



IPPN

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2020

Prepared for: the Minister for Education and Skills  
and the Minister for Finance/ Public Expenditure & Reform

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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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 organisation 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 and Skills (DES), 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 6,400 Principals and Deputy Principals, leading Ireland's 3,200+ primary schools.

There are many significant issues to be addressed in the primary education sector. We present two priorities for Budget 2020 - one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals; and a restoration of promoted posts in schools with more than four teachers. IPPN and other stakeholders have been calling for these improvements for many years. Parliamentary questions in April and July 2019 indicated that the costs of implementing one leadership and management day a week would be €7.5m to €8m. At this stage, we believe that the Department needs to push these changes forward in one step/budget. Simply put, the small incremental changes introduced in recent years are not having a sufficient impact to alleviate the situation in our schools.

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss this submission in further detail with the Minister and his officials.

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## 2. MINIMUM OF ONE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DAY PER WEEK FOR TEACHING PRINCIPALS

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In the Irish primary school system, close to 2,000 schools in the state have fewer than 177 pupils. Consequently, owing to DES policy, more than half (58%) of primary school principals are 'teaching principals' - they teach full-time in addition to their school leadership role. The proportion of school leaders who teach has fallen significantly over the past few decades, from almost 80% in 1996 to 58% in 2017. This is due to population growth leading to increased enrolments; amalgamations and school closures; as well as small changes in the threshold for 'administrative principalship' (non-teaching school leadership) introduced by the Department of Education and Skills in 2013, 2016 and 2018.

Teaching principals have two critical roles to fulfil. They have full-time duties as teachers, more often than not teaching in multi-grade settings. They are also school principals with significant leadership and management responsibilities, many of which cannot be delegated. It could be argued that they are doing three jobs because they have only part-time administrative support. They are in an impossible situation – they can focus neither on their teaching nor on their leadership role, both of which are critical to the school, its pupils and its staff.

The newly-established DES Primary Education Forum, of which IPPN and the other education partners are members, acknowledges the issue of workload as it relates to teaching principals in particular. The symposium on small schools facilitated by the DES in June 2019 also brings a welcome and renewed focus on this issue.

### WHAT IS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AND HOW IT IS CALCULATED

During the official 183-day school year, teaching principals have a number of leadership and management days free from teaching duties as set out below:

School Size	Leadership & Management Days per school year	% time allocated to school leadership by DES
Principal + 0/1/2 teachers	18 days *	10%
Principal + 3/4 teachers	24 days *	13%
Principal + 5/6 Teachers	30 days *	16%

\*Principals with a special class are entitled to four extra days per year, which was a welcome development in acknowledging the significant leadership and management responsibilities and workload attached.

The calculation of school size above includes mainstream class teachers only. It excludes ex-quota posts such as special education teaching posts, special class posts, HSCL and it does not take into account special needs assistants, ancillary staff, bus escorts, nor other staff such as nurses and occupational therapists that are often allocated to special schools. These additional staff members add huge value to each school but also result in significant additional duties for the teaching principal, as all staff must be managed, led and supported.

Teaching principals have between 10% and 16% of their time allocated to school leadership and management by the DES, compared with 100% of time allocated to their 'administrative' counterparts leading schools with seven or more mainstream class teachers.

It should be noted that teaching principals also have the least ancillary staff support, as this also is tied to pupil numbers, despite the fact that they are teaching full-time and desperately need the support of ancillary staff.

This is an inequitable situation that must be urgently addressed.

## IMPACT ON TEACHING PRINCIPALS

Teaching principals tell us that lack of time to deal effectively with their workload is having a negative effect on their ability to focus on leading teaching and learning. This should be a serious concern for the DES because of the inevitable consequences for schools. An international study by the London School of Economics in 2014 of management practices concludes that it is leadership that makes schools successful. Michael Fullan's *'Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning: Proof beyond reasonable doubt'* also makes a powerful argument that if we expect our school leaders to function effectively as leaders, then we must support them with sufficient time to do so.

Dr. Philip Riley of Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia presented IPPN with stark evidence that Irish teaching principals' health and wellbeing is suffering as a direct consequence of their role. He points out that school leaders

*'score on average well above the population on all the negative elements (burnout, sleeping troubles, somatic and cognitive stress) and below the average on positive measures (self-rated health, mental health, coping, relationships and self-worth).'*

He further comments that

*'Teaching principals (...) report lower levels of physical and mental health, coping, confidence, autonomy, personal wellbeing and a raft of other negative factors, along with the highest levels of work-related stress. (...) The current report presents strong evidence of the negative factors associated with the role.'*

The health and well-being of almost 60% of the primary school leaders in our country is at serious risk.

*'Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion – Well-being in Primary Schools'*, published jointly by the DES and the Department of Health, suggests that *'within the school context, positive mental health promotion should focus on enhancing protective factors and minimizing risks.'* No school principal would argue that the mental health of children is not vitally important. It is ironic that school leaders are being asked to implement strategies to protect and minimize risks for the children in their care while their own workload impacts significantly on their own health and well-being.

There has been a marked increase in the number of principals using IPPN's Leadership Support service in recent years. It is absolutely clear that many are stressed and overwhelmed by the challenges of the dual role. Many are availing of early retirement or stepping back from leadership to focus solely on teaching, as there is no dignified, fair process for principals to step down without loss of seniority and pension.

In short, the current situation is unsustainable - something has to change.

## IPPN RECOMMENDATION

There is significant evidence that the quality of leadership in schools impacts directly on the quality of learning of pupils. There is evidence that lack of time and inadequate administrative supports to deal effectively with workload are barriers that prevent teaching principals from spending 'quality time' on their leadership function and there is evidence that this is having a particularly negative effect on the health of more than half of primary school leaders. This situation is no longer sustainable.

The Statements of Practice outlined in the DES publication *'Looking at our Schools 2016 – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools'* need to be achievable by every school, and by every school leader. Increasing leadership and management days for teaching principals set out in this submission would significantly improve their capacity to fulfil their responsibilities, which will ultimately lead to the improvement in education outcomes for all children.

Introducing a minimum of one leadership and management day per week would help ease the burden on teaching principals and would signal serious intent on the part of the Department to address the significant problems highlighted for many years by IPPN and other education partners in relation to their role.

IPPN urges the Department of Finance and the Department of Education and Skills to acknowledge the importance of dedicated time for teaching principals to focus on leadership and management by introducing one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals in Budget 2020.

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### 3. RESTORE MIDDLE LEADERSHIP POSTS IN ALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Principals' work overload is a well-documented issue at this stage, with numerous surveys confirming that the role is unsustainable without an appropriate middle leadership structure in place. The moratorium on middle leadership posts meant that many schools lost their entire management team, with the exception of the deputy principal post. Middle leadership has a significant role in school self-evaluation and school improvement planning, the management of special educational needs, mentoring of new staff and, in larger schools, managing communication.

The delegation of duties and areas of responsibility to the deputy principal and assistant principal roles is central to the effective functioning of any school. It provides a very necessary support for principals in carrying out their role. This is fully acknowledged in DES circular [63/2017 – Leadership and Management in Primary Schools](#), which IPPN very much welcomed, and also the recent DES circular [44/2019 – Recruitment/Promotion and Leadership for Registered Teachers in recognised primary schools](#).

IPPN welcomed the partial restoration of middle leadership posts in Budget 2018, and understood and supported the rationale behind the prioritisation of smaller schools if it was not possible to achieve full restoration in one school year. Larger schools have significant leadership and management challenges also, and they also require sufficient middle leadership capacity to deliver quality teaching and learning, as well as to meet the myriad requirements of the education system.

#### **IPPN RECOMMENDATION**

IPPN is calling for the moratorium to now be lifted from all schools, to ensure that the rebuilding of leadership and management capacity can be facilitated right across the sector.

In this context, IPPN considers, in particular, that:

- The principal's role as instructional leader may necessitate delegating particular areas of the curriculum to curriculum leaders / co-ordinators
- Some of the day-to-day management and administration tasks of the school must be delegated to the middle leadership team
- The middle leadership structure should be tasked with relieving the principal of substantial administration and communications responsibilities, as the post-holders will be responsible for these aspects of their particular areas of responsibility.