



Principals' Priorities for Education Budget 2016

Discussion Paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

At IPPN Conference 2015, Minister for Education Jan O’Sullivan requested that principals feed back to the Department to let them know what principals see as the priorities for education spending, should there be an increase in the budget allocation. This would ensure that principals’ voices are heard when decisions are being made. To that end, IPPN’s National Council identified the categories of DES funding to be used in a survey of all primary principals who are members of IPPN.

1,332 principals completed the Principals’ Priorities for Education Budget 2016 survey, a healthy 40% of all principals. They were asked to prioritise FIVE of the following 22 options by allocating each of the five items a forced priority ranking from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest priority item:

1. Grants: Annual Minor Works Grant
2. Grants: Increase capital expenditure
3. Grants: Increase the Ancillary Services Grant
4. Grants: Increase the Capitation Grant
5. Grants: Restore the Summer Works Scheme
6. TP: Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals
7. TP: Reduce the threshold (178 pupils) for administrative principalship
8. Role: Major investment in CPD for those in leadership roles
9. Role: Restore principals’ salary and apply benchmarking increase
10. Role: Step-down facility for principals without loss of seniority/pension
11. Staffing: Allocate a classroom assistant to every 1 and 2-teacher school
12. Staffing: Improve the pupil/teacher ratio
13. Staffing: Provide full-time, fully-trained administrative support for every school
14. Staffing: Restore full resource hours
15. Staffing: Restore middle management posts
16. Staffing: Update the staffing schedule for special schools
17. IT: Adequate broadband capacity in every school
18. IT: Annual ICT Grant
19. IT: Technical support in each county / region
20. Other: Increase NEPS' capacity to support all schools
21. Other: Indoor PE facilities available in every school
22. Other: Overhaul redeployment panel and supplementary panel.

2. SURVEY RESULTS

Principals' top 5 priorities (by volume of response):

1. Restore principals' salary and apply benchmarking increase [*IR issue, not within IPPN's remit*]
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 management posts

Principals' top 5 priorities (in 'Average Ranking' order):

1. Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals
2. Restore principals' salary and apply benchmarking increase [*IR issue, not within IPPN's remit*]
2. Reduce the threshold (178 pupils) for administrative principalship
3. Revise the staffing schedule for special schools
4. Improve the pupil/teacher ratio
5. Dignified step-down facility for principals without loss of seniority/pension.

Three items are common to both sets of priorities:

1. Restore principals' salary and apply benchmarking increase [*IR issue, not within IPPN's remit*]
2. Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals
3. Improve the pupil/teacher ratio.

3. CONTEXT

3.1. MINIMUM OF ONE ADMINISTRATION DAY PER WEEK FOR TEACHING PRINCIPALS

60% of principals are teaching full-time in addition to their leadership role. They have between 14 and 22 days 'release' time from teaching (depending on the number of classroom teachers) to work on all of the tasks and responsibilities of school leadership. In simple terms, a principal with 178 pupils teaches a class 169 days a year (183 days minus 14 'release' days) whereas a principal with 179 pupils does not teach at all. We propose a stepped approach to release days per the following table:

No of pupils enrolled	No. of non teaching/ administrative days per week
178	5
141	4
104	3
67	2
30	1

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 one day per week (used flexibly to meet the needs of the school). Principals in the Republic need a similar level of substitute cover/release time to start 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.

3.2. IMPROVE THE PUPIL/TEACHER RATIO

Given the diversity of need 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. If class sizes were substantially smaller, there could be a corresponding cutback in the number of Learning Support Teachers, so it could be almost cost neutral.

3.3. 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 maintain vital infrastructure, such as IT facilities. Restoring the capitation grant to pre-2008 levels would enable schools to start replacing outdated and broken resources and refocus their energies on teaching and learning.

3.4. 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 are reinstating the resource hours that had been cut. Irrespective of what model is put in place, full resource hours need to be reinstated.

3.5. RESTORE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT POSTS

Principals' work overload is a well-documented issue at this stage, with survey after survey confirming that the role is unsustainable without an appropriate middle management structure in place. The moratorium on posts of responsibility disproportionately affected schools with more senior staff members as those who retired were not replaced. Many schools notified us of several retirements from the middle management team within a few years, with a significant number having their entire team wiped out, with the exception of the Deputy Principal post. The net effect of the moratorium, given the already low morale among teachers, was to obliterate management support for already-overloaded principals. The department's own briefing of the Minister confirmed this is unsustainable.

3.6. REDUCE THE THRESHOLD (178 PUPILS) FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PRINCIPALSHIP

Principals with 178 pupils are managing a staff of at least 7 teachers, and may also have a complement of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers, Bus Escorts, a part-time secretary, a part-time caretaker and other adults to manage on an ongoing basis. Yet they are expected to do so while teaching full-time whereas a principal with one more pupil (and one more teacher) has none of the teaching responsibilities.

The threshold for administrative principalship, where the principal does not have full-time teaching responsibility, needs 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.

3.7. 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 employ low arousal 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 educational programmes on offer.

These factors need to be taken into consideration at the highest level of the DES when maximum class averages/sizes are being discussed.

3.8. DIGNIFIED STEP-DOWN FACILITY FOR PRINCIPALS WITHOUT LOSS OF SENIORITY/PENSION

Currently, the only option for the many 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 - applying for sub work, maternity leaves and fixed term posts. Because of the scarcity of permanent posts and the operation of the redeployment panel, principals who step down have very little chance of securing a permanent position.

Principals request a scheme to allow principal teachers to step down with dignity and continue in their chosen profession without the pressures and responsibilities of school leadership. This scheme could have the following main stipulations:

- a. A principal teacher with a minimum service as a principal (e.g. 7 years) may step down from his/her position as principal
- b. If there is no vacancy in his/her current school, at the time of stepping down, the principal will be placed on the main redeployment panel.

From a school resourcing perspective, this proposed scheme is cost neutral to the DES. However, it would be appropriate for the DES to recognise a former principal's years of leadership service by allowing him/her to retain a portion of the principal's allowance, commensurate with longevity of service as a principal. A further advantage is the increased number of opportunities for aspiring school leaders with enthusiasm and energy to step up to these vacated leadership roles.

4. CONCLUSION

1,322 principals have carefully considered the challenge of prioritising expenditure. Each of the 22 items is important. However, the above priorities, if fully funded, would radically alter the capacity of primary schools and school leaders to deliver their responsibilities. We urge the Department to listen to the views and experience of principals in defining education priorities for Budget 2016.