



IPPN

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2019

Prepared for: the Minister for Education and Skills
and the Minister for Finance

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INTRODUCTION

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.

IPPN acknowledges the DES' Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, as well as its Statements of Strategy and other planning initiatives in recent years. However, the plans simply do not go far enough to meet the requirements of school leadership at primary level.

We present the following as IPPN's top two priorities for Budget 2019 in relation to primary education.

1. A minimum of one leadership and management day per week for Teaching Principals
2. Restore middle leadership posts in all primary schools.

There are a number of other significant issues to be addressed but the above are the top priorities, so we will be focusing our attention on these during this school year.

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

In the Irish primary school system, more than half (58%) of primary school principals are ‘Teaching Principals’ i.e. they teach full-time in addition to their school leadership role, as close to 2,000 schools in the state have fewer than 177 pupils. 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.

Out of the official 183-day school year, from the 2018/19 school year, Teaching Principals will have a number of leadership and management days (‘release days’) free from teaching duties - where they can find a substitute teacher to cover these days - as set out below:

School Size	Leadership & Management Days per school year	% time allocated to school leadership by DES
Principal + 0/1/2 teachers	17 days	9%
Principal + 3/4 teachers	23 days	13%
Principal + 5/6 Teachers	29 days	16%

It is important to note that the number of teachers counted for the calculation of leadership and management days in the above table refers to mainstream class teachers only. It does not take into account additional support and ancillary staff such as learning support teachers, resource teachers, special class teachers, special needs assistants, ancillary staff or 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. It is also worth noting that the principals of the smallest schools have the least administrative capacity - owing to the wholly inadequate ancillary services grant - and also the fewest days for leadership and management – an inequitable situation that must be urgently addressed.

Teaching Principals have the poorest infrastructure (38% have no personal office space or dedicated storage – 2016 survey finding) and the least ancillary staff support, despite the fact that they are teaching full-time and desperately need full-time secretarial support.

It is clear from what 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' (2006) 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.

At IPPN's Conference in January 2015, Dr. Philip Riley – Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne and Program Director of Principal Health and Wellbeing Surveys in Australia and Ireland - presented us with stark evidence that 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.'

In short, 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.

1.1. IPPN RECOMMENDATION

Based on IPPN's objective of a minimum of one leadership and management day per week for Teaching Principals, we propose a progressive approach towards achieving this goal. While it may be difficult for the Department to achieve this in one step/budget, we anticipate and seek progress each year in terms of 'leadership and management days' as follows:

	2001	2002	2016	Sep 2018	2018	2019	2020
Principal + 0/1/2 teachers	12	14	15	17	22	30	38
Principal + 3/4 teachers	16	18	20	23	28	33	38
Principal + 5/6 teachers	20	22	25	29	33	35	38

For this to work, a national panel of qualified substitute teachers allocated to clusters of schools needs to be established - to ensure adequate and consistent cover for Teaching Principals' leadership and management days.

Of the 137 special schools currently in operation, 18 of their principals are teaching principals. Due to the complexities of the role of principal of a special school, the large numbers of non-teaching staff and many special schools catering for both primary and post-primary pupils, IPPN recommends that principals of all special schools automatically be designated as administrative principals.

2. RESTORE MIDDLE LEADERSHIP POSTS IN ALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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.

IPPN also welcomed the partial restoration of middle leadership posts, 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.

2.1. 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.

CONCLUSION

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 almost 60% of primary school leaders. It is IPPN's belief that this situation is no longer sustainable. 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 serious 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 prioritise primary education in this year's education budget and to carefully consider the two recommendations made in this submission.

IPPN shares the minister's vision for Ireland to have the best education system in Europe by 2026. To do this, we believe that 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. The two priorities set out in this document, if fully funded, would significantly improve the capacity of primary schools and school leaders to fulfil their responsibilities, which will ultimately lead to the improvement in education outcomes for all children.

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