

Pat Goff – President's Speech

Is mian liom fáilte mhór chroíúil a chur romhaibh uile anseo don séú comhdháil de phríomhoidí thainisteacha. Is onóir speisialta domsa bheith anseo mar Uachtarán de Líonra Phríomhoidí Bunscoile Éireann. Mar is eol daoibh, tá an chomhdháil ag bailiú nirt o bhliain go bliain. Tugann sé ardú chroí dom um trathnóna sibhse go léir a fheiceáil os mo chómhair.

Tá an tír seo i dtrioblóid, gan morán airgead, ach beidh orainn mar chinnirí, obair le chéile chun dóchas a choiméad beo i measc páistí, múinteoirí, tuismitheoirí agus pobail ár scoileanna. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh taitneamh, tacaíocht, misneach agus spreagadh as an gcomhdháil – Tugann sé seans dúinn casadh le seanchairde agus buaileadh le cairde nua freisin.

Deputy Principals, Principals, guests, I welcome you here to Citywest to our largest ever gathering of Deputy Principals. It is indeed a pleasure to see so many of you at a Deputy Principals Conference for the first-time. The theme of our conference is '*Stepping up to Leadership*'. You have already been doing this in what has been a turbulent year in and out of school. Our greatest challenge for this school year is to be leaders, when morale might be low so that we can ensure that our pupils do not pay for this recession, and that our schools will provide quality learning, even with fewer resources? How we react to this challenge may be our defining moment as school leaders.

There is a saying that '*A positive attitude may not solve all of your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort*'. Remember every day is a good day, if you don't think so, try missing one! You have the choice to be an optimist or a pessimist. I'm an optimist, I have to be, I am from Wexford.

There is room in life too for the pessimists. The optimist invented the aeroplane, the pessimist invented the parachute. The other great thing about pessimists is you can borrow money from them – they won't expect it back?

Education Cuts and their Impact

Schools are busy and efficient organisations, but look what has happened to us in the last year:

- The huge reduction in the number of EAL posts has had a profound impact on the newcomer children and also on every other child in those classes.
- The few Supply panels that existed around the country are to be disbanded.
- Everyone has paid a price for the recklessness of the few, but unfortunately we Principals and Deputy Principals have paid the highest price. If you include the pension levy and the non-payment of the benchmarking award, our incomes are down a full 19%.
- We now have pupils from other countries, with or without English, pupils with Special Educational Needs, pupils with emotional and behavioural needs, pupils from a disadvantaged background. Yes, the mix of pupils has changed, but so has our resources and not for the better.

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- There was SNA support for those pupils that needed that extra help to allow them be part of a mainstream class, before the many reviews. Withdrawing supports from these special educational needs pupils affects the whole class and the progress of every pupil in that class. It is false economy to define the needs of special needs pupils in such a narrow way as to make it almost impossible to access resources. As I speak, there seems to be a policy of death by stealth to some of our Special Schools, especially those that cater for pupils with Mild Learning difficulties. What will be the ultimate cost to society of short-changing our most vulnerable children?
- The General Allocation Model is now catering for an extra 55,000 pupils. Many of you here today work in Learning Support or manage the support in your school. You know how thin the resources are spread in many schools – yet the DES tell us that there are no cuts in Special Education – the reality on the ground tells us a different story.
- The moratorium on posts of responsibility has also had an enormous impact on many schools and especially on the workload of Principals and Deputy Principals. I have heard many cases where the work of five people has now become the work of two – and we all know which two! This is just not sustainable.

Take your own role as Deputy Principal for example. Not alone is your workload increasing, but at times there is no clear vision of your role. Some schools use a model of shared leadership or team leadership or distributed leadership or co-leadership. In other schools, there is missed opportunity. We can all agree that your workload is very full; especially as with 70% of Principals you also have full teaching duties. Your 'post' duties may range from routine and lower order that does little to enhance leadership status, to true shared leadership where rotation of duties is normal practice. Irrespective of the 'list of duties' what is far more important is the ethos of the school. What I mean by ethos is the style of leadership of both the Principal and the Deputy Principal and the bedrock of trust on which it is built.

John West Burnham states that *'Of all the personal qualities of a leader, trust is probably the most important. It is difficult to envisage any aspect of leadership work that is not profoundly dependent on trust – indeed it could be argued that it would be impossible for leaders to work without trust'*.

Once embedded in the culture of the school, trust works to free people to be their best, to give others their best, and to take risks. John West Burnham states that the most important type of trust is relational, rather than just contractual. This type of trust is based on Respect, Competence, Personal regard for one another, and Integrity.

Trust and support for one another does not solve everything, but it helps overcome many workload issues, and it definitely makes our schools a more pleasant working environment.

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Leadership Succession

Leadership is a journey rather than a position, and it is not something you do to people but something you do with people. Many of you are newly appointed this year, filling the leadership vacancies created by your colleagues that took up the role of Principal in the last year. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there will be many more appointments to Principalship this year due to the continuing exodus. I sincerely hope that many of you will fill those vacancies.

Our schools need people of your quality to take the next step – you know the tough job it is, but it is also one of the most rewarding. The DES has not helped in this regard with the serious downsizing of LDS, the Leadership Development for Schools programme. The Tánaiste programme is no longer available, but IPPN over the coming year will be attempting to fill this void with a comprehensive new programme of Continuous Professional Development.

Later in the conference you will have an opportunity to tell us what you need – from a professional viewpoint, and what we can do for you.

Child Protection

The Ryan and Murphy reports make grim reading. As you know, I work in the Diocese of Ferns where we are no strangers to this type of report. Yet it was horrific – there is no other word to describe it. We in IPPN publicly stated that anyone in a position of responsibility in schools who did not put children first should step aside from their role in schools.

As Edmund Burke said, *'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing'*.

There were many new Deputy Principals appointed this year – how many of those have had training as Deputy Designated Liaison Persons? Has your school ensured that all new staff members are aware of the school's policy and procedures on Child Protection? Do they all know who the DLP and Deputy DLP are? Does your school put it on the agenda of your staff and Board of Management meetings?

The Child Protection Guidelines now in force must be immediately put on a statutory footing. We owe this to our current pupils and to future generations of Irish children, it is a basic human right.

IPPN – The First Decade

IPPN is ten years old this year. We have a committed, support office staff that is second to none, with a new support office just opened.

What a decade it has been!

Many of you will have your own memories:

The wars, the treaties, the tribunals, the reports! NAMA.

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It was a decade when more legislation for schools was enacted than all the previous decades put together – Education Act, Education Welfare Act, Equal Status Act, EPSN Act. We have also accumulated so many more acronyms, such as -SNAs, SENOs, SNOs – might need to have a different definition of SNOs this year.

It is hard to remember a time when there was no IPPN Support Office, no Leadership+, no website, no e-scéals or texts, no networking mailing list... no TextaParent, no TextaSub, no EducationPosts.ie saving schools millions of euro – a decade of changes for the better, an example of real leadership in action by Principals and Deputy Principals for Principals and Deputy Principals.

IPPN is now a formal education partner and is now recognised as a leading Principals' organisation in Ireland, and indeed across the world. This is highlighted by the fact that Virginia O'Mahony, Past President and our Assistant Director, is the incoming President of ICP, the International Confederation of Principals. Congratulations Virginia, it is indeed a great honour for you, for IPPN and for all School Leaders in Ireland.

President McAleese told us in Killarney that *'Few groups in our society play such a critical role as you do as shapers of individual and collective destinies and as frontline absorbers of major change'*.

Children have a right to the very best education that we can give them. We must continue to provide an environment where they can grow and where every teacher can make a difference. Our children may not remember everything that we taught them, they will always remember how we treated them.

IPPN will be guided by such values. We will be there for each other in 2010 and IPPN will continue to be your strong and courageous voice.

As school leaders we will never ever apologise for being the voice of the children in our schools.

I will finish with the thoughts of George Washington Carver.

'How far you go in life depends on you being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because some day in life you will have been all of these'.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

ENDS