

## IPPN DEPUTY PRINCIPALS' CONFERENCE 2025

### PÁIRIC CLERKIN, IPPN'S CEO

Good morning, everybody. It's lovely to see so many of you here again in Galway this year.

Thank you sincerely for making the effort to join us.

As Brian mentioned yesterday, the theme of the conference this year is **Empowering Effective Teaching and Learning** and he spoke about your well-being and the steps IPPN is taking to address the conditions that lead to poor well-being among far too many school leaders. It is very clear that you cannot be as effective a leader as you would like to be, if your personal health & well-being are compromised. That is why IPPN is focusing on wellness and self-care in our **Be Well, Lead Well** campaign— as these are essential ingredients for effectiveness and empowerment in leadership.

As well as focusing on self-care, we need to find better ways to manage the ever-increasing demands that are made of us in leadership. We must embrace the tools that empower us to focus on our core purpose - leading effective teaching and learning. I also passionately believe in empowering yourself by empowering those around you. In my view, this is what Empowering Effective Teaching and Learning means. There's no greater legacy for a leader than to inspire others to lead.

IPPN's mission is to enhance your leadership capacity, your leadership effectiveness and the sustainability of your leadership role. Why? – because your leadership matters. Because it makes a difference in the lives of children. In the original Sustainable Leadership report, published in November 2022, IPPN identified a disproportionate focus on managing the organisation which limits the capacity of school leaders to focus on your core purpose of leading teaching and learning.

It would seem that UNESCO agrees. In its recently published Global Education Monitoring Report for 2024/25, quoting IPPN's research, it identifies:

- an acute need for strong instructional leadership
- it states that empowered leaders are essential to transforming education outcomes
- and that Irish school leaders do not have enough time to lead teaching and learning due to administrative and bureaucratic demands.

IPPN has been saying this for years. As the professional body for school leaders, our ultimate objective has to be to support school leaders to effectively deliver high quality teaching and learning and thus, better outcomes for the children in our care. To better ensure this IPPN has proposed and is progressing specific actions to address:

- the need for a greater allocation to schools of discrete time for leadership
- the need for school leaders to maintain their focus on their core purpose of leading teaching and learning
- the need for greater capacity to share leadership effectively and
- the need to enhance current and future governance practice.

Through our daily engagement with school leaders and through our research, we have identified the challenges around the practice of school leadership. Our approach to meeting these challenges has been very much solution-focused– on what school leaders can do for themselves, as well as actions for IPPN and for policy-makers at system level.

We, as **school leaders**, need to take control of our own destiny as much as we can. We are the experts on the practice of school leadership. We have a responsibility to identify what we can do to move the dial towards effective, sustainable leadership.

What the **system** must do is to support school leaders by providing the appropriate infrastructural supports, so that we can focus our attention on what is central to our roles rather than on the constant distraction of tasks that should be the responsibility of others.

In terms of the actions for **IPPN**, we have developed a number of resources to support you in focusing on your core purpose. We didn't wait for others within the education system to define that core purpose for us, because that is **our** area of expertise. To ensure greater **role clarity**, IPPN has developed a **Leadership Effectiveness Reflection Tool**, based on the domains and standards of the Quality Framework, which is the clearest and most concise expression available of the school leadership role. The reflection tool details the tasks associated with the achievement of those standards, and challenges you to consider who in the school is best placed to undertake such actions.

Rather than just encouraging you to focus on what is central to our role as school leaders, IPPN has developed a resource to support and empower your instructional leadership— the **Guide to the Leadership of Teaching & Learning**, which was launched in Killarney in November, and which you have in your conference bag. The *Guide* emphasises the fact that the leadership of teaching and learning is a **shared** responsibility. It provides a way for everyone in the school who has responsibility for leadership and management to reflect on the practice of instructional leadership in your school. Ultimately, we hope that the guide will help to bring about a more balanced, distributed practice of leadership in our schools, with a greater focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Feedback from those who have been using it is exceptionally strong. I encourage you all to engage with it and to discuss it with the principal when you get back to school next week, if you haven't done so already.

With regard to **leadership time**, your feedback in the recent IPPN survey confirms that an allocation of discrete time for leadership would have the greatest impact on your leadership. IPPN is proposing that additional discrete leadership time be allocated to schools with teaching principals and to deputy principals who have full-time teaching duties. Such a graduated approach already exists in post-primary schools, based on the size of the school. Remember, 93% of Deputy Principals have zero discrete leadership time. That needs to change.

As you can see from this table, we’re proposing a minimum of 40% non-contact time for teaching principals and a minimum non-contact time of 40% for deputy principals of schools with an administrative principal.

Band	Enrolment	Status of Principal	Status of Deputy Principal	Number of schools
1	1 - 84	0.4 admin (2 days a week)	Full-time teaching	1002
2	85 - 168	0.6 admin (3 days a week)	Full-time teaching	821
3	169 - 372	Fully admin	0.4 admin (2 days a week)	871
4	373 - 572	Fully admin	0.6 admin (3 days a week)	308
5	573 +	Fully admin	Fully admin	87
				3089

This additional capacity would have a profound impact on leadership and school effectiveness and would improve school leaders’ wellbeing significantly.

To achieve greater **capacity to share leadership**, IPPN is proposing the removal of barriers to accessing team coaching, so that all schools and school leaders can participate— principals and deputy principals, as well as the other members of the school’s leadership and management team.

We were heartened to see research from Maynooth University echoing IPPN’s calls for the role of deputy principal to be fully supported and empowered as a key leader in the school and I quote - *“Our research highlights that deputy principals are much more than operational managers—they are pivotal leaders in shaping the culture, curriculum, and wellbeing of schools. Yet, their contributions are often undervalued. This report is a call to action for systemic change to ensure that these hidden assets in our education system are fully supported and recognised.”*

It’s reassuring, if a little frustrating to note that the research is now finally saying what we have been flagging for quite some time.

On the issue of **reducing the administrative and compliance burden**, we have made a number of specific proposals, two of which are progressing as part of the Small Schools Action Research project, and are very significant developments. The first of these is the

ongoing **piloting of a shared administrator role** in the Galway cluster, which has already yielded positive outcomes for schools and is likely to result in further improvements for small schools.

The second is only recently announced- the **piloting of a shared compliance officer role**, formally known as a Schools Executive Officer, in the Donegal cluster, which is an acknowledgment by the Department that school leaders can no longer continue to discharge the compliance responsibilities of our boards of management. This compliance officer role is the type of reform that will provide an appropriate support structure for boards of management to ensure they can succeed in meeting their responsibilities in the future. It's the type of reform that will allow school leaders greater capacity to focus on leadership of teaching and learning and less on the tasks that should be the responsibility of others.

IPPN has also proposed the piloting of clustered access to shared services to provide financial, HR, legal and capital project expertise.

We have lobbied for the Primary Education Forum to establish a working group to review governance structures during the lifetime of the current Boards of Management.

We are actively pursuing these priorities and the constructive engagement we have had in recent weeks with the Department and other education stakeholders gives us hope that a coalition of support is forming and progress is being achieved.

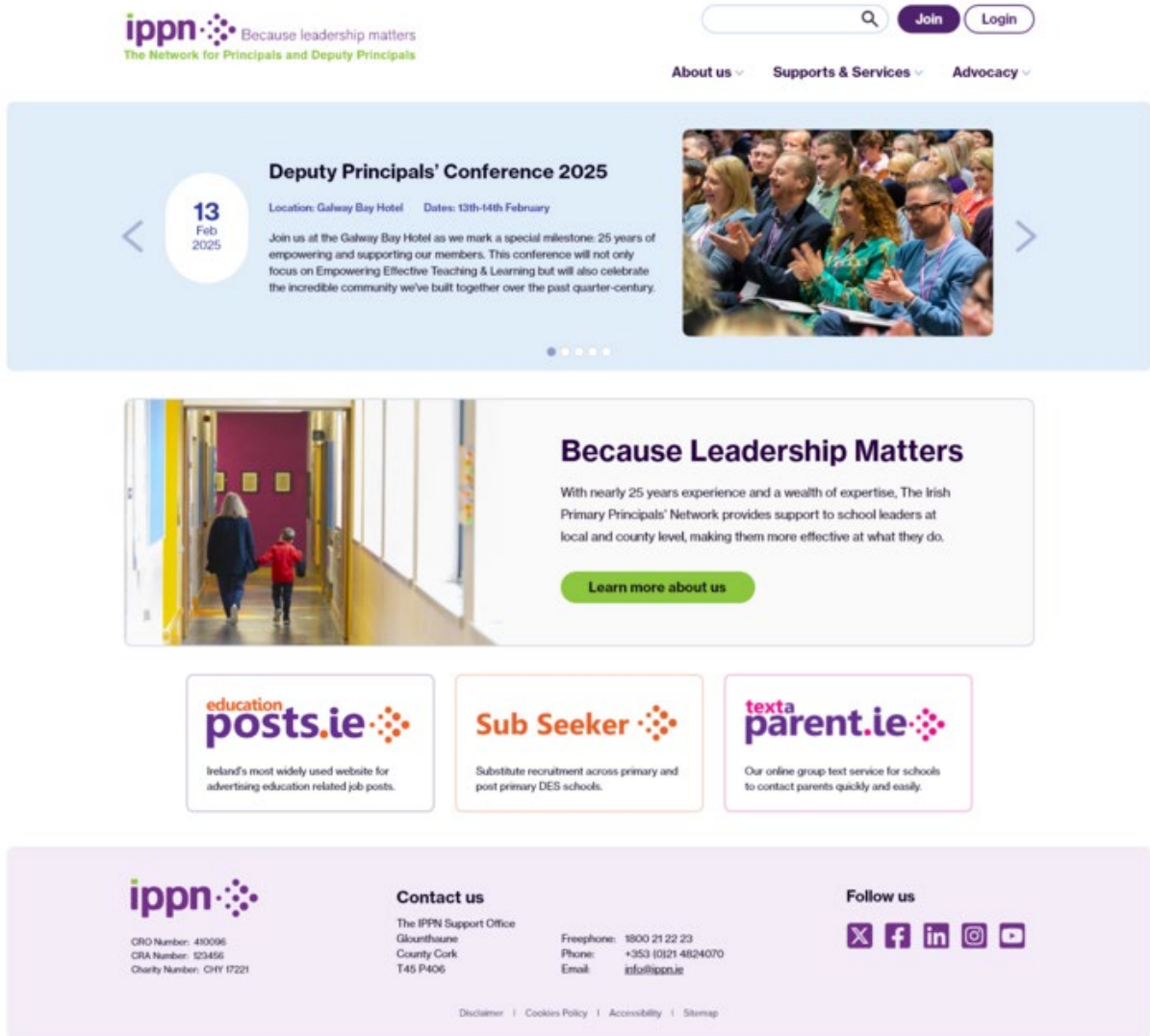
This year, indeed this week, marks 25 years since the official founding of IPPN in 2000. Over those 25 years, numerous supports and services have been put in place to support school leaders. Many were designed before there was a Centre for School Leadership. IPPN and NAPD were the driving force behind CSL, which was launched in 2015. As the CSL project's

long-term future has been achieved, with the incorporation of CSL, as well as PDST, into Oide, it is time for a rethink around IPPN priorities for the future delivery of our supports and services. IPPN will continue to work in partnership with the Oide Leadership team to ensure that you receive high-quality CPD.

As part of our review of supports and services that Brian referenced yesterday, we **wish to emphasise** that every support and service that IPPN offers is available to you including our Leadership Support service, resource bundles; sample policies, our weekly E-scéal, Leadership+, and more. We are also delighted that our group mentoring project for newly appointed Deputy Principals has expanded this year. Please make sure that IPPN has up-to-date contact information for you so we can keep you abreast of what's available to you.

The development of a **new IPPN website** was the number one priority for most of you in your feedback to us. I assure you that the IPPN leadership team is driving this project forward so that it will be launched this year as part of our 25 year celebrations. It's a complicated project because the site must integrate with numerous other systems .., such as EducationPosts, TextaParent, Subseeker and Salesforce. It has certainly taken longer than we had intended. However, the good news is that the technical background work has now been completed and the rebuild is well underway.

I hope that you'll agree that the design is a clear improvement from the current site.

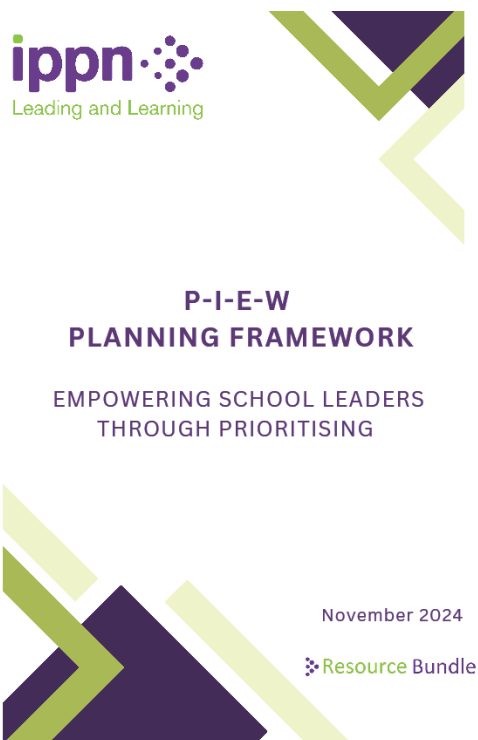


We aim to deliver a user-friendly ,easy-to-search website that meets your ongoing needs. As part of the website redesign, we are delighted to launch the new IPPN logo and more inclusive strapline – IPPN – The Network for Principals and Deputy Principals – Because leadership matters.



What was formerly merely understood is now explicitly stated. We are the professional body for school leaders .., supporting principals and deputy principals equally because we know your leadership matters in the lives of children.

Since the start of January, IPPN has delivered the first five of a series of 26 workshops across the country - what we've been calling our 2025 Roadshow. As well as celebrating 25 Years of IPPN, our president Louise, past president Damian White, Donal Kerins and myself are working hard to help provide access to existing support groups for the 700 principals and deputy principals who have indicated an interest in joining one, and to set up new support groups where needed. Indeed, at today's DPMeet seminar, Rachel Burke, who is deputy principal of Kildare Educate Together, will address how she and colleagues set up a support group for DPs in Kildare. Well done to Rachel, her colleague Barbara Elwood, and many others who have similarly established support groups in their own local area.



A key focus of the Roadshow workshops is the **P-I-E-W Capacity Analysis Framework**, or P-I-E-W, because we genuinely believe that it can help move the dial on the sustainability of school leadership. P-I-E-W, together with the other resources I've already mentioned, provides you with a powerful toolkit to help you maintain your focus on your school's priorities.

The reality is that in every Organisation, every CEO and every Manager in every sector is expected to do more than can realistically be achieved or should be expected of them.

The framework provides an internal strategic approach to managing change, using the school self-evaluation, School Improvement Planning, and DEIS planning processes. We believe that P I E W can support and empower you to better manage the pace of change and help make your leadership more effective and sustainable. IPPN developed it because school leadership is a challenging and sometimes lonely job.



That's why the Network was formed 25 years ago. It's the reason why local support groups were set up all over the country. Having a supportive network has helped so many of us over the past 25 years.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in your counties in the coming months to mark the occasion of 25 Years of IPPN and I look forward to telling you more about P-I-E-W, the Guide to Leading Teaching and Learning, our Leadership Effectiveness Reflection Tool and the Local Support Group Project. If you need any further incentive, there may also be cake!

Finally, later this year, IPPN will launch a **new Strategic Plan** for the period 2026 to 2030. The next set of strategic priorities will build on the current ones and we will of course be asking for your input to those priorities in the coming months.

I'll leave you with a quote that has resonated strongly with me over the past few years as I've engaged more proactively with Nancy Kline, who founded the Time to Think Foundation.

I've been reflecting a lot about it as the world seems to be on the brink of a complete crisis of leadership.

***"The quality of everything we do depends on the quality of the thinking we do first. The quality of our thinking depends on the way we treat each other while we are thinking."***

In that spirit, IPPN will continue to advocate on your behalf and to provide you with supports to enhance your leadership capacity, your leadership effectiveness and the sustainability of your leadership role to the benefit of the children in your schools.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.