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Qualifications for Principalship

Recruiting the most effective School Leaders

IPPN Position Paper

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Table of Contents

1	Background	1
2	Context.....	2
3	The Issue	3
4	International Norms.....	4
5	Recommendations	5
6	Conclusions	7

1 BACKGROUND

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.

2 CONTEXT

The role of Principal in a rapidly-evolving educational landscape requires knowledge, key competencies and specific skills. There is no longer any professional argument to support the notion that a leadership role should be earned on the basis of seniority alone. Today's school leader must be a teacher, a visionary, a communicator, a strategist, and a diplomat while possessing a range of other skills and attributes that are not necessarily part of the skill-set of every teacher following initial teacher training.

Strong and purposeful leadership is central to school effectiveness and school improvement. There is no evidence of a successful school operating without the leadership of a principal who is both personally and professionally, an exemplary leader of learning.

"Every review of the research literature on school improvement has highlighted the key role of the principal, for better or for worse, i.e. there are no examples of school-wide success without school leadership; all examples of school failure include weak or ineffective leadership." *Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning*, Fullan, 2006.

3 THE ISSUE

A membership consultation survey of 880 Principals carried out by IPPN in 2014 revealed the following

- Many teachers do not consider applying for the role of principal due to disruption to work-life balance, unrealistic expectations and workload implications.
- Seven out of ten principals did not hold the post of Deputy Principal before assuming the role of Principal.
- The primary motivation in applying for the position of Principal was a belief that they were ready for a leadership role or that certain aspects of the role appealed to them.
- Only one third of Principals reported holding a post-graduate qualification relevant to the role, such as a PhD, a Masters or a diploma or certificate in Educational Leadership.
- The majority of Principals (80%) consider they are in need of further professional development and are willing to undertake same.
- Significantly, 15% of respondents are considering 'stepping down' from the post due to role fatigue.

4 INTERNATIONAL NORMS

Qualifications and ability to do the job are central to recruiting the best people for the post of Principal. In Ireland, a minimum of 5 years teaching experience is a pre-requisite for accession to the role. This differs substantially from requirements in other countries.

In Finland, entry to school leadership requires a Masters in Education. In addition, Finland has a National Qualification for Principalship which involves training in policy planning, budget preparation, HR, curriculum development, evaluation and Team Management.

In Japan, teachers are paid 30% more than civil servants in comparable roles and those aspiring to the role of Principal must have a Masters qualification. In Korea, promotion is based on qualifications (Masters Degree), years of service, evaluation results and research achievement. In Canada and Australia, aspiring Principals are required to hold a Masters Degree in addition to two specialist qualifications.

In Singapore, a teacher's performance on the Educational Performance Management System (EPMS) determines whether he or she can apply for the post of Principal. This involves evaluation in the areas of Leadership Management, Professional Practice and Personal Effectiveness. Once identified, potential leaders are groomed for future leadership roles. Finally, in the US, a Principal must hold a Masters Degree or a Doctorate in Educational Administration and must complete an internship enabling him/her to obtain a state-issued School Administrator Licence.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on international best practice, it appears that recruitment practices and levels of qualifications and expertise in Ireland require some adjustment. National research conducted by IPPN and other stakeholders such as the DES since 2004 suggest that the following recommendations are appropriate in the circumstances:

- IPPN recommends a clear national strategy for leadership and succession in Ireland through the establishment of a National Programme for Aspiring Leaders. This state-sponsored initiative would define minimum qualification standards for school leadership and put in place a graded scheme in relation to additional qualifications such as levels of expertise and experience.
- IPPN to work with the relevant arm of the Department of Education and Skills in redefining this revised qualifications model for aspiring leaders.
- Any national strategy for leadership must focus on raising the profile and prestige level of school leadership in the eyes of the community. The newly-formed Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and the National Centre for Leadership and Innovation (NCLI) can both play a role in promoting innovation and excellence in school leadership.
- The Department of Education and Skills to establish a clear role definition for Principal teachers. This would include an unambiguous Principal's Contract of 5-7 years for new entrants to the role, a clear job description, more autonomy and a 'step down' facility for existing principals.
- A national strategy for leadership would focus on modules such as pedagogy, curriculum design, human resources, management and planning, legal studies, financial planning and assessment.
- Pre- and post-appointment training should be central to the recruitment process, including participation in Ciall Ceannaithe, Headstart and Misneach programmes for newly-appointed principals.
- A period of 'job shadowing' for aspiring principals is desirable, whereby a teacher can experience at first hand the multiplicity of skills required for a leadership role
- It is desirable that newly-appointed principals avail of mentoring from experienced school principals for a period of at least 6 months and experience, first-hand, issues relating to parental complaints, conflict, budgeting, Board of Management etc.
- Candidates for school leadership should have a proven track record of capacity for leadership, whether through an official post of responsibility or having gained leadership experience in other ways. Experience in at least one management position, though not necessarily that of Deputy Principal, is desirable.
- IPPN considers that a Masters Degree, or at least a Post-graduate Diploma, in Educational Management/Leadership is desirable. The development of a specific post-graduate qualification by the newly-formed Centre for School Leadership is welcomed.

- Seniority and/or the culture of self-selection should be eliminated as the primary criterion for selecting new school leaders.
- Recruitment practices require enhanced professionalism. Members of Selection Boards must meet certain criteria before being eligible to engage in the process. Independent assessors should be remunerated appropriately.
- Boards of Management must conduct their business to the highest professional standards and be fully transparent and accountable.
- Board of Management members should receive mandatory training to ensure a greater understanding of the concept of governance and of their shared role and responsibilities.
- Reduce the barriers to recruitment identified by national and international research. These include lack of in-service training, bureaucracy, workload issues, poor financial rewards, funding issues and role definition.
- Licensing of candidates for principalship should be considered.
- A separate salary scale should be considered as the means of remunerating school leaders. Such a salary scale should eliminate the current anomaly of a deputy principal in a medium-sized school receiving a greater allowance than the majority, if not all, of teaching principals.
- Following appointment, on-going, accredited professional development should be mandatory for all school Principals.
- Serving Principals should be encouraged to identify and groom future leaders.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Schools are complex organisations with the Principal located where all roads converge. The quality of the Principal is of crucial importance. Equally important is resilience - dealing with the daily grind of leading and managing a school requires stamina and endurance as well as tactical nous. This tacit knowledge can only be acquired through experience, acquiring appropriate knowledge in specific areas, listening to others and developing professionally.

Finally, absolute priority should be focused on the professional wellbeing of each and every school leader. An unburdened Principal has so much more to offer the children and staff under his/her leadership.