atmosphere, this happens, you see we've a little weakness, it's mentioned at a staff meeting and we do something to change it, the purpose of it is for if there are schools who are failing? it forces them to get on board with it and I guess then you need proof in the form of paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P5 • P7 • P2 • P1 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • N6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have always done it as in we see something, lower results in tests or some attitude problem on the kid or something and we kind of naturally focus in, next year let's try to do a bit better on that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R3 • P1 • P5 • P6 • P7 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement at school level or classroom level I'd say both,it depends on the topics you chose, we've picked something very practical....., handwriting, it's good for the school because we've all had a look at ourselves and said it's something we can improve as a school and then the kids will definitely feel it in class because it's very practical. this time next year we could look at the copies and say, 'Look at that' There's the result, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P1 • P5 • P7 • P8 • P9 • OC6 • OC7 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I find it hard to engage with When there was a meeting, it was SSE, then I go out and it's kind of, 'Oh gone', you know unless I'm reminded again about it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like I'm always so against the clock I believe in the decisions made, I want to do it in the classroom,the day just goes by, so I guess that's why I did like that we did something simple, like handwriting, I think maybe if it was perhaps more classroom specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say there is scope for a whole school use of it like we were just talking about a lovely schoolhad a general feeling and attitude that people in the classroom benefited from so I guess we could look at things like, uniforms or punctuality and...Politeness, manners.issues on yard, so I'd say there is scope for tangible whole school improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P5 • P7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say potential for it for using both, so far, it's been classroom based and I'd it has led to improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • R4 • P7 • P5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm always a little nervous about plans that are operate over a few years,you've a changeover of teachers, you could have a new principal, maternity leaves, you've everything and those things get lost and so I just love when something can be implemented between September and June and done and it's there..... Anything that's a little longer term I am starting to lose enthusiasm for because I've started to realise, they just fade away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti OC6 • Anti OC5 • L1 • E1 • N4 • N1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the intention is very good I think it has to be a positive thing you know because we're always trying to improve, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • P9 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it can be a bit vague if it's too big, I think small concise areas or maybe an overall general thing in the school if you say for year 1, 2, 3, and 4, we're going to implement thisit starts off great but inevitably people come and go and puff..... we forget. But the intention is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N1 • N4 • OC10 • P7 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's good to keep looking at ourselves and looking at our practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2 • P7 • P2 • P9 • P3 • OC6 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we do get to suggest those weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • R3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a very supportive environment here in this school..... I think nobody's afraid to ask for help if they need help people have different strengths..... And no one's afraid to say, 'I'm bad at something'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • R2 • P5 • P8 • P9 • E1 • OC6 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one feed into the other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd say for SSE classroom based probably works better because it's hard to find a practical measurable way of add to school culture or atmosphere, when you talk about SSE....., it's more suitable for classroom teaching and it's probably more likely more effective..... Because they're more precise measurableharder within the bounds of school self-evaluation process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable you to do school self-evaluation?.....one thing that's very practical is the time out that we had from the classroom to be able to talk in focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R4 • P2 • P9

<p>about, the handwriting it's very hard as you know if you're trying to do that at lunchtime or after school. Like we were given time and plenty of time to – so that helped to engage and we could all agree in our group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P5 • P1 • L1 • OC6 • OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long time ago. I just remember the cold in the library, that's what I remember about 'Pick a very small area'..... That's all I remember, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10 • OC11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we were trained we were ready but you know the strike then it was called..... I felt like I'd emotionally invested in it and then it was gone, then it came back, This is just another thing that will come and go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N2 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the topics we picked had been topics I feel I can talk about. any of our topics so far actually I've had opinions on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P9 • P8 • Anti OC7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know there's an effort to have every voice heard there was so much talk and discussion and meetings to get to a few quite basic points you know so I guess that's the part of it that if an instinct to resist. it's just the time and the all the democracyOn the flip side, if we weren't given all that time, we'd all be moaning wouldn't we. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N3 • P5 • P9 • P8 • P2 • L1 • OC3 • Anti OC6 • Anti OC7 • OC8 • Anti OC9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wouldn't be keen to get more training on it really. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I assume you go off to these places and you know what's required and it filters down to us in terms of what you know what we have to do so I'm comfortable enough with that process, I'm probably not eager enough to go and study those things myself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • L1 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • my lack of enthusiasm about the whole thing,. , I'm very happy to do whatever. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • E1 • OC1 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a kind of an apathy towards it, where do you think that stemmed from, I think people want to become a teacher Ipicture myself as a teacher whenyou've got a book in your hand and you're talking to the class and they're answering questions and next thing the conversation moves on, you're down with the map and next thing you're talking about Brazil and that's when I feel really good in my job and I like to be in the classroom anything that goes into a folder for me is just the stuff I have to do to get paid, people became teachersthey didn't chose office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • OC10 • N9 • E1 • R1 • P5 • P8 • P9 • OC3 • OC7

<p>work they saw themselves doing nature walks I feel best when I do something like I read a book see something in an art gallery I'm doing it in school I actually feel – blissful moments everything else I try to argue to have it as minimum as possible and I'm being paid for being here so I accept that I should have to do this stuff but I don't know if I could ever really feel enthusiastic about that. only thing that would encourage enthusiasm is that if it's something you would personally do next year, like the handwriting, I do feel positive about that next year, I feel good that we'll all be doing the same thing or that we all know how to rule our copies the same way but I think the general apathy is just if maybe if you asked a pile of accountants to do this kind of work you might get some enthusiasm.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • things we have to write down that I feel like you write it down and probably it will never ever be read but you're doing it in case some legal thing comes up or someone comes in and there's no soul in it, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N4 • N9 • OC3 • OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this I wouldn't feel negative about this because it is, actually, going to be used next year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 • P9 • P8 • E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • something I have to write downand away it goes in a folder and probably eyes will never be cast on it again, that frustrates me, anything to do with legal, you know the whole world of insurance and compo culture and all that and everything to do to prevent that is just a very negative area in my mind you know. If you were to think about that you wouldn't teach really. You'd change your job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • N9 • E1 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, I love teaching. I love my job. I love the children. I love being in there, getting you know making a difference in their lives and getting them enthused about something, that I'm enthusiastic, bringing out of them – bringing out what's the best in them that's real to me and I really love that and this ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Box ticking exercise dusty old doesn't do anything for me. I do it because I have to do it because that's my terms and conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • R1 • E1 • OC2 • OC3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like integrated learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know where you put that in boxes, I'm not a box ticking person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OC10 • N4 • N9 • R1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> every form or folder reduces the time you have in the day to do those things. she's done nothing up there because you know what I mean I haven't ticked all the boxes but yet I feel I have done a lot but you can't quantify a lot of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9 R1 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> your best teaching moments are the things when you veer offSpontaneous. It's not really worth it to go back and change your plans you know what happened and you know and I'd say as well the parents anything they value that you do, none of that's in your folders either 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 N9 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a good – a positive approach, a positive outlook really, open-mindedgood social skills to be able to engage and to listen and to take on new things and a fresh prepared to look at things in a different way really. positive attitude to you know engage with the processnot a negative approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P9 E1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> you need a leader who's able to go and do the research, fill in the forms, someone who's good at, making the tables and charts and working it all out, I think you need one person like that and the other people compliant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 L1 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good interpersonal relationships..... prepare to engage with each other be honest no point in pretending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P9 E1 OC6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> would lean more towards positive than negative anyway. a little resistant I feel a sense of resistance,to anything that has to go into a folder you know documents, and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 E1 OC3 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole thing can be a little distasteful not very appealing to me, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 OC3 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptance Acquiescence. Resignation but I like the group thing we can all you know share ideas and you know not get too het up about it and start small you know and I like the idea of it, I can see on paper the whole idea of it but I would be no good to do it on my own you know I might as well be looking into a pool of deep water. the words I'd be using, stressed and negative and worried and overwhelmed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 R4 P5 E1 OC3 OC6 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I could think of ways in my own class to do a thing but not....Yeah but you do all the time don't you?.....And every – after Halloween and every January and after Easter I always come back with this new thing I'm going to do and change because you know you look back and say, 'God that was so wrong', you know.....It's interesting you should say that though, we're doing it all the time.....We don't reflect on it. We don't stop and say...This is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> P5 P7 P9 P8 P1 P2 P3

<p>evaluation.....That’s what teaching is though isn't it? You're improving all the time.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> who should be responsible for school self-evaluation in a school?..... I think the principal, with the help of the deputy head I'd say and filter it down from there. You know to structure it, ‘You guide it and steer it and then everybody else come in on board’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N4 L1 OC10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it's managementit would start with you Vinnie and then the likes of the Vice and then if you could whittle it down to the tangible choices as in, here’s the three handwriting books, staff have a look at them, chat to your partner, have a vote, again this process we’ve done here so far and there were times where I didn’t think we all need to be part of it, that you or you and Catherine might have got that bit done and then you know sometimes just too many cooks can just slow a whole process down and especially as management are more clued into these things anyway and possibly care more you know. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> L1 OC6 Anti OC9 N4 OC10

Phase 3 – Generating initial themes

This phase involved sorting the different codes (and the actual data extract quotes) into potential themes. To help analyse the codes and consider how they might combine to form overarching themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the use of a visual representation (p.89). I therefore listed all the codes with their title description into a table as follows:

Code	Title description	Code	Title description
R1	Accountability	N1	Too long term
R2	Improvement	N2	No momentum/No energy in process
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	N3	No time
R4	Planning	N4	Meaningless
		N5	Overworked staff
P1	Practical	N6	More paperwork
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	N7	More stress
P3	Promotes professionalism	N8	Staff overworked

P4	SNA	N9	Not realistic
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	N10	Lowers morale
P6	Focus on better outcomes	N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time
P7	Focus on improvement		
P8	Autonomy	OC1	Participate yes!
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	OC2	Tell me what to do
		OC3	Tiresome
E1	Emotions	OC4	Irrelevant
L1	Leadership	OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please
		OC6	Involves everyone
		OC7	Once target area improves
		OC8	Pressure
		OC9	Proper sub cover
		OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why
		OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good

The next task involved thinking about the relationship between the codes. I used colour coding once again to link codes I felt had something in common, collating them then into their own thematic box for ease of analysis and further refinement as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
R2	Improvement	
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	
OC7	Once target area improves	
R1	Accountability	
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	

N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	
N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	
N3	No time	
N5	Overworked staff	
N6	More paperwork	
N7	More stress	
N8	Staff overworked	
N10	Lowers morale	
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time	
OC3	Tiresome	
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please	
OC8	Pressure	
OC9	Proper sub cover	
E1		

L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	

The orange codes represented what school self-evaluation gives to a school. The yellow codes I felt were representative of the perceived reality of school self-evaluation on the ground by those implementing it. The purple codes represented what, according to the literature, school self-evaluation in theory gives to school staff. I felt the blue codes represented the attitude of staff members to school self-evaluation, whilst the green code represented the leadership of school self-evaluation.

Phase 4 – Reviewing and developing themes

This phase involved the refinement of potential themes. To do this I revisited the actual data extracts and the literature, to thus ensure, that the themes worked in relation to our data set and that we had accurate representations for the purposes of this study. The outcome of this process was as follows:

Code	Title description	Sub themes
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal accountability
P2	Promotes reflection and discussion	
P3	Promotes professionalism	
P8	Autonomy	
P9	Engagement with teaching and learning	
OC1	Participate yes!	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	

R2	Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate for improvement
R3	Evaluate (weakness and good practice)	
R4	Planning	
P1	Practical	
OC7	Once target area improves	
P6	Focus on better outcomes	
P7	Focus on improvement	
OC6	Involve everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school approach
P5	Whole school review and work on weaknesses	
R1	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External accountability
N1	Too long term	
N4	Meaningless	
N9	Not realistic	
OC2	Tell me what to do	
OC4	Irrelevant	
OC10	School self-evaluation has to be done not sure why	
OC11	Partnership with inspectorate would be good	
P4	School self-evaluation is meaningless to SNAs	
N2	No momentum/no energy in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workload

N3	No time		
N5	Overworked staff		
N6	More paperwork		
N8	Staff overworked		
N11	Takes from classroom teaching and learning time		
OC3	Tiresome		
OC5	Teaching and learning planning more than policy please		
OC9	Proper sub cover		
N7	More stress		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions
N10	Lowers morale		
OC8	Pressure		
E1	Emotions		
L1	Leadership can motivate the involvement of staff in school self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and staff motivation 	

Phase 5 – Refining, defining and naming themes

In this phase Braun and Clarke (2006) say we must identify the essence of what recognised themes are about and determine what aspect of the data set each theme captures (pg.92). They contend it is important to identify the ‘story’ that each theme tells in relation to each other and how it fits into the overall story of the research question. Using this approach in my analysis of the data, I generated two key themes to frame a thematic analysis of the data.

The first theme ‘*Attitudes to school self-evaluation*’, is about the people tasked with implementing the school self-evaluation process to achieve the end goal of improved outcomes

in teaching and learning. Whilst the second theme, '*Leadership and staff motivation*' describes the important role school leaders play in motivating and sustaining staff to engage meaningfully with the school self-evaluation process.

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation found in a review of the literature
<p><i>“a systematic process, largely initiated by the school itself, where participants describe and evaluate the functioning of the school for the purposes of making decisions or undertaking initiatives in the context of (aspects of) overall school (policy) development”</i></p> <p>(Van Petegem, 2005, pg.104; Vanhoof and Van Petegem, 2010, pg.20)</p>
<p><i>“SSE can be described as a process, in large part initiated by the school, whereby highly eligible participants systematically describe and judge the functioning of the school in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives within the framework of school development”</i></p> <p>(Vanhoof and Petegem, 2010, cited in Faddar et al., 2017, pg.398)</p>
<p><i>“SSE is considered as an attempt involving various changes made by the schools in order to ensure a better teaching and learning environment, improve students’ academic achievement and also strengthen the schools’ ability to implement those changes”</i></p> <p>(Hopkins, 2005, cited in Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.50)</p>
<p><i>“SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”</i></p> <p>(Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.51)</p>
<p><i>“School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”</i></p> <p>(Hofman et al., 2009, cited in O’Brien et al., 2019, pg.2)</p>
<p><i>“School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self-Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of</i></p>

school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”

(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005, pg.239; Smith, 2012, cited in Setlalto, 2014, pg.525)

“To arrive at an appraisal of their current functioning (strengths and weaknesses) as a point of departure for a plan or vision for the future. Self-evaluation is a procedure which is initiated and carried out by the school in order to describe and evaluate its own functioning”

(Vanhoof et al., 2009, pg.21) (Blok et al., 2005, pg.3)

“The primary purpose of the school is student learning. Evaluation, a tool that promotes and supports both the individual and the system, can be very helpful.....to have a sound basis for decision-making about potential developments to increase student learning. It can provide the school with clear guidelines and parameters to follow in order to make positive changes that facilitate this learning.... Moreover, the school can develop and improve through a reflective practice which can help stimulate the decision-making processes”

(Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Sivesend et al., 2006, cited in Emstad, 2011, pg.271-272)

“a situated analysis of educational quality”

(Simons, 2013, pg.9)

“School self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analysing and communicating information to: (i) inform decision-making within a school (ii) ascribe value or worth (iii) establish public confidence in the school (iv) demonstrate professional self-accountability (v) to meet the purposes of accountability, development, knowledge and encourage creativity in schools”

(Simons, 2013, pg.16-17)

“Evaluation for accountability purposes involves reporting on goals and standards (including checking on compliance matters) while an improvement focus involves assisting schools to improve through their self-review”

(Mutch, 2013, pg.83)

“Self-review involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed”

(Ministry of Education, 2003, cited in Mutch, 2013, pg.84)

“a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”

(Schildkamp, 2007, pg.4)

“a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make decisions that provide recommendations”

(Devos, 1998, pg.51-52, cited in Demetriou et al., 2012, pg.150)

“Teachers and schools are encouraged to formulate their own development plan, to discuss their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, thus fostering collegiality and cohesiveness in terms of the school’s own mission and aspirations for improvement”

(Brady, 2016, pg.524)

“School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning”

(Chapman and Sammons, 2013, pg.2)

“Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”

(MacBeath, 2005, pg.4)

“School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements. All of this with a view to bring about improvements in students’ learning.”

(DES, 2016, pg.10)

“Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice”

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

Please click the three definitions of School Self-Evaluation below which you most agree with:

- “a systematic process, largely initiated by the school itself, where participants describe and evaluate the functioning of the school for the purposes of making decisions or undertaking initiatives in the context of (aspects of) overall school (policy) development”
- “SSE can be described as a process, in large part initiated by the school, whereby highly eligible participants systematically describe and judge the functioning of the school in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives within the framework of school development”
- “SSE is considered as an attempt involving various changes made by the schools in order to ensure a better teaching and learning environment, improve students’ academic achievement and also strengthen the schools’ ability to implement those changes”
- “SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”
- “School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”
- “School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”

- “To arrive at an appraisal of their current functioning (strengths and weaknesses) as a point of departure for a plan or vision for the future. Self-evaluation is a procedure which is initiated and carried out by the school in order to describe and evaluate its own functioning”

- “The primary purpose of the school is student learning. Evaluation, a tool that promotes and supports both the individual and the system, can be very helpful.....to have a sound basis for decision-making about potential developments to increase student learning. It can provide the school with clear guidelines and parameters to follow in order to make positive changes that facilitate this learning.... Moreover, the school can develop and improve through a reflective practice which can help stimulate the decision-making processes”

- “a situated analysis of educational quality”

- “school self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analysing and communicating information to: (i) inform decision-making within a school (ii) ascribe value or worth (iii) establish public confidence in the school (iv) demonstrate professional self-accountability (v) to meet the purposes of accountability, development, knowledge and encourage creativity in schools”

- “Evaluation for accountability purposes involves reporting on goals and standards (including checking on compliance matters) while an improvement focus involves assisting schools to improve through their self-review”

- “Self-review involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed”

- “a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”

- “a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make decisions that provide recommendations”

- “Teachers and schools are encouraged to formulate their own development plan, to discuss their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, thus fostering collegiality and cohesiveness in terms of the school’s own mission and aspirations for improvement”

- “School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning”

- “Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”

- “School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements. All of this with a view to bring about improvements in students’ learning.”

- “Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice”

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Appendix 27

Please click the three definitions of School Self-Evaluation below which you most agree with.			
Reference	Definition	Votes in agreement	Overall ranking
	<i>“a systematic process, largely initiated by the school itself, where participants describe and evaluate the functioning of the school for the purposes of making decisions or undertaking initiatives in the context of (aspects of) overall school (policy) development”</i> (Van Petegem, 2005, pg.104) (Vanhoof and Van Petegem, 2010, pg.20)	3	
	<i>“SSE can be described as a process, in large part initiated by the school, whereby highly eligible participants systematically describe and judge the functioning of the school in order to make decisions or adopt initiatives within the framework of school development”</i> (Vanhoof and Petegem, 2010, cited in Faddar et al., 2017, pg.398)	0	
	<i>“SSE is considered as an attempt involving various changes made by the schools in order to ensure a better teaching and learning environment, improve students’ academic achievement and also strengthen the schools’ ability to implement those changes”</i> (Hopkins, 2005, cited in Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.50)	3	
	<i>“SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”</i> (Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.51)	6	1
	<i>“School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”</i> (Hofman et al., 2009, cited in O’Brien et al., 2019, pg.2)	4	3
	<i>“School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of</i>	5	2

<p><i>their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle</i></p> <p>(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005, pg.239; Smith, 2012, cited in Setlalentoa, 2014, pg.525)</p>		
<p><i>“To arrive at an appraisal of their current functioning (strengths and weaknesses) as a point of departure for a plan or vision for the future. Self-evaluation is a procedure which is initiated and carried out by the school in order to describe and evaluate its own functioning”</i></p> <p>(Vanhoof et al., 2009, pg.21) (Blok et al., 2005, pg.3)</p>	2	
<p><i>“The primary purpose of the school is student learning. Evaluation, a tool that promotes and supports both the individual and the system, can be very helpful.....to have a sound basis for decision-making about potential developments to increase student learning. It can provide the school with clear guidelines and parameters to follow in order to make positive changes that facilitate this learning.... Moreover, the school can develop and improve through a reflective practice which can help stimulate the decision-making processes”</i></p> <p>(Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Sivesend et al., 2006, cited in Emstad, 2011, pg.271-272)</p>	3	
<p><i>“a situated analysis of educational quality”</i></p> <p>(Simons, 2013, pg.9)</p>	0	
<p><i>“school self-evaluation is a process of conceiving, collecting, analysing and communicating information to: (i) inform decision-making within a school (ii) ascribe value or worth (iii) establish public confidence in the school (iv) demonstrate professional self-accountability (v) to meet the purposes of accountability, development, knowledge and encourage creativity in schools”</i></p> <p>(Simons, 2013, pg.16-17)</p>	1	
<p><i>“Evaluation for accountability purposes involves reporting on goals and standards (including checking on compliance matters) while an improvement focus involves assisting schools to improve through their self-review”</i></p> <p>(Mutch, 2013, pg.83)</p>	0	
<p><i>“Self-review involves investigating evidence about student outcomes and current ways of doing things to find out where improvement is needed”</i></p> <p>(Ministry of Education, 2003, cited in Mutch, 2013, pg.84)</p>	1	
<p><i>“a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”</i></p> <p>(Schildkamp, 2007, pg.4)</p>	5	2

<p><i>“a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make decisions that provide recommendations”</i> (Devos, 1998, pg.51-52, cited in Demetriou et al., 2012, pg.150)</p>	0	
<p><i>“Teachers and schools are encouraged to formulate their own development plan, to discuss their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, thus fostering collegiality and cohesiveness in terms of the school’s own mission and aspirations for improvement”</i> (Brady, 2016, pg.524)</p>	2	
<p><i>“School self-evaluation is a process by which members of staff in a school reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement in the areas of pupil and professional learning”</i> (Chapman and Sammons, 2013, pg.2)</p>	1	
<p><i>“Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”</i> (MacBeath, 2005, pg.4)</p>	4	3
<p><i>“School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, and reflective process of internal school review. An evidence-based approach, it involves gathering information from a range of sources, and then making judgements. All of this with a view to bring about improvements in students’ learning.”</i> (DES, 2016, pg.10)</p>	1	
<p><i>“Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice”</i></p>	1	

Please click the one definition of School Self-Evaluation below which you most agree with.			
Reference	Definition	Votes in agreement	Overall ranking
(Hamzah and Tahir, 2013, pg.51)	<i>“SSE is considered as an internal and formative evaluation which is based on a collection of evidence. Or in other words the schools have to base their judgments on all the evidence gathered to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the schools’ programs..... SSE stresses that it is a reflection process by the schools on their own practice. SSE needs to be operated in a systematic and transparent manner in order to achieve its aims to improve the students’ achievement and enhance the schools’ professional and organizational learning”</i>	2 (previous votes:6)	3 (previous ranking:1)
(Hofman et al., 2009, cited in O’Brien et al., 2019, pg.2)	<i>“School self-evaluation (SSE) is an internal process which aims to ensure quality, improve the teaching–learning process and increase school performance”</i>	0 (previous votes:4)	4 (previous ranking:3)
(Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005, pg.239; Smith, 2012, cited in Setlalentoa, 2014, pg.525)	<i>“School Self-Evaluation is, by definition, something that schools do to themselves, by themselves and for themselves’. School Self-Evaluation (SSE) involves examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff, to reflect on the learner outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle”</i>	7 (previous votes:5)	1 (previous ranking:2)
(Schildkamp, 2007, pg.4)	<i>“a procedure involving systematic information gathering that is initiated by the school itself and intends to assess the functioning of the school and the attainment of its educational goals for purposes of supporting decision making and learning and for fostering school improvement as a whole”</i>	3 (previous votes:5)	2 (previous ranking:2)
(MacBeath, 2005, pg.4)	<i>“Self-evaluation is a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning”</i>	0 (previous votes:4)	4 (previous ranking:3)

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

The following definition of school self-evaluation has come from a process of reducing nineteen definitions down to five definitions using your votes. The key words and phrases from the final five definitions have been interwoven into the one definition below. Please read the definition of school self-evaluation offered below and then answer the questions which follow.

Thank you.

An agreed statement of what “School Self-Evaluation” means to us for our school
<p><i>“School Self-Evaluation is a cyclical procedure we do to ourselves, by ourselves and for ourselves. It provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and systematically gather information to examine, assess and make decisions on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster quality, improved teaching and learning and enhanced professional and organisational performance”</i></p>
<p>8. Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure </p>
<p>9. Have you any comments, thoughts or ideas on this statement?</p>
<p>10. Have you any comments, thoughts or ideas on the way we reached this statement? <i>(i.e., involving all teaching staff, voting from a list of definitions, combining the common words etc.)</i></p>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Definitions of School Self-Evaluation

A definition of School Self-Evaluation for our school

The following definition of school self-evaluation has come from a process of reducing nineteen definitions down to five definitions using your votes. The key words and phrases from the final five definitions were interwoven into the one definition and then adjusted based on your feedback. Please read the definition of school self-evaluation offered below and then answer the questions which follow. Thank you.

An agreed statement of what “School Self-Evaluation” means to us for our school
<p><i>“In [our school name] school self-evaluation is a cyclical procedure, which provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including learners, parents and all staff to reflect on our practice and systematically gather information to examine, assess and make decisions on our teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of our school’s operations, so that they can be strengthened and supported to foster quality, improved teaching and learning and enhanced professional and organisational performance”</i></p>
<p>11. Do you agree with this statement?</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure </p>
<p>12. Have you any further comments, thoughts or ideas on the agreed statement? (if you cannot think of anything please just write ‘pass’)</p>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**

Appendix 31

Question 1	What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that are driven or conducted externally for accountability purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>	
Respondent	Answer	
S8 respondent 1	Pass	
S8 respondent 2	Pass	
S8 respondent 3	Pass	
S8 respondent 4	Pass	
S8 respondent 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspectorate advisory teams / individual enhancing progress of whole school development • PDST supports guidance • Comparing national figures of child development / statistics to current school levels etc. 	
S8 respondent 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DES inspection parent questionnaire (e.g., amount of homework) 	
S8 respondent 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning • School self-evaluation • Special Education Needs and inclusion • Mentoring and Droichead process • Monitoring attendance • Curricular changes • Active and green school flags • Vetting procedures • Employment • Data protection – GDPR • Health and safety • Child protection and welfare • NEPS • Anti-bullying procedures • Legislation • FSSU 	
S8 respondent 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit union quiz 	
S8 respondent 9	Pass	

Question 2	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for self-accountability purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>	
Respondent	Answer	
S8 respondent 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and assessment for learning 	
S8 respondent 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent / Teacher meetings 	
S8 respondent 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardised testing at all levels. Analysis of results. Targeting area for improvement based on results • Whole school approach to improving Gaeilge ó bhéal and handwriting 	
S8 respondent 4	Pass	
S8 respondent 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sigma-T/Micra-T results • Teacher in class assessment • Parent Teacher conferences • Teacher / Teacher conferences • Teacher / Pupil statistics from previous year results • Progress / goal update for each given School Self-Evaluation focus • Whole School Evaluation plan of School Self-Evaluation 	
S8 respondent 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual teacher self-reflection • Continuous Professional Development • Whole School Self-Evaluation • Staff meetings • Great communication between colleagues • Planning 	
S8 respondent 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of and for learning, teaching and learning activities 	
S8 respondent 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit union quiz 	
S8 respondent 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that planning is carried out fully in accordance with the curriculum and that all policies are regularly updated and followed 	

Question 3	What are all the activities that you can think of that our school engages in that we select and conduct for school self-improvement purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>	
Respondent	Answer	
S8 respondent 1	Pass	
S8 respondent 2	Pass	
S8 respondent 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting – uniformity of approach and practice • Píosa as Gaeilge performed by each class at assembly (pre COVID) 	
S8 respondent 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School subject based discussion and meetings to act on and improve on 	
S8 respondent 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss areas of improvement • Discuss what is working well • Share information from Continuous Professional Development to others • Open floor for conversation and encouragement from other staff members • Assess statistics of achievement from prior years • Focus on areas in need of enhancement 	
S8 respondent 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Professional Development • Whole school self-evaluation • Self-reflection and review of practice • Open minded to ideas for improvement • Team spirit among staff • Pupil and parent input 	
S8 respondent 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning, sharing of ideas, Continuous Professional Development 	
S8 respondent 8	Pass	
S8 respondent 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings to discuss the areas in which we are performing well and are happy with and also identifying the areas upon which we can improve to ensure we are improving as a school 	

Question 4	What are all the activities you can think of that our school engages in that are conducted or supported externally for improvement purposes? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i>	
Respondent	Answer	
S8 respondent 1	Pass	
S8 respondent 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses • Training programmes • Upskilling 	
S8 respondent 3	Pass	
S8 respondent 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking suppliers of new schemes subject based to come in and we examine and discuss materials involved 	
S8 respondent 5	Pass	
S8 respondent 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Professional Development • DES inspections 	
S8 respondent 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Professional Development • Revision of curricula • Child protection procedures 	
S8 respondent 8	Pass	
S8 respondent 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses carried out in the Education Centre in order to upskill ourselves 	

**A graphic diagram to communicate and explain
all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school**

The following diagram has come from a process of listing all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school based on its purpose (i.e., improvement or accountability) and who conducts it (i.e., internally or externally). Please read the diagram and then answer the questions which follow. Thank you.

A graphic diagram to communicate and explain all the evaluation activities undertaken in our school
<p>13. Do you agree with this diagram?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure</p>
<p>14. Have you any further comments, thoughts or ideas on the agreed diagram? <i>(if you cannot think of anything please just write 'pass')</i></p>

**Thank You for taking the time to complete this survey.
Your help is most appreciated.**