



IPPN Submission to the Department of Education

Review of Garda Vetting Legislation

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. Established in 1999, IPPN is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education and Skills as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the Department of Education (DE), the National Parents' Council, management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of over 6,000 Principals and Deputy Principals, leading Ireland's 3,200+ primary schools.

IPPN has reviewed the proposed amendments in relation to garda vetting legislation, from the perspective of primary schools. We set out below our feedback, focusing on those aspects of the proposals that IPPN supports, as well as some issues and observations that we hope will inform the review group as you finalise the proposals.

2 PROPOSALS IPPN FULLY SUPPORTS

IPPN fully supports the following proposals:

1. Mandatory system of re-vetting every three years
2. Moving to a system in which a person is vetted for the work they will be or are likely to be engaged in in that employment within categories of identified risk, rather than treating each clause in isolation, and avoiding the need for additional vetting during the same 36 month period if individuals are largely carrying out the same role
3. Introduction of a mechanism whereby, once a vetting disclosure is obtained by the Teaching Council in respect of a registered teacher that disclosure can, with the consent of the teacher concerned, be made available electronically to any school employer that requires it for the purposes of the Vetting Act.

3 ISSUES

The following are the issues we have identified in relation to the proposed legislation:

1. Clarification is needed regarding '**categories of identified risk**' such that re-vetting isn't required when an individual moves employment from one place of employment to another e.g. moving from one school to another, as the work is substantially the same from one primary or special school to another, as is the potential risk to children
2. The robust approach taken (via the Teaching Council) in respect of the vetting of teachers is not taken in relation to **non-teaching employees**. It is currently the responsibility of individual school employers to seek and obtain a vetting disclosure from the Bureau (via the relevant diocese or management body as applicable) in respect of the employment of the individual concerned. Despite the individual having been fully garda vetted, their certificate is valid only for the individual school for which it was sought. While this is not as significant an issue in relation to permanent vacancies, it is a significant issue when it comes to the recruitment/employment of temporary and substitute SNAs and other non-teaching staff.
3. A robust process is also required to facilitate the vetting of **student teachers who do not yet have a Teaching Council number**. Many student teachers take up work as unqualified substitute teachers or as SNAs in schools, or both, during the course of their studies. Ensuring that their certification is sufficiently flexible to enable them to carry out such work without triggering a need to be re-vetted is very important, especially in the context of the ongoing crisis regarding the availability of substitute teachers.
4. There needs to be a **single process and timescale** that applies across the education sector – regardless of the school's patronage.

4 OBSERVATIONS

We offer the following observations:

1. Requiring an individual to be re-vetted for every school separately creates considerable barriers to an efficient recruitment process in relation to non-teaching staff such as SNAs (especially in relation to SNA substitution cover) and can result in children – including very vulnerable children - missing out on vital supports. It also impacts on the workload of school leaders and Boards of Management, which is a critical concern for the sustainability of leadership and the smooth running of primary schools.
2. The simpler the process and the faster the information can be shared with schools, the easier it will be for schools to ensure that all staff employed are fully garda vetted and that all pupils are safe.

IPPN would be very happy to discuss the points raised in this submission with the review group and wish the group well with its deliberations.