

Louise Tobin, IPPN President
IPPN Deputy Principals' Conference 2024
9th February 2024, The Galmont Hotel, Galway

A Chairde uilig, maidin mhaith daoibh. Ta suil agam go bhfuil sibh ag baint taitneamh 's tairbhe as ar gcomhdail anseo I Gallaimh. Geallaimse daoibh gur mor an onoir domsa a bheith anseo libh ar maidin, mar Uachtaran Lionra Priomhoidi Bunscoile Eireann.

Good morning, everybody, and I hope you are enjoying, and benefiting, from our IPPN DPs Conference, in Galway, the festival capital of Ireland, hosting over 120 festivals and events per year. It is a wonderful honour, and privilege, for me to be standing here today, as your IPPN President.

For those who don't know me, my name is Louise Tobin and I am principal of St. Joseph Primary School in Tipp town, an all-girls school with 2 early intervention ASD classes.

Our school was included in the list of new DEIS Band 1 schools in 2022 after years of campaigning for this.

Selina Carmody is DP of Wexford Educate together National School. She is a member of our IPPN board of directors. Selina will speak to you later today. As a current DP I asked Selina to share some of the challenges you face in your roles and these are reflected in my words today.

Our DPs Conference is a very important event in our calendar offering a top quality CPD event for you, our Deputy Principal members. We have over 400 of you here today, along with some Principals, guests, Board members and staff of IPPN.

Our Conference theme is Leading Together With Purpose. Very simply, that means Principal and Deputy Principal, leading the school together, focusing on Teaching and Learning, our core purpose. But unfortunately, the reality is very different.

Deputy Principal colleagues, I would like you to revisit our core purpose. I ask you to think for a moment about why we trained to be teachers, why we applied for and accepted leadership roles – leading the teaching and learning in our schools. And then I ask you to think of your current role, in most cases multi-tasking your fulltime teaching duties with a senior leadership role. The challenges are huge.

I would like to have a closer look at your role and all the distractions that take you from your position of leading your school together with your Principal.

It's true to say that, in nearly all cases, deputy principals will have a teaching role. The absence of any admin days for DPs is a source of great frustration, meaning that the Principal and Deputy have no allocated time to sit down and discuss the shared leadership of the school. I can imagine that both Principals and Deputies with teaching duties often feel that they are never actually successful in either role, such is the load.

Time, or the lack of, has a huge impact on school leaders.

- Time to meet
- Time to be informed of all that goes on in a busy school
- Time to grow this partnership relationship
- Time to meet with parents, staff, students and outside agencies
- Many DPs lead SEN in their schools and this role is huge but yet again, there is no admin time allocated.

In our research, 84% of deputy principals and 78% of principals cite lack of time as the greatest impediment to the development of a partnership approach. And 81% of deputy principals and 76% of principals identify the same lack of time, due to teaching commitments, as the greatest impediment to the leadership and management team seeing the leadership of the school as a shared responsibility.

We in IPPN have repeatedly called for 3 'silver bullets' that would greatly enhance capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. We are calling for immediate action on these.

They are:

1. Being able to maintain a greater focus on the core purpose of school leadership
2. Having greater capacity to share leadership effectively
3. Having a governance structure that has the capacity to meet the onerous responsibilities of a Board of Management.

To be given some time to lead teaching and learning and to have proper shared leadership opportunities would radically change the playing field in our primary schools.

Can you imagine if there was an allocation of time given, when Principals and Deputies could be freed up to sit down and properly plan for teaching and learning, and then in turn share the leadership journey and agree and work towards priority areas for the school?

Role clarity could be achieved, expectations managed and a more cohesive approach to school improvement and development agreed.

The Pathways to Sustainable Leadership session at the IPPN Principals' conference in November, was an opportunity for attendees to talk and hear about the things that are working in their schools to share leadership and create time and space to work together. I know you had some time yesterday to offer your own thoughts that we will of course collate and share after Conference.

The ideas generated at the pathways sessions for Principals were excellent. I'd like to share here some of those that resonated most with me. This was actually a big challenge, such were the quality and number of these great ideas.

So they were divided into 3 questions...

Q1. What might assist me to better maintain a focus on my core purpose?

You can see I whittled the list down to my top 5 and I'll just mention 2 today

- being clear about that core purpose
- remembering that leadership of teaching and learning is a shared responsibility.

Q2. What might assist me to better ensure a partnership/co-leadership approach to the leadership of the school with my deputy?

So here I chose

- remembering to cultivate the relationship
- encouraging the deputy to participate in local support groups.

Q3. What might assist us to better share leadership effectively with the wider team?

- recognising that the sharing of leadership is a necessity and not a luxury
- recognising the central importance of trust

I would encourage you to try and find time to sit down with your Principal or ISM team to go through the ideas you discussed yesterday and the ones from the principals' conference, and pick your favourites that you might adopt to greater ensure a shared leadership approach in your school.

At the opening session yesterday, our Deputy CEO Brian O'Doherty gave an overview of the Sustainable Leadership project and the data that was gathered through our member surveys and participation in the Health & Wellbeing research. I'm delighted that we now have an up-to-date evidence base to strengthen the case for progressing the recommendations.

I won't repeat the stats Brian mentioned yesterday, but I would like to have a look at some of the other data that struck me as particularly interesting:

There is broad consensus among principals and deputy principals with regard to what would enhance their leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability, with 95% of principals and 94% of deputy principals agreeing that an ability to focus on their core purpose would have a positive impact.

Similarly, 95% of principals and 93% of deputy principals agreed that increased opportunities to share leadership would enhance their own leadership capacity, effectiveness and sustainability.

I was delighted to see the stats Brian referenced regarding the sharing of leadership in our schools. It is very encouraging that two thirds (66%) of principals and deputy principals believe that the members of their leadership and management teams see leadership as a shared responsibility. This is an indication of the proactive work happening in schools around the development of a culture of shared leadership.

We in IPPN are a membership organisation. The professional body for Primary School leaders. We are very concerned, about the health, and wellbeing of our members, our Principals and Deputy Principals.

There is stark evidence, that the wellbeing of school leaders, is being hugely affected by workload, and this situation is in fact getting even worse. We ask you to take care of yourself and to try and make sure that you prioritise you, your health and wellbeing.

It really heartens me that, despite all of these challenges and concerns we share about our job, the data also shows that we enjoy our work. We do our best at all times for the children in our care and we value and enjoy working with our management teams and the entire staff in our schools.

How much better could it be over time if our core purpose was recognised and accommodated, if shared leadership was facilitated and the development of a proper governance structure was ensured.

To our Deputy Principals here today and those in school, I want to say thank you and well done for the great work you do every day in our schools. For the very high standards you set, and achieve. For ensuring the very best education you can deliver for our children.

In the meantime, mo chairde, thank you for taking the time to attend your CPD event of the year despite the challenges you left behind you in school, for prioritising your leadership and your professional development. We appreciate the commitment of your Principal and Board in ensuring your attendance also.

Be assured that we will continue to support you and advocate on your behalf to make things better. But in the meantime, I ask you to take care of yourselves and to continue to share the leadership of your school with your Principal and school management team.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir, slán abhaile agus go n-eirí an bothar libh.