



Priority Issues for Leadership in Schools

Submission to the
Joint Committee
on Education and
Social Protection

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) was invited to present to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection to discuss leadership in schools. IPPN's views are informed by international research, consultations with principal associations around the world and in particular, on-going consultation with our own 3,350 school leaders who lead and manage the primary education of more than half a million children every day. This document and our presentation to the committee are the outcome of that process.

Extensive research shows that effective principals are best deployed as "Leaders of Learning" and in that role, can have a greater impact on the learning outcomes for students than any other single factor. There is an urgent need to radically reduce the administrative duties for which principals are currently responsible. We believe that there is a need to create a leadership strategy, which develops potential and aspiring principals and provides a comprehensive training programme to meet the needs of school leaders throughout their career.

Having identified those with the potential to become great principals, we argue that it is essential that we professionalise the appointment procedures, bringing greater transparency and accountability to this crucial process.

Once we have found, selected and hired the principals the next task is to ensure that their knowledge and skills are maintained and kept relevant to the changing education context. We have recommended that a formal process of Continual Professional Development (CPD) be put in place. This is to ensure that as advances are made in education and leadership, and as the school context evolves; all principals are appropriately informed, skilled and supported.

We believe that the key to unburdening principals of administrative duties is to radically overhaul the roles of deputy principal and of the middle management team giving principals the flexibility to delegate effectively. The role of middle management has never been properly defined by the Department of Education and Skills. Given that these roles are the logical stepping stones to principalship and can have a huge influence on a school and its students, it seems sensible that these positions be properly defined, have regular reporting duties to the Board of Management and provide support to the principal, allowing for skills and experience to be shared.

Boards of Governors, as they should be named to reflect their actual governance role need extensive training and support to enable them to carry out their function. Greater clarity is required to separate the function and role of the board from those of the principal.

The recommendations within this document illustrate our belief in the importance of a clear strategy and greater focus on leadership within our education system. As stated by Michael Fullan (2006), '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 badly underperform.'

BACKGROUND

The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) is the professional body for school leaders in Irish primary schools. Since its establishment in 2000, IPPN's mission has been to support and represent school leaders. We work closely with our second level counterparts NAPD and the Department of Education and Skills (DES). At the core of our existence we fundamentally believe that it is through effective skilled leadership that the greatest amount of change and improvement to teaching and learning can be achieved.

In support of this belief IPPN is currently developing a National Centre for Leadership and Innovation (NCLI). This centre will provide a means for the research and development of programmes, projects and other leadership advancement initiatives. In addition, it will be a hub for academics, practitioners and agencies already engaged in leadership training and development. NCLI is dedicated to creating the leadership structures necessary to deliver the best possible primary school education to Ireland's children, allowing them to thrive in their future academic, professional and personal lives. In addition to Dedicated Educational Leadership and Management Training Programmes, NCLI has designed courses offering the broader school community unique opportunities to learn and grow as leaders.



INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen unprecedented levels of change in society and consequently in schools. Principals began to see their original role changing from that of head teacher carrying out a number of lower order administrative tasks to a complex multi-faceted leadership and management position. Prof. Michael Fullan, in his publication *Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning*, which was co-written by IPPN (2006), points to the 'key role of the principal, for better or for worse, i.e. there are no examples of school wide success without strong and effective leadership, while all examples of school failure include weak or ineffective leadership'.

We know from the consistent findings of international research (Prof. Kenneth Leithwood, 2004) that over the lifetime of a student in school, the principal's role has greater influence over children's learning outcomes than any other factor. Knowing the positive influence an effective and competent leader can have on a school, IPPN challenges why this role is so under supported.

The OECD report *Improving School Leadership* (2008) sets out the pivotal role played by school leaders in improving the quality of student learning. This report also confirms and supports the findings of Prof. Michael Fullan (*Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning*, 2006) and Prof. Kenneth Leithwood et al (*How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, 2004).

In *Improving School Leadership*, the OECD also outlines a comprehensive and logical set of recommendations that will lead to the further professionalisation of school leadership and in turn yield improvements in the quality of education for all pupils in Irish schools.

The recommendations are:

- a) To define and structure the role as the leader of teaching and learning,
- b) To put in place an effective model of distributed leadership that enables the principal to spend quality time with teachers,
- c) Invest in the identification, training and development of leadership,
- d) Make the profession of principal more attractive to good teachers.

IPPN has examined the issues raised by the OECD in the light of the Irish context and propose that the following eight issues are critical to the future of school leadership in this country.

1 LEADERS OF LEARNING

1.1 CURRENT ISSUE

- The leadership of learning and teaching is the primary function of every school principal. Most Principals find that their current administrative workload severely limits their capacity to have a meaningful role in influencing student learning.
- In the last number of years, there is a strong emphasis on accountability in education. This manifests itself in several forms of school, teacher and principal evaluation. In parallel, a school's capacity to meet the required demands, are diminishing. This is leading to extreme levels of pressure, particularly among principals where the role is becoming so overloaded that even the most competent people find that their function as a school leader is quickly being eroded.

1.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- In order to enable principals to undertake the essential function of leading learning; appropriate and adequate administrative and professional supports must be put in place. The time that principals currently spend on administrative duties is a waste of scarce resources.
- The OECD study in 2008 identified the need to make the role of principal more financially attractive, relative to all other roles in education.

2 RECRUITING THE BEST PRINCIPALS

2.1 CURRENT ISSUE

- If principals are to be leaders of learning, we must attract the best teachers into the school leadership role. Good teachers don't always make good principals but poor teachers never make good principals.
- In order to create a leadership pipeline, the first step is the identification of emerging leaders. This practice is not currently being implemented in Ireland, while it is considered good practice in other jurisdictions, such as in Ontario, Canada and Victoria, Australia.
- Excellent teachers will be attracted to school leadership if they are confident that they will be able to make a positive difference to children's lives. They want to spend their time and energy on improving children's learning across the whole school and not just in their own classroom. They most definitely do not want to become administrators.

2.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- A contract for principals is required as well as a clear job description.
- Graded reward structures for deputy, assistant and principal roles should reflect their relative role responsibilities.
- Salary differentials must be constructed to incentivise rather than inhibit promotion which is currently the case. As in most other OECD countries principals and deputy principals should be paid on a separate salary scale from teachers. (Investing in School Leadership, IPPN, 2006)
- Providing opportunities for all teachers to engage in leadership activity early in their careers is an essential component in developing future school leaders.
- Preparation for leadership is essential. Programmes and initiatives that encourage and develop leadership skill sets must be resourced and expanded for those aspiring to a leadership role. IPPN's newly developed National Centre for Leadership and Innovation (NCLI), will constructively enable relevant leadership training and development.

3 APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES

3.1 CURRENT ISSUE

- Getting the right leader to lead the school is critical. Failing to do so has profound implications.
- The recruitment process for principals requires review and radical overhaul. If the principal is critical to school success, then it is clear that those who select the principal play a vital role in the process. In addition, those who select the selectors carry immense responsibility, but also have the opportunity to put in place a model for selecting principals that is based on international best practice.

3.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- It is essential that anyone charged with responsibility of appointing principals must undertake appropriate and continuous training in recruitment and selection.
- Transparent criteria and clear guidelines must be in place for the selection of members of interview panels across all sectors and patrons.
- In order to have an effective change of leadership in a school the BoM should ensure that a suitable induction process and transition process is put in place.

4 CAREER PROGRESSION

4.1 CURRENT ISSUE

- IPPN is concerned about the high turnover of school leaders through strategic retirement. Large numbers of principals are retiring and tacit knowledge in their schools and in the system as a whole is being lost. Many new principals are inexperienced and have applied for principalship as it is one of the few promotional prospects available to teachers.
- As teacher vacancies are filled primarily from redeployment panels, there are few options for mobility other than applying for principalship.
- Principalship is a high 'wear and tear' position, some of which is due to the isolated nature of the role. Consequently, the role requires specialised support structures to address personal as well as professional difficulties. IPPN and NAPD have engaged with Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, to survey Irish school principals' and deputy principals' health and wellbeing. This is being conducted by Dr. Philip Riley, using an internationally recognised research method.
- Currently, if a principal needs to 'step down' for whatever reason, the existing structure in place has serious weaknesses. It is often in the best interest of the school and its pupils to facilitate the principal to step down from their leadership role. Currently this results in the principal being placed at the most junior position of the seniority ladder, which means that if there is a drop in enrolment numbers the former principal is the first person to be placed on the redeployment panel. This is the most undignified treatment of someone who has led the school, perhaps for several years.

4.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- Given the changing nature of the role, the concept of 'Principal for Life' is no longer ideal. Flexible career structures are required which attract and enable teachers to 'step up' to a leadership role for a contracted period of time.
- Provision should be made to allow those who so wish to 'step down' from principalship back to a teacher role within the defined contracted period of time, without pension or reputational loss.

5 CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 CURRENT ISSUE

- An adequate budget is not currently available for appropriate, comprehensive support and development programmes for school leaders. However, if the goal is to improve student learning, investing in school leadership, offers the best value for money compared with other forms of intervention. (Prof. Michael Fullan, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto)
- Aspiring principals are not currently required to undertake any form of CPD relevant to the role. There is no standard framework or 'pathway' for personal and/or professional development.
- Once appointed to a principal role, there is no further requirement to undertake any CPD for the remainder of their principalship.
- IPPN has as part of its core mission the provision of appropriate training and development for principals. Appendix D outlines the range of supports and services currently offered to principals and deputies. IPPN endeavours to continually increase the level of services provided but unfortunately we are restricted due to limited resources.

5.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- If principals are to be genuine 'leaders of learning', the principal's own learning must be continuous and developmental throughout their career.
- A pre-appointment qualification in school leadership should not be made compulsory but should earn a candidate additional weighting during the short listing process.
- CPD Programmes should be predominately based on action-research, focused on the principal's school so as to accommodate their busy role. Leadership programmes offered by NCLI will be designed so as to ensure that the staff and pupils of a school will ultimately benefit from the training undertaken by the principal.
- Evidence gathered by IPPN's Principal Advice service and its mentoring programme strongly suggests that there is a considerable need for increased provision of personal and professional development. Where this need is realised and addressed, the capacity to lead and manage change is fully harnessed.

6 ROLE OF DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

6.1 CURRENT ISSUE

The role of deputy principal should be a significant part of the leadership capacity within a school. However, a number of factors mitigate its effectiveness:

- The role has never been defined by the Department of Education and Skills. Consequently it has never been utilised as a capacity building measure in schools.
- It is often seen as a position to be held by the longest serving member of staff, other than the principal. Research in other countries shows that the vast majority of principals have previously served as deputy principals'. This practice is obviously a valuable aspect of career progression. (Giorraíonn Beirt Bóthar – Distributed Leadership – Deputy Principals, IPPN, 2007)
- All teachers, including deputy and principal teachers are employed on the same salary scale. Principals and deputies also receive an allowance for their leadership role, which is determined by the size of their school. An example of this would be a deputy principal in a school with 14 or more teachers applying for a role as principal in a smaller school, should they be appointed to the position they will incur financial loss. This is an unnecessary impediment in its own right and has caused a significant problem for the 'leadership pipeline'. It also restricts movement of leadership roles from school to school.

6.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- To review the role of deputy principal and to assign significant leadership, management and administrative duties for which the deputy principal has responsibility.
- Require the deputy principal to provide a written report as a component of the principal's written report to each meeting of the Board of Management, as the principal currently does.
- Restructure remuneration for principals and deputies using separate salary scales, accommodating incentives for early and mid-career teachers to apply for positions that provide promotion and that eliminate financial impediments.
- When a school is appointing a deputy principal the school should, as in the case of second level schools, be entitled to recruit from open competition and not confined to staff within the school, as in current practice.

7 MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

7.1 CURRENT ISSUES

- Distributing leadership throughout all staff is essential to maximise the quality of learning in the school. Every member of staff must have a leadership role and responsibility for some aspect of the school community. (Dr. James P. Spillane, Associate Prof., School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, USA).
- Middle Management posts of responsibility have not delivered the capacity building affect that they were intended to provide. Though changing slowly there is still a sense that these posts are allocated to those with the greatest length of service in the school. While alternative criteria are officially agreed, this practice still remains.
- Due to education cutbacks, all assistant principals and special duty posts are not being replaced when the post becomes vacant due to illness, career break, maternity leave, retirement, etc. Most schools have lost a significant portion of their existing Middle Management posts. In many cases the entire middle management team has been removed.

7.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- When education budgets are restored Middle Management capacity needs to be radically overhauled so as to enable principals, with the support of their BoM, to match the capacity of teachers with the requirements of the school on an annual basis. As with the allocation of classes to teachers, principals should be free to redistribute areas of responsibility annually to the middle management team.
- Middle Management should have a significant role in the ongoing school self evaluation process, mentoring of new staff and in larger schools manage communications for subsets of the school's student population.

8 GOVERNANCE

8.1 CURRENT ISSUE

The following observations are made in the context of the OECD Irish Country Background Report and the OECD Improving School Leadership Report:

- Effective school leadership requires that principal teachers and BoMs have a clear understanding of their respective leadership and management functions in schools.
- It is in everybody's interest that school leadership responsibilities should be clearly articulated within a national framework.
- Specific knowledge and skills are required by school leaders and Board members as they exercise their governance, leadership and management roles.
- The current structure of BoMs is based on the willingness of people to voluntarily participate in the running of schools. This model will soon prove to be unsustainable because the skill sets needed to properly resource a Board of Management are often lacking.
- Extensive research carried out on 500 Boards of Management (Primary School Governance – Challenges & Opportunities, IPPN, 2011) shows that much of the discussion and energy of the board is spent on lower order managerial tasks. Boards generally are not performing their true governance role. This results in a confusion of responsibilities between the BoM and the principal.
- Expertise in law, finance, human resources, IT and construction are frequently unavailable to Board members and, while many BoMs work well, a number of Boards are unable to carry out the responsibilities envisaged in recent education, equality, welfare and health and safety legislation. Where this is the case there can be an undue dependency on the principal to manage areas that are the function of the Board.
- This is not best practice and will lead to difficulties if the principal becomes the 'de facto' manager of the school, incorporating part of the governance function of the Board with the leadership role of the principal.

8.2 IPPN'S RECOMMENDATION

- There is a need for greater role clarity on the governance role of Boards of Management and the leadership and management role of the principal.
- Boards of Management should be referred to as Boards of Governors as their function is in the area of governance rather than the area of day to day management.
- In light of significant change in the education sector, driven largely by greater level of diversity and the need for inclusion, the time is ripe for a review of governance structures. These structures were an adaptation of 'the single manager' and are no longer fit for propose to govern schools.

- More recently a variety of different school patrons has emerged leading to an increasingly fragmented system. A model of governance that supersedes all existing structures, while acknowledging individual traditions is required.
- The capacity of the Education Training Boards of Ireland (ETBI) to deliver additional supports, such as technical, financial, legal, HR and construction services, to primary schools to support the functioning of Boards of Management should be examined.

CONCLUSION

The effect of a principal on a school is similar to the effect of the yeast in the dough. We have the opportunity to create wonderful bread. Investing in the development of principals into effective leaders is a sine qua non. In the words of John F. Kennedy 'leadership and learning are indispensable to each other'.

IPPN and NCLI share a very clear agenda; to achieve substantive change in education leading to improved learning outcomes for all children. The key to achieving this change is to elevate the quality of school leadership and IPPN, in its capacity as the professional body for primary school leaders, is perfectly positioned to deliver this change through its services and that of NCLI.

Appendix 1: IPPN's Supports & Services



IPPN has developed a wide range of services aimed at assisting and supporting principals and deputy principals in their work. These include:

Principal Advice Service: A one-to-one confidential advisory service that offers principals a listening ear from someone who understands their situation. The Principal Advice service provides collegial support and guidance of a non-directive and non-legal nature from a team of skilled serving and retired principals.

Newly Appointed Principals' Mentoring Service: This service delivers a wealth of advice and coaching to newly appointed principals. While programmes and seminars have their place, personal mentoring is particularly powerful in enabling a newly-appointed principal to be up and running fast. This service is offered for up to two years from first appointment.

Leadership Recovery: A discrete service coordinated from our Support Office to personally visit and support individual principals who may be experiencing extreme professional or personal challenges.

www.ippn.ie: Website where members can avail of a wealth of resources, FAQs, publications, research, information updates and education news.

E-scéal: E-mail updates sent regularly to inform members of current issues within education and providing professional guidance, from FAQs on circular releases to announcements, about IPPN events and services.

networking@ippn.ie and other Mailing Lists: Members' mailing lists which facilitate professional debate, peer support and the sharing of good practice. In addition, advice@ippn.ie is a one-way mailing list to request a response from the Principal Advice panel.

County Networks: Through the system of 26 County Networks IPPN facilitates CPD in the form of guest speakers or interactive sessions for the benefit of members in each county. County Network meetings offer principals an invaluable opportunity to network with each other sharing best practice and advice.

Continuous Professional Development: Each year, IPPN hosts a Principals' and a Deputy Principals' Conference as well as arranging other regional professional development events and online courses. Education Expos are also provided at some of these events to facilitate effective school purchasing.

TextaParent.ie is a fast, reliable and cost-effective way for schools to contact parents and staff. This online group texting service enables schools to instantly communicate with a large group of people.



EducationPosts.ie: To alleviate the burden of costs associated with newspaper advertising, IPPN developed EducationPosts.ie to enable schools to advertise vacancies free of charge. The website is the number one choice for schools advertising vacancies. Thousands of teachers use EducationPosts.ie in their search for work.



TextaSub is an online service that enables members to send free text alerts to primary-qualified teachers who are available for subbing work in the relevant county. Teachers are required to supply a valid Teaching Council number in order to register for TextaSub.



Appendix 2: IPPN CPD Framework for School Leaders

PhD

Masters

Degree

Graduate Diploma

Graduate Certificate

Regional Seminars

Your School and Staff Management	Your School and the Law	Teaching Principals Clinic	Conference Workshops	Conference Plenary
Principals' Professional Briefing Day	Pre-retirement Seminar	Deputy Principals' Conference Plenary	Deputy Principals' Conference Workshops	Managing SNA's

Online

Headstart	County Network Meetings	Your School and the Law	Counter-acting Bullying	Managing Challenging Behaviour
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Misneach

Ciall Ceannaithe

Toraíocht

C
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Appendix 3: IPPN Services provided to Newly Appointed Principals'



Appendix 4: Staged CPD for School Leaders

