



IPPN

SUBMISSION - BUDGET 2021

Prepared for:
the Minister for Education and Skills
the Minister for Finance
the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform
the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills

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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. Recognised by the Minister for Education and Skills as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the Department of Education and Skills (DES), 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.

As schools grapple with the implications of COVID-19, there are additional issues to be addressed in the primary education sector in the coming year. We present three key priorities for Budget 2021, namely, the placement of one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals on a permanent footing; additional middle leadership capacity in larger primary schools; and the resourcing needed to keep schools safe and open during the ongoing pandemic.

IPPN has been working closely with the Department and other stakeholders involved in the Primary Education Forum, as well as the Small Schools Symposium and its follow-up meetings, to consider potential solutions to school leaders' work overload and how change can be managed more effectively in the primary schools' sector. We hope to embark on an action research project looking at the sustainability of small schools and the role of teaching principal, with support from the DES and led by DCU, which will ascertain how clustering and other models can alleviate some of the structural and resourcing difficulties in these schools.

We support also the calls by the INTO for the benchmarking pay increase awarded to principals in the Public Service Benchmarking Body report in 2006 to be implemented, to reflect the significant additional responsibilities undertaken by principals since the current reward structures were designed, as outlined in IPPN's research publication [Investing in School Leadership](#).

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

2. PERMEMENT RETENTION OF ONE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DAY PER WEEK FOR TEACHING PRINCIPALS

RATIONALE

In the Irish primary school system, owing to DES policy, more than half (58%) of primary school principals are 'teaching principals'. This significant cohort of school leaders has 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. 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.

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. There are other vital supports needed in smaller schools, and structural issues that also need to be addressed, however our focus and priority for the coming year is on establishing the day a week for teaching principals as a permanent feature of the resourcing of schools.

School leaders told IPPN that they need sufficient leadership and management days ('release days') to undertake vital leadership and management responsibilities, including:

1. Leading teaching and learning/ classroom visits to other teachers
2. Planning/policy development/School Self-Evaluation/School Improvement Planning
3. Special Educational Needs, including managing ASD and Speech and Language classes
4. Meetings with staff and external parties/BoM prep/case conferences
5. Interpersonal relationships/staff management
6. General administration
7. Professional development
8. Building projects.

One additional day per week was allocated to teaching principals from 1st September 2020 to 'to relieve the administrative burden arising from the changes and the impacts of Covid-19'. Until that time, only one tenth to one eighth of their time (depending on school size) was allocated to them for school leadership and management. Their 'administrative' counterparts leading schools with seven or more mainstream class teachers do not have teaching responsibilities at all, and can focus *all* of their attention on leading the teaching and learning in their schools. While larger schools certainly have more staff to manage and more pupils and families to engage with, it has been acknowledged widely by education stakeholders that teaching principals require additional time to carry out their leadership and management responsibilities. One day a week for the smallest schools is the minimum required. In a Dáil debate on 11th April 2019, then minister Joe McHugh TD confirmed that this would cost €7.5m per annum, a relatively small sum given the significant positive impact this would have in schools.

IPPN's rationale for additional leadership and management time has been presented in previous budget submissions and is further articulated in Appendix I.

RECOMMENDATION

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 putting one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals on a permanent and statutory footing from Budget 2021.

3. INCREASE MIDDLE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN LARGER PRIMARY SCHOOLS

RATIONALE

As noted in previous budget submissions, the role of principal in any school is unsustainable without an appropriate middle leadership structure in place. The moratorium on middle leadership posts introduced during the economic crash in 2009 meant that many schools lost their entire management team, with the exception of the deputy principal post. While there has been a partial restoration in all schools, many larger schools have minimal capacity and it is insufficient to adequately support the principal or to deliver on the leadership and management responsibilities expected of them. 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 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.

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.

In a Dáil debate on 22nd September 2020, Minister Norma Foley confirmed that the estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level would be in the order of €19m per annum.

RESEARCH

Dr. Siobhán Kavanagh conducted doctoral research relating to middle leadership and reviewed the relevant literature to ascertain the impact of middle leadership in schools. Some of her research is highlighted here, as it explains why primary schools require adequate middle leadership capacity if the breadth and depth of leadership and management, especially that which pertains to teaching and learning, can be progressed to achieve optimal outcomes for students:

- Schools require a leader who can motivate both teachers and students to learn and the education system requires a leader who can meet the requirements and needs of all stakeholders. This is a significant undertaking for one individual.
- We must question whether placing this level of responsibility on one person is sustainable. The role and remit of the principal is overwhelming (Drysdale, Gurr and Goode, 2016); has grown exponentially (O'Donovan, 2015) and it is “unrealistic to think that any one person can discharge the role without the assistance of a considerable number of colleagues” (Martin, 2006).
- The literature acknowledges that principals require support and that the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities is essential to relieve this burden and improve teaching and learning (OECD, 2008, and LDS, 2007).
- Effective schools require a team of leaders, that utilise their collective intelligences to transform the school into a learning community.
- Irish educational policy (DES, 2018) advocates for the utilisation of a distributed leadership model in schools
- Middle leaders are important for the successful functioning of schools (Turner and Sykes, 2007, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014)
- Their role gives them a unique position which comes with a responsibility to enact change, while still being closely connected to and involved in teaching.
- When teachers take on an appointed middle leadership role, they have the potential to influence both policy and practice and are central to the implementation of new practices (Shaked and Schechter, 2017).
- Middle leaders have the potential to greatly influence the teaching and learning in their schools, from both a student and teacher support perspective. This aspect of the role of an ML in Ireland is in its infancy and needs to be further developed to harness the important and influential potential of the position of the ML as a conduit between policy and practice.
- Middle leaders can make a “powerful contribution to [...] school improvement” (Gurr, 2019) when they work well with school leaders.

Dr Kavanagh concludes: “The need for strong professional middle leadership is incontestable” (O'Connor, 2008, p.16) as it has the potential to affect teacher attitudes and beliefs, school culture and most importantly student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

IPPN is calling for the moratorium to now be lifted from all schools to the largest extent possible, to ensure that the rebuilding of leadership and management capacity can be facilitated right across the sector in a fair and equitable manner. We believe this should start with increased capacity in larger schools whose middle leadership has been decimated owing to the moratorium over the past decade and who have not seen any alleviation measures in recent years, in special schools, and in smaller schools with special classes, given the added complexities of leading and managing these schools.

4. RESOURCING TO KEEP SCHOOLS OPEN AND SAFE IN A PANDEMIC

RATIONALE

IPPN advocated strongly, along with our fellow education partners, for adequate resourcing of schools to enable them to put in place all of the necessary measures to reopen school buildings and safeguard the health of their pupils and staff. We welcomed the government's comprehensive *Roadmap to Reopening* and the additional budgetary measures introduced in that context for primary schools. They reflected the complexity of the work and the significant additional work required by school leaders and their staff to keep the school community safe.

The additional cleaning, PPE and hygiene requisites will need to be fully funded until such time as the virus has been fully contained nationwide or until there is 'herd immunity' through an immunisation programme, to allow schools to continue to manage and maintain the high standards of cleanliness that has meant a minimal spread of coronavirus within school buildings.

We appreciate and acknowledge that this requires additional funding and that this will be a focus for Budget 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

That the level of resourcing currently in place for schools to maintain cleaning and hygiene be continued for the duration of the pandemic.

Appendix I – Rationale for additional leadership & management time

In the Irish primary school system, 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.

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.

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.

Providing 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.