

Health, safety and wellbeing of school leaders

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Being a school leader is never less than interesting, and that has certainly been the case during the course of this white-knuckle, roller coaster ride that has characterised the last two years of our lives.

The return to school this January was particularly fraught, given that the trajectory of the virus and its prevalence within our communities, meant that, not only would there be significant numbers of cases within our school communities, but also that large numbers of staff members would be unavailable for work on account of either testing positive themselves or being a close contact of a confirmed case. Your co-operation with our members' survey at the beginning of January enabled us to highlight the extent of this staff absence and its implications for schools.

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The unavailability of teachers and SNAs, allied to a shortage of available substitutes, has compromised the safe operation of schools in the early weeks of the term. Once again you have risen to the challenge of finding workable and creative solutions to ensure continuity of the provision of learning experiences to classes. And when circumstances presented where there were no such workable or creative solutions, you made balanced decisions with regard to the provision of in-school and online learning. We can only hope that, as the wave of infections caused by the omicron variant recedes, there will no longer be a need for such prioritisation.

RESEARCH ON THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF SCHOOL LEADERS

In my article in the December issue, I referenced that, as part of the Sustainable Leadership project, we had commissioned a specific piece of research in partnership with our sister organisation at post-primary level – the National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD). The focus of the research project is on the occupational health, safety and well-being of school leaders in Ireland. The survey is being led by Professor Philip Riley (Deakin University, Melbourne) and his research team (Dr. Ben Arnold, Dr. Mark Rahimi and Dr. Marcus Horwood). This research is being conducted in response to concerns that the increasing complexity and workload demands of school leadership roles is impacting on the health and well-being of Irish school leaders.

It is hoped that the data gleaned from the research project will:

- support individual school leaders to prioritise their own health and wellbeing
- enable IPPN and NAPD to benchmark the demands on school leaders in Ireland against comparative international statistics
- help to improve the leadership reality of Irish school leaders so that their leadership roles are more sustainable
- have a significant impact on future policy development in Ireland.

This research into the health and well-being of school leaders was first undertaken in 2010 in Australia and has achieved widespread international recognition. It was previously conducted in Ireland in 2014, but the leadership landscape has changed considerably since then. It will be illustrative to see how the 2022 data compares to the 2014 data in terms of the occupational health, safety and

well-being of school leaders in Ireland. Internationally, evidence from the principal health and wellbeing surveys has been used to:

- develop policies and strategies to promote principal health and wellbeing
- inform discussion and campaigns to promote safe and healthy work environments and work roles for school leaders
- evaluate the impact of policies and interventions – the data is longitudinal, so the survey tracks the impact of policy decisions on educators.

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We hope to formally launch this research project at the end of January (around about the time you will be receiving this copy of *Leadership+*). The window of opportunity for you to engage with the survey will be from late February to early April and the higher the participation level, the more persuasive the data and the stronger the message to stakeholders will be. We anticipate that the survey data will greatly compliment the Current Reality section of our Sustainable Leadership project report. We will share more details in relation to the research project with you via E-scéal in due course.

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