



A Programme for a Partnership Government

DES Statement of Strategy 2016-2018

Prepared for:

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CONTENTS

2	Introduction	1
3	Calendar of Reform – Cohesive Change Management.....	2
4	IPPN’s response to the Programme for Government Proposals	3
4.1	IPPN Supports.....	3
4.2	IPPN needs more details about.....	3
4.3	IPPN has significant concern about.....	4
4.4	Key Omissions	4

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: IPPN KEY PRIORITIES

APPENDIX 2: CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP – LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

1 INTRODUCTION

The *Programme for a Partnership Government May 2016* sets out a number of proposals within eight areas of priority. It must be acknowledged that the stated priorities are laudable, and few would argue that the aims outlined and the focus on measurement of outcomes are not important.

However, in IPPN's view, the plans don't go nearly far enough, and represent a missed opportunity. This is particularly true in terms of supporting and empowering school leadership, the very people who are needed, on a day to day basis, to support, manage and implement all system change as it affects schools. IPPN is very much a solution-oriented organisation with a wealth of leadership expertise and research material that the Minister and the Department can tap into. Conscious of the following powerful thought from Professor Fullan, IPPN works tirelessly to achieve our stated mission to 'empower every Principal to be an exemplary leader of learning and inspire every teacher to lead every child's learning'.

'The principal is the nerve centre of school improvement. When principal leadership is strong even the most challenged schools thrive. When it is weak, schools fail or badly underperform.'

- Professor Michael Fullan

2 CALENDAR OF REFORM – COHESIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT

There is very little detail about how the various proposals outlined in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* will be implemented, and this gives rise to some justifiable concern.

Each of the four over-arching goals in the DES' *Statement of Strategy 2015-2017* has a long list of outputs, many of which are already having an impact on the work of schools and other education settings, not all of it positive. Given the significant investment involved, it is hoped that there has been a learning process with regard to the management of change across the education sector in recent years, and also an appetite to amend the approach to take into account the many issues that have arisen in the sector as a consequence of ineffective change management. For principals, the key issues are the exponential increase in their workload, as well as the poorly-planned, relentless and concurrent nature of change in the sector.

IPPN has repeatedly called for a **Calendar of Reform**, to take into account all the various initiatives already in the process of being implemented in the education system, before any further change is discussed in detail, agreed or scheduled. Future change needs to be cohesive, integrated, structured and, above all, prioritised and scheduled.

3 IPPN'S RESPONSE TO THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

3.1 IPPN SUPPORTS...

IPPN welcomes the following proposals and plans, which are very much in line with our own thinking and policies. It is worth noting that several of these improvements can be made within existing resources:

- Increased capitation grant – *at the very least a restoration to pre-Austerity levels*
- Clarity that no small school will be involuntarily closed and that there will be a review of appointment thresholds in very small schools
- CPD for newly-appointed principals – *development of a leadership pipeline, pre-appointment training and a revised appointment process are also crucial*
- Introduction of an additional ECCE year
- Additional teacher CPD
- Reduced pupil/teacher ratio at junior and senior infant level
- Examination of SEN access and funding provision, including an extension of the July Provision programme
- Full implementation of the EPSEN Act
- Provision of additional NEPS psychologists
- Additional speech and language therapists - school leaders would prefer that they were directly employed by the Department of Education and Skills than the HSE
- Pool of experts to assist schools in the areas of finance, HR, IT etc. – we have asked for this for many years and would hope this would be available to primary schools
- Clarity around enrolment/admissions policy
- Capital investment and the eliminating the use of prefabs.

3.2 IPPN NEEDS MORE DETAILS ABOUT...

We agree that the following are very interesting proposals, and look forward to the opportunity to discuss these areas in more detail to ensure maximum return for the new provision to be invested:

- Measures to assist teaching principals
- Allowing school management to decide on allocation of resources – *training and ongoing support are vital to achieve this*
- The introduction of rolling 3-year grant to allow for planning
- Expanding DEIS beyond the current scheme to ensure all those in disadvantaged settings can avail of the significant supports available and benefits of this successful initiative
- Implementing diversity of parental choice in our school system, including the increase to 400 multi- and non-denominational schools by 2030
- Utilisation of school buildings out of hours.

3.3 IPPN HAS SIGNIFICANT CONCERN ABOUT...

We would have significant concerns about the following proposals, and again will seek opportunities to discuss these further:

- Schools Excellence Fund
- Ombudsman for Education – *rationale? This would involve significant duplication with the role of the Ombudsman for Children*
- Any proposed use of standardised testing data for the compilation of ‘league tables’ - while IPPN is very supportive of the need for openness and transparency as well as the importance of assessment *for* learning, we would have strong reservations about assessment *of* learning being used to compare schools.

3.4 KEY OMISSIONS

There are also some key omissions, particularly in relation to leadership and the stated aim to support ‘School leadership [...] in identifying and introducing reforms that drive up educational standards’. The only stated commitment to leadership in the Programme for Government is to the Centre for School Leadership (CSL). The CSL have made an excellent start and are to be commended but their current brief is limited to providing mentoring and coaching supports over the course of a 3-year pilot project. Their own leadership priorities include recruitment process, the development of middle leadership, teacher CPD and methods of measurement. See Appendix II for more details.

Successive ministers have confirmed their understanding of, and empathy with, the huge challenges facing primary principals. Yet most of the key priorities identified by principals to alleviate their overburdened role (as outlined in our submission to the DES in October 2015 – *Principals’ Priorities for Education Budget 2016*) do not feature in the Department’s plans.

These stated priorities are:

1. Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals
2. Improve the pupil/teacher ratio
3. Increase the Capitation Grant
4. Restore full resource hours
5. Restore middle leadership posts
6. Reduce the threshold for administrative principalship
7. Revise the staffing schedule for special schools
8. Dignified step-down facility for principals without loss of seniority/pension.

Each of the above priorities is described in Appendix I.

‘Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes...’
Peter Drucker

APPENDIX 1: IPPN KEY PRIORITIES

IPPN's stated priorities as outlined in our submission to the DES in October 2015 – *Principals' Priorities for Education Budget 2016*:

Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals

60% of primary principals are currently teaching full-time in addition to their leadership role. They have between 15 and 25 days 'administration' time from teaching to work on all of the tasks and responsibilities of school leadership. In simple terms, a principal with 178 pupils teaches a class 168 days a year (183 days minus 15 'administration' days) whereas a principal with 179 pupils does not teach at all. IPPN propose that a 'stepped' approach is followed for administration days.

The current situation is unsustainable. Numerous IPPN studies (and the DES' own reports) confirm this. Teaching Principals are far more likely to feel stressed, require medical intervention and take early retirement. They have the poorest infrastructure (45% have no personal office space or dedicated storage) and the least ancillary staff support despite the fact that they are teaching full time and desperately need full-time secretarial support.

Teaching Principals across the border in Northern Ireland have a substitute teacher available two days per week (used flexibly to meet the needs of the school). Principals in the Republic need a similar level of substitute cover/administration time to address the anomalies in their working conditions compared with non-teaching principals. The level of release time for teaching principals needs to be increased to ensure that all principals have adequate support to carry out their role as leaders of learning. The current situation is educationally inequitable and professionally unsustainable.

Improve the pupil/teacher ratio

We look forward to hearing more details regarding the proposed reduction in the P/T ratio in infant classes. Given the diversity of needs present in classrooms today teachers are increasingly challenged to ensure that every child in their care has equal and appropriate access to a differentiated curriculum. This is why principals have asked for the maximum class size to be prioritised ahead of most other aspects of primary education. Where the class size is manageable, children have more equitable access to education and teachers can lead learning in their classrooms more effectively.

Increase the Capitation Grant

Schools have been significantly challenged by the cuts to all grants over the past several years, particularly the capitation grant. This has forced schools to fundraise to pay for basic running costs, to curtail support to disadvantaged pupils and to cease maintaining vital infrastructure, such as IT facilities. Restoring the capitation grant to pre-2008 levels would enable schools to start replacing or repairing school facilities and refocus their energies on teaching and learning. It is hoped that the current proposals will achieve this restoration in the short term.

Restore full resource hours

The 15% cut in resource hours has disproportionately affected some of the most vulnerable children in primary schools – those with special educational needs – as well as their classmates. Under the proposed new model, the Department of Education and Skills are reinstating some of the resource hours that had been cut. Irrespective of what model is put in place, full resource hours need to be reinstated.

Restore middle leadership posts

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 posts of responsibility disproportionately affected schools with senior staff members who retired not being replaced. Many schools have had their entire management team wiped out, with the exception of the Deputy Principal post. Middle Leadership could have a significant role in the ongoing school self-evaluation process, mentoring of new staff and in larger schools manage communications for subsets of the school's student population.

IPPN is calling for an urgent review of Middle Leadership capacity. This is an opportune time to commence the rebuilding of leadership and management teams in schools.

Reduce the threshold for administrative principalship

Principals with 178 pupils are managing a staff of approximately 7 teachers, often with an additional complement of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers, Bus Escorts, a part-time secretary, a part-time caretaker and other resources on an ongoing basis. They are expected to lead the school and its staff while teaching full-time. While a principal with one more pupil (and one more teacher) has none of the teaching responsibilities.

IPPN is calling for the threshold for administrative principalship, where the principal does not have a full-time teaching responsibility, to be reduced considerably to reflect the workload of a school principal. IPPN proposes to reduce the threshold to 145 pupils and/or to include all adults managed by the principal in the calculation, rather than including only class teachers. This will also allow for the increased complexity of special schools.

Revise the staffing schedule for special schools

The Special Schools' Staffing Schedule was last updated in 1993 (the SERC report) and urgently requires attention.

It would appear that there is no account taken of the complexity of need of individuals attending special schools in determining pupil/teacher ratios, including maximum class averages/sizes. Every class in a special school is a multi-disability class. In the severe/profound category of pupils with ASD, the optimum number of pupils per class has been proved from experience to be 4 pupils. These pupils need a calm, quiet environment where staff can implement techniques to manage behaviours. At present the ratio of 6 pupils to one teacher including up to 3 SNAs in the room does not allow for this type of environment. As a result, anxiety levels increase to the point where pupils become so upset/challenging that they cannot access the extent of the educational programmes on offer.

IPPN is calling for a revision of the staffing schedule for special schools and that additional factors specific to special schools are taken in to consideration to maximize class averages/sizes.

Dignified step-down facility for principals without loss of seniority/pension

Currently, the only option for principals who, for whatever reason, feel that they can no longer give of their best in a leadership role, but who wish to remain in the teaching profession, is to resign and start back at the level of a newly-qualified teacher. In many cases this involves them having to apply for sub work, maternity leave posts and fixed term posts. Due to the scarcity of permanent posts and the operation of the redeployment panel, principals who step down often have very little chance of securing a permanent position. Principals have requested a scheme to allow principal teachers the option to step down with dignity and to continue in their chosen profession without the pressures and responsibilities of school leadership.

Children's Emotional Wellbeing

A succession of IPPN surveys have uncovered continuing disturbing increases in the levels of depression, anxiety, emotional trauma and neglect amongst primary school-going children. Allied to the increasingly strong influence of social media and cyber-bullying, children are being exposed to levels of pressure that they may not have experienced before. Health effects, such as childhood obesity, have associated self-esteem implications and can become very real issues in our schools today.

IPPN is calling for the provision of resources to establish and embed a culture in all schools whereby all children feel safe to express their anxieties and develop emotional resilience to meet the challenges they face as they go through life. IPPN also advises that provision is made for the appointment of additional NEPS psychologists to support schools. Early detection and prevention of issues affecting emotional wellbeing at primary school age is much more effective and inexpensive than seeking to provide a cure or addressing the same issues further down the track.

Information Technology and Digital Learning in Primary Schools

Multi-national and Irish employers are consistently alerting government to the impact on our economy arising from the shortage of science and technology skills. Irish primary education is at least a decade behind virtually all other OECD countries in relation to ICT provision and usage.

IPPN strongly recommends that the provision of a multi-annual budget for ICT in schools is put in place. An integrated ICT-supported curriculum must be put in place to enable Ireland to keep pace with our OECD neighbours and competitors. A decision needs to be taken to teach a number of subjects e.g. science or maths, through the medium of technology from Junior Infants to Leaving Certificate level. For this to become a reality, government must ensure that all schools have access to high speed broadband and technical support.

APPENDIX 2: CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP – LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

Recruitment

PDST leadership teams should be comprised of school leaders from various different types of schools. **Post Primary:** CSL are concerned that there are no full-time post primary principals on the PDST leadership team. While a small number of PDST associates are involved in the delivery and design of these programmes, they are limited to 20 days a year by the Alpha payment service. Some of these associates work not only for PDST Misneach but also for JCT leadership and for PDST Tóraíocht. There is a need to find a solution to this dilemma.

Primary: There is a full-time primary leadership team but this is populated by teaching principals who do not have administrative principalship experience. While we welcome the fact that the team exists, it is important that a diversity of leadership experience is reflected on the team. PDST is the delivery service for leadership programmes.

Middle Leadership

There is a need to begin succession planning in the education sector. Currently the only preparation course available for aspiring leaders is a Level 9 post-graduate diploma - Tóraíocht. This will be replaced by a new Level 9 (18-month) post-graduate diploma in 2017. CSL welcomes the advent of the new diploma.

However, there is a need to introduce a menu of shorter programmes earlier in a teacher's career to help them establish whether or not they would like to become school leaders. Some of these programmes could be delivered on-line while other programmes would involve reflective practice and some action research in the area of leadership in their own schools. Once they have completed shorter courses/programmes, teachers could participate in the new post-graduate diploma. Examples of these types of programmes can be found in Scotland and in Ontario.

This proposal would build capacity in the system and would ensure that the right people are appointed to leadership positions in schools.

Teacher CPD

CSL believes that all teachers are leaders in their own right. While some may not aspire to principalship, they are also leaders in their classrooms, on sports fields, in subject departments and in curriculum planning.

CSL proposes that all professional learning opportunities for teachers should be done through the 'lens' of leadership. These learning opportunities could be mapped to the Quality Framework for Leadership and Management and would provide a basis for teachers to reflect on their own leadership development.

Measurement

The consultation paper requires CSL to comment on how the progress of strategies such as those mentioned above can be measured. As with many interventions in education, the impact of the above strategies would be long term and would be difficult to measure. In the long term, we expect to improve the quality of school leadership, to distribute leadership throughout the school community and bring about a culture where all teachers view themselves as leaders.

In the short term success could be measured by:

- Recruitment of principals (Post-primary) and administrative principals (Primary) into the PDST leadership teams
- Introducing 2-3 new short programmes for aspiring leaders
- Engaging teachers in a conversation about teacher leadership in early 2017 and commissioning a report (December 2017) to look at the outcomes of those conversations. This would inform the Statement of Strategy 2017-2019.