



Education and Training Inspectorate

An Evaluation of the use of School Development Days 2008-2009

May 2009

Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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1. CONTEXT

1.1 Regulation 4 (a) of Schedule 3 to the Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 requires that teachers must be present for 195 days in grant-aided schools and that the school must be open to the pupils for 190 of those days. The balances of five 'directed' days, commonly called 'Baker' Days¹, are those on which pupils are not engaged in learning and are used by the teachers for directed activities such as preparation, marking and staff development.

1.2 In addition, every year since 1998, the Department of Education (DE) has issued a circular to advise schools of their entitlement take up from within the 190 days, up to five additional closures days, referred to as School Development Days (SDDs). Initially two days were allowed, which was increased to four days in 2005-06 and five in 2006-07. These days are for school improvement and school/staff development and are in addition to the five directed Baker Days. Taking account of Baker Days, this means that each school has up to ten days available for school and staff development. In taking the closure days, schools are asked to reflect carefully on how they are already using the directed days for whole-school development and training before deciding on the number of SDDs they wish to take, and for which purposes. Where a school decides not to use all or some of the five available SDDs, it must be open as normal to pupils.

1.3 Since 2007, DE has advised that schools should plan to use three of the SDDs to support teachers in implementing the revised curriculum. Furthermore, in Circular 2008/02, DE highlights the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) recommendation that schools should consider setting aside the equivalent of two SDDs to avail of training and professional development to help schools meet the statutory requirements to assess and report on the cross curricular skills.

1.4 Year on year, schools are asked to devote time to a range of current school development priorities, which include:

- the revised curriculum and assessment requirements, and the pupil profile (annual report);
- implications of the entitlement framework in post-primary schools;
- the need for schools to engage in rigorous self-evaluation taking account of data and other evidence to formulate good quality school development planning (SDP);
- ongoing work on Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD);
- ongoing work on school improvement issues such as: literacy and numeracy policies, effective use of data to inform self-evaluation and lead

¹ In-service training days for teachers were introduced by the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker (1986-1989); they became known as 'Baker' Days.

to sustained self-improvement, child protection measures, special education needs (SEN), developing whole-school approaches to promoting positive behaviour and anti-bullying policies;

- issues related to the professional development, health and well-being of staff; and
- the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in learning and teaching.

1.5 Circular 2008/02 states further that whole school development and training is expected to link with the schools' priorities as identified in its school development plan (SDP). Schools leaders are required to involve all staff, teaching and non-teaching, in the planned activities or in other appropriate developmental activities to maximise the benefit derived from each day. All schools are asked to submit written proposals for SDDs to their respective Education and Library Board (ELBs) and in the case of maintained schools, copied to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). The information sent to ELBs is intended to enable them to plan the most effective and efficient delivery of advice and support and also to enable Boards to co-ordinate and plan transport and school meals.

1.6 The Circular notes that the increase in the number of additional closures may well be questioned by parents and the local community. DE recommends, that schools should indicate in their Governors' Annual Report the days on which the school has been closed, together with a short summary of the main activities carried out on each day.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 In August 2008, DE asked the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) to evaluate how well the SDDs are being used by schools to support staff development and school improvement. The evidence from this survey also contributed to the Inspectorate's second evaluation report on the implementation of the revised curriculum in primary, special and post-primary schools 2008.

2.2 This report is based on the findings of a survey, which involved visits to 22 primary and post-primary schools from across the ELBs and was carried out by district inspectors (DIs) between August 2008 and December 2008.

2.3 During the course of the survey, the Inspectorate visited a range of SDDs to observe training and development sessions and held discussions with principals, vice-principals and teachers at senior and middle management levels with responsibility for organising and delivering the training and development sessions within the school.

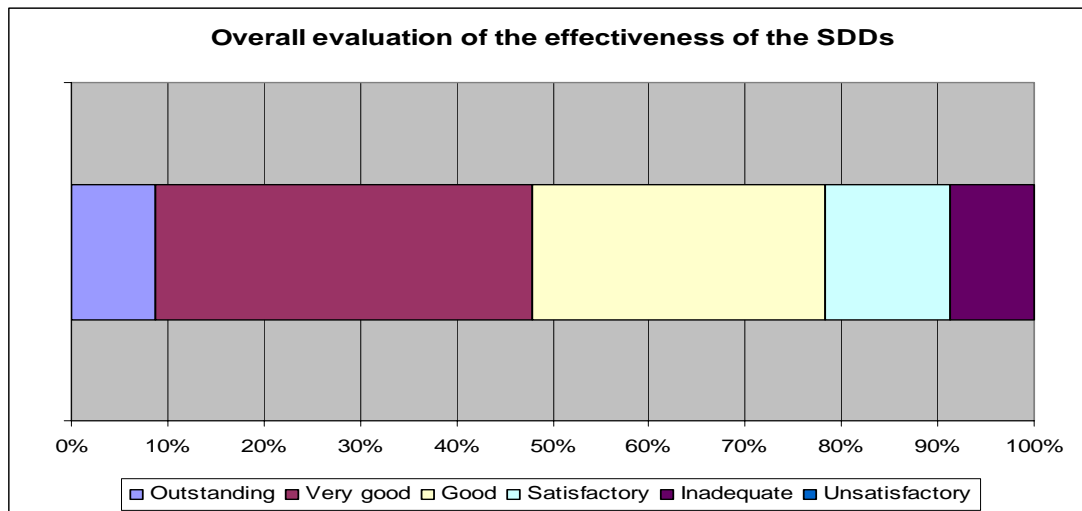
2.4 A number of quantitative terms are used in this report. These terms should be interpreted as follows:

- Almost/nearly all - more than 90%
- Most - 75%-90%
- A majority - 50%-74%
- A significant minority - 30%-49%
- A minority - 10%-29%
- Very few/a small number - less than 10%

2.5 In assessing the various features of the training and development sessions, inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

3. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS



3.1 In just over three quarters of the SDD sessions inspected in primary and post-primary schools, the overall quality ranges from good to outstanding; almost half of these sessions were evaluated as being very good to outstanding. However, in almost one quarter of the SDDs, the quality ranges from only satisfactory to inadequate. More detailed phase-related analysis is given in Annex 2.

3.2 In the most effective sessions evaluated, the main enabling characteristics are as follows.

3.2.1 In the planning:

- there is very good synthesis between the priorities identified in the school development plan and the allocation of the SDDs;
- the SDD programme is linked closely to the school's Professional Review and Staff Development (PRSD) objectives;
- the capacity-building of the staff to enhance pedagogical understanding, improve learning and teaching and pupil attainment are major foci of the plans; and
- it is evident that there is good continuity and progression from previous staff development priorities.

3.2.2 In the pattern and use of the school development days:

- the schools allocate their time appropriately to a range of school development and improvement priorities including:
 - revised curriculum training and development and arrangements for pupil assessment;
 - the review of performance data, including the identification of pupil underachievement;
 - training in the use of educational technologies such as interactive whiteboards to support teaching and learning;
 - the review of and further development work in relation to the SDP;
 - collaborative work with other local schools on a range of educational and pastoral initiatives, for example special educational needs and pastoral care and child protection; and
 - the preparation and review of specialist schools bids.
- the schools use a variety of effective models to deliver their staff development programmes including:
 - whole staff training and development sessions with the involvement of non teaching staff where appropriate;
 - specific and targeted training and support sessions with the use of focus groups, curricular teams, subject based groups, pastoral teams, and area of study teams;

- clustering with other local primary and post-primary schools in the delivery of joint staff development sessions; and
- the use of full day sessions.

While the use of full day sessions are the main mode of delivery for staff development, some schools employ a mixture of twilight and full day sessions to deliver their staff development programme during the year. In these schools the staff are consulted appropriately on this arrangement.

3.2.3 In the identification of staff development priorities:

- staff development priorities are identified effectively through appropriate consultation with all staff using a range of audit tools. In the schools surveyed most of the priorities focus on improving the pupils' learning experience and raising achievement;
- regular reviews of the SDP and action plans are conducted to affirm progress and identify further areas for development including staff training needs;
- the staff development priorities are closely aligned to the school's whole targets for PRSD; and
- there is emerging evidence that the pupils' views are sought and taken into consideration when identifying priorities for aspects of the staff development programme such as pupil welfare and improvements in the arrangements for pastoral care.

3.2.4 In the sources of expertise used to build capacity:

- appropriate use is made, in a minority of schools, of internal and external support such as Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) officers and other agencies and consultants, to meet the identified needs of the school;
- there is emerging good practice in the effective use of collaborative and clustering arrangements with other schools to share good practice and enhance the teachers' professional development and understanding; and
- effective use is made of in-house expertise from within the school to deliver the staff development sessions thereby creating an enhanced sense of collegiate responsibility and accountability.

3.2.5 In the evaluation of the impact of the staff development sessions:

- the courses are well evaluated by participants through staff audits and questionnaires;
- comprehensive summary reports are produced by the leadership team to inform staff of their effectiveness and highlight areas for further development;
- in the best practice, longitudinal evaluations are conducted to monitor the impact of staff development on the quality of experience and outcomes for the children and young people, through classroom observations, pupils' self-evaluations, discussions with staff, scrutiny of action plans and evaluation reports and records of meetings;
- the staff are given appropriate opportunities to reflect and evaluate the progress of the school in meeting its main priorities as identified in the SDP; and
- the staff development evaluations are focused on improving the quality of experience and outcomes for the pupils.

4. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

4.1 In the less effective sessions comprising almost one quarter of the sessions observed, the main characteristics evident are as follows:

- limited reporting opportunities to inform staff of the outcomes and evaluations of previous SDDs and the effectiveness of their impact on the pupils' learning;
- there is no reference to staff development identified in the SDP;
- there is no clear evidence that the programme of staff development is strategically linked to the main priorities identified in the SDP; and
- there is a lack of consultation with staff regarding the identification of priorities and modes of delivery for staff development.

4.2 Furthermore, a number of significant weaknesses have been identified in almost all of the schools inspected. These include:

- insufficient strategies in place for the medium to long-term evaluation of the influence of staff development on school improvement, particularly its impact on learning and teaching;
- the lack of specialist CASS support, particularly the availability of subject specialists reported by the schools. The non-statutory role of CASS link officers, restricts their engagement with schools to 'invitation only', limiting their potential to contribute significantly to the staff development sessions;

- the perceived lack of strategic and operational planning and coordination between the support agencies responsible for supporting the schools and the inconsistencies in some of the messages delivered in relation to assessment and reporting arrangements;
- in the majority of schools inspected little or no reference to staff development in the Governors' Annual reports; and
- the failure of schools, ranging from the majority to a significant minority (depending on the ELB area) to report their annual staff development plans to their respective ELB.

5. KEY FINDINGS

- In over three-quarters of the schools surveyed, the schools use their allocation of staff development days effectively in addressing a range of school development priorities.
- These priorities are appropriately focused on improving the quality of learning and teaching and raising pupil achievement.
- In the staff development processes in almost a quarter of the schools there are a variety of shortcomings to do with planning, deployment and evaluation.
- The survey has identified a further number of significant strategic, support coordination and reporting deficiencies common to almost all primary and post-primary schools.

6. SPECIFIC ACTIONS REQUIRED TO BRING ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

ACTION BY

The programme of staff development needs to be strategically linked to and supportive of the main priorities identified in the school development plan.

Schools

The staff development sessions need to be regularly and systematically monitored and evaluated in order to ascertain their impact and effectiveness on school improvement.

Schools

Appropriate reference needs to be made in the Governors' Annual Report to the days on which the school was closed, together with a short summary outlining the outcomes of the main staff development activities carried out on each day.

Schools

Improved co-ordination of the strategic and operational planning between the support agencies responsible for supporting schools is needed so as to ensure greater consistency in the delivery of key educational messages.

The schools need to report their SD plans in advance to ESA/ELBs so that appropriate support can be arranged.

In view of DE's commitment to retaining the 5 additional school development days for at least the next five years, DE needs to ensure that an evaluative overview is taken at system level about their use for self evaluation and continued professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards.²

ESA: and in the short term, CASS, CCEA and where appropriate C2k
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DE

² Every School A Good School. A Policy For School Improvement. DE May 2009, page 22
http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools_impvt_prog_pg/03-every-school-a-good-school-a-policy-for-school-improvement.htm

SCHOOLS VISITED BY DISTRICT INSPECTORS IN THE AUTUMN TERM 2008

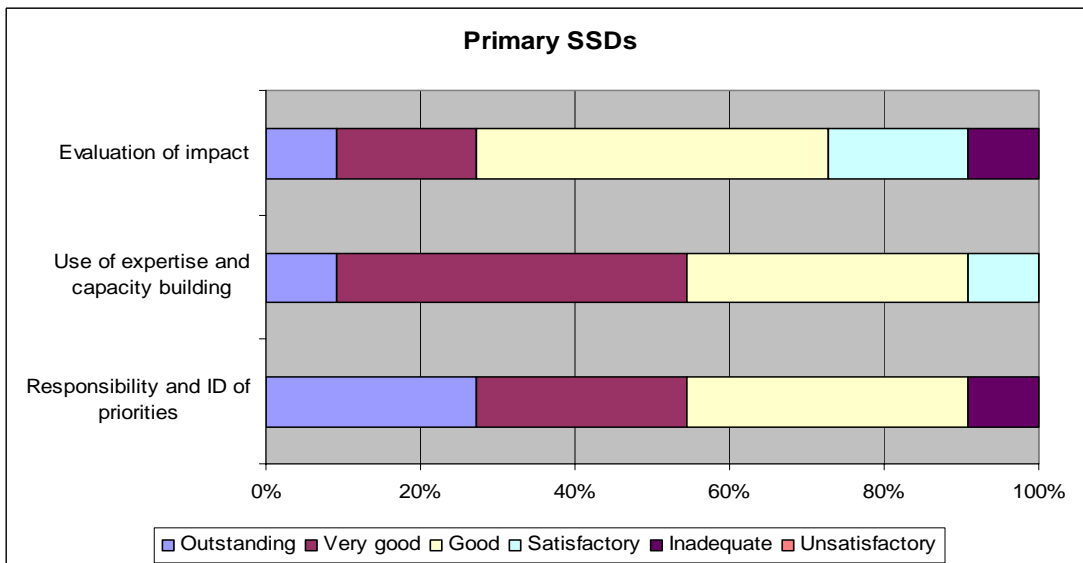
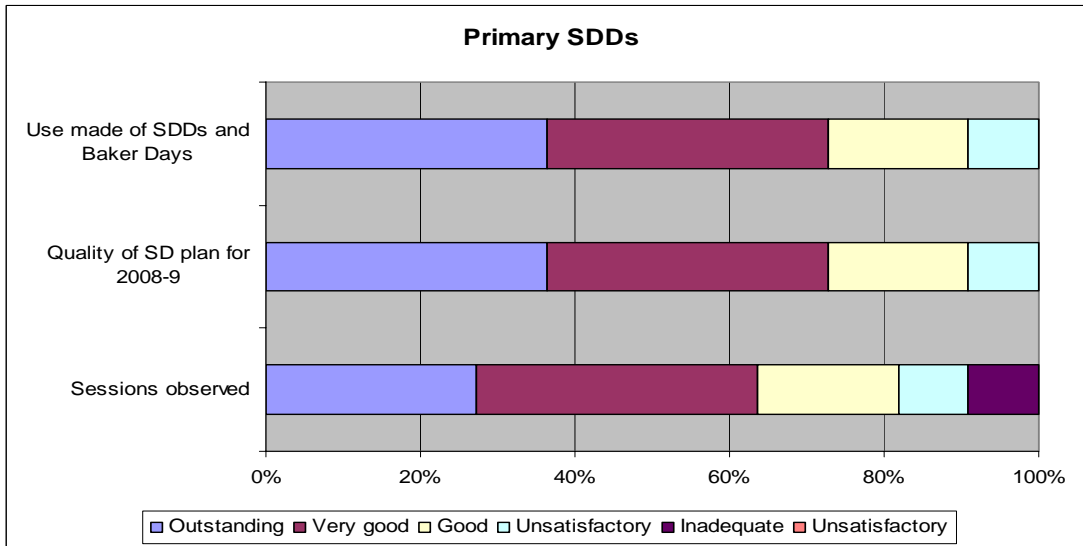
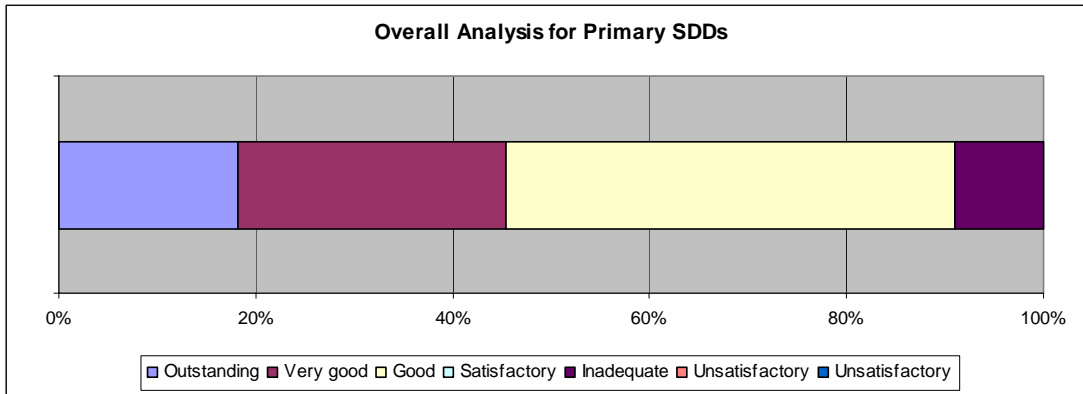
Primary Schools

Aghadrumsee Primary School
Augher Central Primary School
Ballyclare Primary School
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir Primary School
Christ the Redeemer Primary School, Dunmurry
Portadown Integrated Primary School
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballygalet
Seaview Primary, Belfast
St Mary's Primary, Killyclogher, Omagh
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge
St Nicholas' Primary School

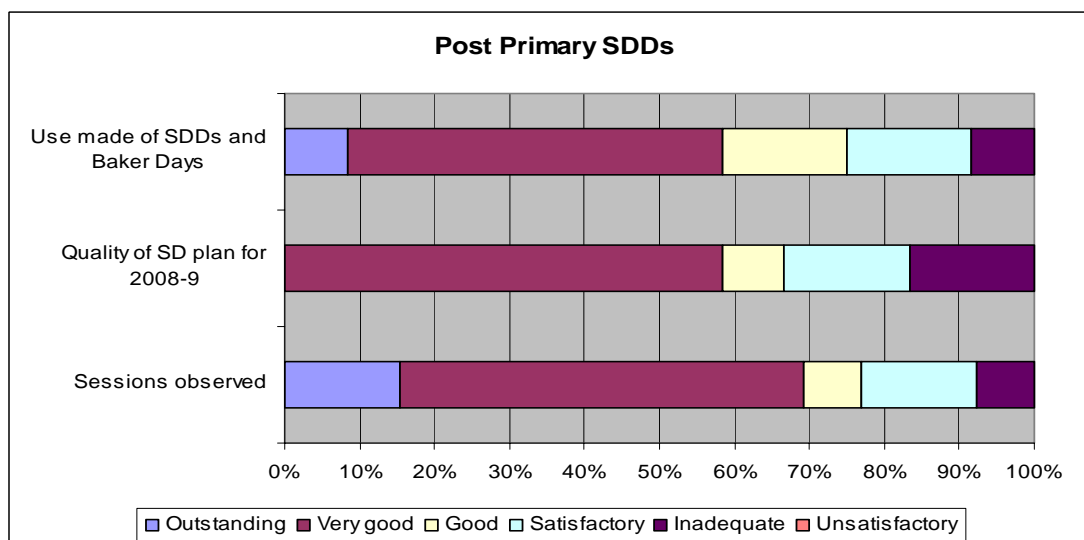
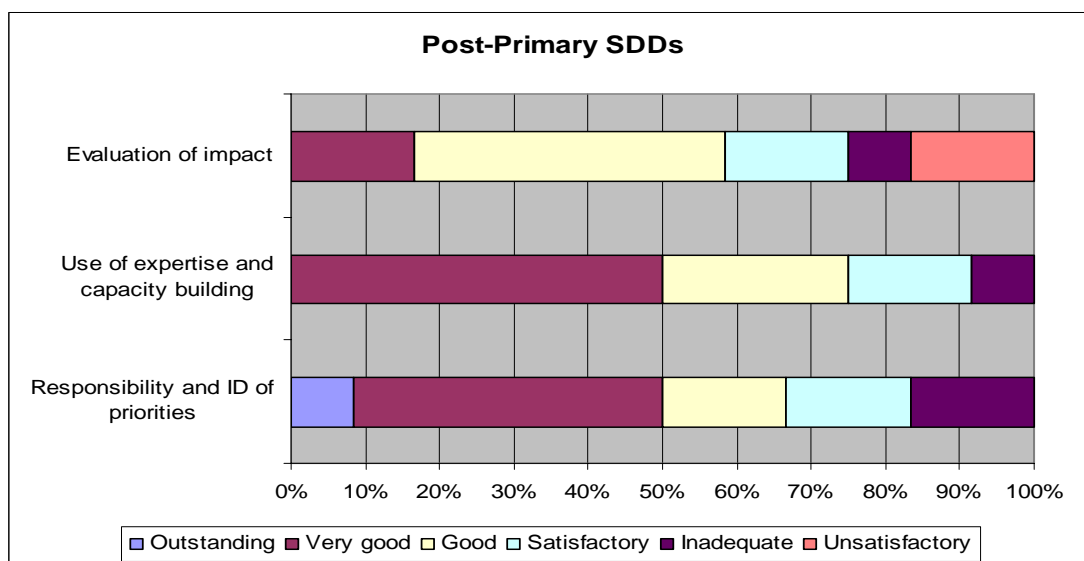
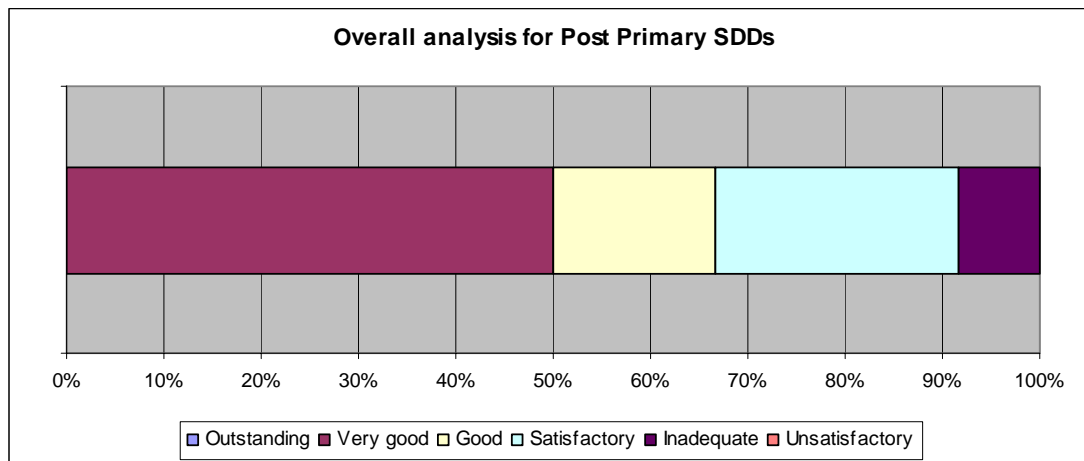
Post-Primary Schools

Antrim Grammar School
Ballymoney High School
Dunluce High School
Hunter House College, Belfast
Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle
Strangford Integrated College
St Dominic's High School, Belfast
St Mary's Junior High School, Lurgan
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
St Patrick's College, Banbridge
St Paul's College, Coleraine

ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS (SDDs)



ANALYSIS OF POST - PRIMARY SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS (SDDs)



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