



# Reducing the Threshold for Administrative Principalship

**IPPN Position Paper**

May 2016

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## 1 BACKGROUND

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IPPN is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the 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 6,600 Principals and Deputy Principals.

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## 2 CONTEXT

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IPPN believes that it has an obligation to highlight the increasing challenges faced by Teaching Principals and to make recommendations that will address some of those challenges, so that Teaching Principals may be enabled to focus on their core function – being leaders of teaching and learning.

This paper sets out the IPPN position on reducing the threshold for the appointment of an administrative principal in primary schools. In order to identify the immediate priorities of school leaders for education in Budget 2016, IPPN conducted a survey, with 1,332 principals responding. The top two priorities identified were the provision of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals and a reduction in the threshold for Administrative Principals.

These are not new priorities for principals. IPPN's 2005 paper on Principals' Workload had identified these two areas as crucial towards enabling a more effective means of managing the dual role of the Teaching Principal.

Circular 5/2015 combined with the Staffing Schedule for 2016/2017 sets out the enrolment schedule underpinning the appointment to administrative principal status. Ordinary primary schools, Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht require an enrolment of 177 pupils to appoint an Administrative Principal. If one of the aforementioned schools has a special autism unit, 114 pupils are required. In a DEIS Band 1 school, an enrolment of 116 is required (81 pupils if the school has a special autism unit) while DEIS Band 2 schools require an enrolment of 145 pupils (115 if the school has a special autism unit). Furthermore, an Autism Unit with one class has no recognition, an anomaly that needs to be urgently addressed.

Currently, 60% of Principals are Teaching Principals, as close to 2,000 schools in the state have fewer than 177 pupils. Principals in these schools have full-time teaching duties with the exception of a number of 'administrative days' (from the 2016/17 school year) as set out below:

- Principal + 5/6 Teachers: 25 days
- Principal + 3/4 teachers: 20 days
- Principal + 0/1/2 teachers: 15 days.

It is important to note that the number of teachers counted for the calculation of administrative days 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. These additional staff members add huge value to each school but also result in additional duties for the Teaching Principal as all staff must be managed, led and supported.

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### 3 THE ISSUE

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It is unsustainable for Teaching Principals to manage their current workload effectively under current arrangements.

The 2002 report by Hay Group Management Consultants *'Defining the Role of the Primary Principal in Ireland'* lists seven key elements to the role, namely Leadership, Teaching and Learning, Resource Management, Human Resource Management, Policy Formation, Administration and External Relationships. The report goes on to state that effective management of the responsibilities of the Principal are essentially based on the Principal being in an administrative capacity:

'The responsibilities of Principal which are envisaged in the relevant legislation and guidelines appear to be predicated primarily on the role of administrative principal. While teaching principals have the same range of functions and accountabilities, the reality is that the teaching principal role is seen primarily as a teaching one, as teaching principals have insufficient time and energy to devote to the managerial aspects of the role while carrying responsibility for a full class teaching load.' (p.4)

Principals' teaching duties are compromised because of the demands of being in the dual role of principal and teacher. Principals of smaller schools frequently report that the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms is compromised and that the children may be losing out due to the negative impact of the dual role of administration and teaching (IPPN, 2005, p.12, *'New Horizons for Smaller Schools and Teaching Principals in Ireland'*).

In recent years, workload has significantly increased due to the introduction of a raft of legislative measures, new initiatives and additional responsibilities. These include:

- Sections 24 and 29 of the Education Act
- Management of the OLCS system
- Meeting Special Educational Needs including the procurement of resources and the management of SNAs and escorts
- Attendance at and preparation for case conferences
- The development and implementation of an eLearning plan including the procurement and maintenance of ICT infrastructure
- Dealing with a range of agencies including Túsla, PDST, CAMHS, NCSE
- New models of inspection
- Managing revised recruitment procedures and panels
- Coordination of school funding applications and school building projects along with revised emergency funding and Summer Works applications
- Managing Book Rental schemes
- Facilitating the placement of Student Teachers and a wide range of other work placements
- Inducting and mentoring NQTs
- Overseeing the population and maintenance of the Primary Online Database
- Ensuring compliance with Health, Safety and Welfare legislation
- Leading the process of School Self Evaluation and Reporting to the School Community
- Management of new reporting procedures to the Board of Management.

The merit of these initiatives is not being called into question but it is unsustainable to continue to add to the workload of the principal without a corresponding increase in the allocation of time available to principals to complete the work. In 2014, then Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn, acknowledged to IPPN that he was aware that workload was an issue and asked for details of the administrative burden on schools. IPPN responded with an analysis that listed seven pages of administrative requests to schools issued by the various education agencies and the Department itself. IPPN welcomes the slight increase in administrative days included in the 2016/2017 Staffing Schedule. It is a step in the right direction but does not go nearly far enough.

In *'Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning'* (2006), Professor Michael Fullan highlights the importance of the role of the principal in leading school improvement:

'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 perform badly.'

Fullan recommends that the government 'provide significantly more leadership/ non-contact time for teaching principals' (p. 19).

Special schools led by Teaching Principals face particular challenges over and above those of other Teaching Principals. Typically, there are significantly higher numbers of special needs assistants and bus escorts in special schools. In addition, there are multi-disciplinary teams and medical teams that must be coordinated, not to mention the coordination of certified programmes at junior and senior cycle level. IPPN believes that all special schools should have Administrative Principals and, given the significant challenges of leading such schools, IPPN is currently developing a separate Position Paper on Special Schools.

IPPN believes that the current situation in relation to the threshold for administrative principalship is having a negative effect not only on the principal, but also on the staff, pupils and the entire school community. A principal who is teaching throughout the school day cannot provide effective leadership and guidance to teachers, staff, pupils and the wider school community. Today's educational landscape dictates that leadership and management duties extend well beyond the current principal administration days outlined above.

It is deemed necessary that a school with 177 pupils requires an Administrative Principal i.e. 183 administrative days per year. How then is it considered manageable, or justifiable, for a school with 176 pupils to have their principal as 'administrative' for just 25 days per year or a school with 143 to have their principal administrative for 20 days?

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## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

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Taking all realities into account, IPPN recommends that:

1. The threshold for the appointment of an Administrative Principal be reduced to from 178 to 144 pupils.
2. The staffing schedule be based not on pupil enrolment numbers but on the overall staffing level in each school, to include teaching as well as non-teaching staff – SNAs, administration and caretaking staff, bus escorts, therapists etc. – as the management of these roles add significantly to the principal’s workload.
3. Administration days for schools below 144 pupils should be calculated proportionally but set at a minimum of one day per week.
4. The thresholds for the appointment of administrative principals in DEIS schools, and in schools with special autism units be maintained or reduced proportionally.
5. All special schools have an administrative principal with immediate effect.

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## 5 CONCLUSIONS

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These concessions would allow Teaching Principals to carry out their role more effectively. IPPN has sought information on the likely cost of such an initiative. The projected cost of reducing the threshold to 144 pupils would be approximately €10.5M per annum which is a relatively small outlay for a potentially large return.