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Deputy Principal and Board Member
IPPN Deputy Principals' Conference 2024
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I am delighted to be here both as a deputy principal and as a member of the IPPN Board of Directors.

I have been teacher and Deputy Principal of Wexford Educate Together National School since its establishment in 2008. I currently teach 2nd Class and lead Literacy (my biggest passion), school self evaluation, technology and school attendance...amongst a myriad of other roles.

My role has changed considerably over that time and I have seen our wonderful school grow from just twenty students to over two hundred and twenty. What we have always maintained is our passion for learning, our knowledge of every single student and as our team has grown knowing how to support and celebrate each other and pull together to navigate all kinds of weather!

I was asked to share with you some of my takeaways from the conference and I am happy to do so as so much of the content really resonated with me.

Our CEO **Pairic Clerkin** called for clarity regarding school leadership roles and the need to reach consensus on what we want school leaders to spend their time doing - giving leaders the opportunity to do the job they signed up to do.

The Emerging Leaders and the Leadership Portfolio Projects seem to have great potential to enhance leadership capacity and sustainability and I look forward to seeing how they progress. All of the work IPPN is doing to push for change in terms of governance structures and supports, teacher supply and SEN resourcing is commendable, and we live in hope that the stakeholders will see the benefits of the proposals put forward, so that we in schools can see and feel the change for ourselves before long.

I have taken on board what you said, Páirc, about needing to embrace the autonomy we school leaders have and in the past number of years in my own school we have gained the confidence to stand by our decisions around staff allocation and playing to our strengths.

We have found that the PIEW Framework has streamlined the workload and improved the communication across the school community about what we are doing and why.

Brian took us through some of the work being done to bring the supports for deputy principals in line with those provided to principals.

I am one of those DPs who was on the National Council and now on the Board and I am delighted to see more of us on the Council now. Brian also talked about the research and the progress underway in the Sustainable Leadership Project.

From what I can gather, the system seems to be listening and there is a willingness within the DE and the education agencies to address some of the key issues raised in it. I appreciate the ongoing focus on sustainable leadership – it is clear that IPPN is laser focused on behalf of all school leaders in that regard.

With regard to Brian's report card regarding supports for Deputy Principals I think perhaps it should read 'a lot done, more to do' – a slogan and a report in one Brian!

It was wonderful to participate in the discussions on Leadership Connections, which were so ably facilitated by **Rachel and Mary**.

There is so much excellent practice around the country in terms of what school leaders are doing to carve out much-needed space to focus on leading the learning in their schools. No-one from outside can tell us how to do it better than a school leader who can show us how they're doing it and all whilst getting us to dance!

We have collated what you shared with us yesterday and some of what resonated with me was to consider what was getting in the way of me and my principal leading effectively together. Turning that thought into a question is an invaluable tool and one I shall be taking with me.

My golden nugget from our group was the importance of cultivating the relationship between the Principal and the Deputy Principal and how, like any relationship, it takes hard work and commitment.

I consider myself incredibly lucky to have a great relationship with my Principal and it is not something either of us take for granted. We know each other's strengths but it is through recognising our shortcomings that we can support each other, back each other and fill in the gaps. The central importance of trust in that relationship was highlighted by many of you yesterday: building an environment that is open, inclusive and respectful of differing opinions, trusting the capacity of others to lead and manage with responsibility and creating a culture of shared responsibility and accountability.

Our **President Louise** asked us to think about why we trained to be teachers, why we applied for and accepted leadership roles and also to look at all the distractions that take us from our core purpose of leading our schools.

I completely agree that lack of time to focus on leadership – and to share leadership effectively – is what has me sometimes feeling like I'm in some way 'failing', when in my heart I know I'm giving my absolute all both to teaching my class and to supporting the principal in leading and managing the school.

This is a subject very close to my own heart, striving to reach the balance between teaching and leading effectively and formed the basis of my own masters research. The research Louise took us through confirms that I'm certainly not alone in feeling this way.

At least now we have a benchmark for deputy principals to work from that can be tracked over time to see whether and to what extent any new approaches have an impact on wellbeing and sustainability scores for school leaders.

Thank you Louise for getting us to reflect on this for ourselves.

If ever we were unsure about our core purpose or the importance of our school culture, having listened to **Patricia Mannix McNamara's** input, we have all had a wonderful reminder of it!

Enda McGovern and **Lorraine Dempsey** left me, at least, a little awestruck with the sheer amount of thought and effort put into their wellbeing programmes. Again, there is so much to take away from that session.

Finally, I take away gratitude for our president-elect **Deirdre** in her expert facilitation of the conference over the past two days, and to IPPN for giving me this opportunity to share my perspectives on what has been an excellent and thought-provoking event.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.