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THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE OF PRINCIPALS



## Principal as leader of learning or leader of administration?

*It is clear that we need to substantially raise Irish standards in numeracy and literacy and this must begin at primary level. This will not happen without significant effort and a singular focus. It simply cannot happen without the support and leadership of Principals who are focused on their role as leaders of learning.*

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# Principal as leader of learning or leader of administration?

By Seán Cottrell and Gerry Murphy



All the research highlights the pivotal importance of highly-educated school leavers and the key skills they need to bring to the economy, including literacy, numeracy, IT, entrepreneurship, lateral thinking, problem-solving, communication, independent learning, creativity as well as mental health and physical fitness.

The foundation for these skills is built in primary school. It is too late to develop these skills at second level if the basics are not already in place. We are all aware that literacy and numeracy outcomes are not where they should be. Leaving aside the concerns about the PISA assessment process, it is clear that we need to substantially raise Irish standards in numeracy and literacy and this must begin at primary level. This will not happen without significant effort and a singular focus. It simply cannot happen without the support and leadership of principals who are focused on their role as leaders of learning.

Irish and international research literature identifies the principal as the most pivotal role in primary education. Principals have a long-term influence in their schools and are pivotal in developing the school's culture and ethos. While the teacher-child relationship is extremely important, the relationship between the principal and the teaching staff has the strongest bearing on children's learning in the longer term. Principals are central to the appointment of teachers; they influence new teachers through induction and mentoring programmes and they support and encourage experienced teachers throughout their career. Furthermore, principals reconfigure the full teaching team each year, seeking the best balance of experience, knowledge and skill to address the learning needs of children across the whole school.

As Professor Michael Fullan states in *Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality 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.'

In some ways, it could be said that principalship has become a victim of its own success. It is now acknowledged that for any initiative to be implemented and sustained it must have the backing and leadership of the principal. Consequently, the responsibility for almost all change initiatives is added to the already overloaded principal's role.

In well-regarded education jurisdictions such as New Zealand, Ontario and Finland, the instructional leadership role of the principal is considered to have ultimate importance. The appointment of skilled administrators is linked to the staffing schedule. Administrators are trained to a high level of competence, which releases principals from a multitude of administrative tasks. In Ireland, the inadequacy of administrative and caretaking support is diluting the impact that a principal can have on the work that goes on in a classroom. Principals often end up dealing with renting prefabs, counting sick days, providing statistical information to the Department and other agencies, sourcing supplies and fixing IT problems rather than being able to focus on reading strategies,

maths for fun, special educational needs, whole-school curriculum planning and healthy eating and exercise in the school – leading learning, in other words. This is worsened by the erosion of middle management over the past few years. It took many schools several years to create a more distributed form of leadership and increased capacity through the introduction of middle management roles. Regrettably, as schools are no longer allowed to fill the thousands of vacant positions arising from retirements, this leadership and management capacity is rapidly disappearing from schools – which compounds the problem of addressing falling standards.

Excellent teachers know that to address the problem, they need to work cohesively in a whole school approach. Principals can and should be entrusted with this task, but if it is to have a chance of success, they must be freed up from mundane administrative tasks.

This is not a complex problem. School administration and caretaking roles have their own required skill sets and are essential to the functioning of any school, however not all schools have adequate resource levels or skills in these areas. Up-skilling ancillary roles with appropriate training and supports will enable administrative staff to support principals more effectively, which will make a very positive difference to school leadership and management capacity.

Editor: Damian White  
Deputy Editor: Geraldine D'Arcy  
Assistant Editor: Brendan McCabe  
Comments and articles to editor@ippn.ie  
Advertising: Louise O'Brien louise.obrien@ippn.ie

Irish Primary Principals' Network  
Glounthaune, Co Cork  
1890 21 22 23 | www.ippn.ie

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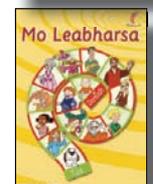
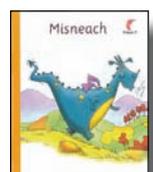
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# Legal Diary

by David Ruddy, B.L.



## Court rules in favour of school principal in dismissal case

**CATHY MCSORLEY  
V  
THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION &  
SKILLS AND OTHERS  
&  
COUNTY KILKENNY VEC**

**HIGH COURT 2012 - MR JUSTICE J  
HEDIGAN**

### THE FACTS

Cathy McSorley was appointed principal of Kilkenny City Vocational school in 1999. Many of the pupils would be deemed to be marginalised and disadvantaged. There was also a high level of absenteeism and truancy. There had been a history of unrest between various parties in the school prior to Ms McSorley's appointment. In fact the previous principal resigned. Four years after the principal's appointment there were a number of allegations made against the principal.

### THE INQUIRY

The Minister for Education at the time decided to hold an inquiry into the performance of the principal in relation to the following matters:

1. The organisation and administration of that school in the area of staffing
2. The alleged failure of Ms McSorley to effectively apply the school's disciplinary policy
3. The alleged engagement by Ms McSorley in the bullying of staff members
4. The alleged failure of Ms McSorley to comply with the lawful orders of the VEC
5. The administration of the school by Ms McSorley with regard to recording of roll books and the supervision of a foreign trip by the school in 2001
6. The alleged payment by Ms McSorley to enrolled students to attend the school.

The inquiry was conducted by Mr Torlach O'Connor, a retired Assistant Chief Inspector. Ms McSorley fully and actively engaged with the inquiry. A report making a number of findings against the principal was furnished to the Minister.

A Departmental memorandum was prepared by the Minister's advisor and attached to the report. The Minister, having considered the report and advice, wrote to Ms McSorley to inform her that he had formed a provisional opinion that she was 'unfit to hold office'. The Minister invited a response from Ms McSorley which was forthcoming. After consideration of the response and further advice of Departmental officials, the Minister remained of the opinion that she was unfit to hold office. The VEC wrote to the principal and informed her that her salary would cease on 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2011.

*Mr O'Connor also found the VEC culpable in failing to support and/or train the principal in her post in relation to financial matters.*

The Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 1944 allows the Minister to remove a principal on two specific grounds:

- a. Unfitness to hold office
- b. Refusal to carry into effect a lawful order or misconduct.

### THE PRINCIPAL'S APPEAL

The principal submitted that there was no finding against her on the basis of the six issues originally listed in relation to the inquiry. The inquiry basically confined itself to eight grounds. The inquiry now concentrated on certain new matters concerning possible financial improprieties.

It was in relation to three of these that adverse findings were made resulting in the Minister's decision to dismiss Ms McSorley. The terms of reference in the inquiry were enlarged by Mr O'Connor. He took the decision not to concentrate on the original grounds on the basis that they related to events of nine years standing,

were known to the VEC, and that the VEC did not act appropriately in dealing with the complaints against the principal.

Mr O'Connor, despite the adverse findings, did not recommend the removal or dismissal of Ms McSorley. In fact he made comments of a very positive nature about her and her abilities and concluded that she was 'a very considerable force for good in the school' and also found that 'there is no doubting her commitment to the school and her efforts to turn around a school which, when she took over as principal, was in serious decline as a consequence of both internal and external pressures'. He also stated that Ms McSorley had introduced a number of initiatives aimed at tackling some of the disadvantage experienced by pupils, such as a breakfast and lunch club, and especially a programme for seriously disadvantaged students experiencing difficulties with formal schooling.

Mr O'Connor also found the VEC culpable in failing to support and/or train the principal in her post in relation to financial matters. It was only in recent years that guidelines were issued for the management of school accounts. There had never been any question of financial gain for the principal or loss to the VEC. The report was explicit in finding that there was no financial loss suffered by the school and, in fact acknowledged that the principal had to expend her own private resources for the benefit of students and the school.

### JUDGEMENT

Mr Justice Hedigan stated 'As the adverse findings against the principal were in respect of events up until 2003 coupled and balanced against her apparently very satisfactory performance of her duties as principal in the time between, there is in the decision to remove her from her post, a manifest disproportionality that requires the court to intervene. There must be an order to quash the decision of the Minister to dismiss the principal from her position.'



### OBSERVATION

This case highlights the need for comprehensive training for newly appointed principals. Well-intentioned individuals can make decisions which can land them in all sorts of trouble.

### PRINCIPALS AND SELF PROTECTION

Over the last eighteen months several hundred new principals have been appointed in schools all over the country. Each school is unique in terms of size, pupil intake and socio-economic background. Each newly appointed principal is unique in terms of experience and expertise. Everyone will face different challenges and in most cases positive outcomes will result. It is essential that there should be good housekeeping rules that protect you and your school from possible allegations of negligence / misconduct. The

following suggestions, some of which may seem obvious, may be helpful:

1. Never act as Treasurer of a Board of Management.
2. Never be the sole signatory to a school bank account
3. Ensure that the school Child Protection Policy is up to date and brought to the attention of all staff, including temporary staff and ancillary staff. Staff should acknowledge in writing that they have read same.
4. Avoid having one to one contact with a pupil
5. Ensure that all new staff and substitutes are vetted and that Statutory Declarations and Letters of Undertaking are in place
6. Ensure that agendas and minutes of staff meetings are recorded and filed
7. Ensure that there is at least one qualified

Occupational First Aider on staff

8. Publish a summary of the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy in the Pupil's Journal. Read the NEWB Guidelines and be familiar with the concept of 'fair procedures' and 'due process'
9. Stick rigidly to the school's 'Admission and Participation' or 'Enrolment' policy in relation to admission of pupils to the school
10. Ensure that pupils with allocated low incident hours are receiving access to resource teaching
11. Ensure that there are regular fire drills and that the Health and Safety Statement is observed
12. Retain and file yard duty rosters along with accident reports
13. Seek advice and help from IPPN, INTO, Management, and Patron Bodies where necessary.

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Each book consists of 120 single-page units, arranged into 30 sections (one per week of the school year). Each page is a vibrant stand-alone piece, with a variety of styles and themes to appeal to all tastes and interests.



# Maths Teaching in Your School: Questions to Clarify and Change Practice

by Seán Delaney, Registrar, Marino Institute of Education



Only changes in practice – not changes to written school plans – can change what children learn. A good school plan is a written record of discussion among teachers in a school about how a subject is taught, learned and assessed. Each school must decide when the discussion takes place, and for how long it lasts. New teachers and inspectors may want to see the written plan, but only those who experienced the discussion can appreciate the plan's full value. Here are thirteen questions to generate discussion about mathematics teaching. Use the answers to revise your school plan and guide the teaching of maths in your school.

## 1. How are number facts – tables – taught and tested throughout the school?

Before leaving primary school, all children must know their number facts, from  $1+0$  to  $100\div 10$ . Learning tables by rote works well for some children. But learning tables is an inefficient way of learning number facts when applying the commutative property would halve the number of addition and multiplication facts to be learned. Learning tables also conceals relationships between addition and subtraction facts; once you know that  $3+4=7$  and  $4+3=7$ , you should also know that  $7-4=3$  and  $7-3=4$ . How is knowledge of number facts assessed?

## 2. What algorithms (recipes for doing calculations) for each operation are preferred/used?

Is decomposition or equal additions (borrow and pay back) used to subtract? Why? What prior knowledge is needed for the method used? If decomposition, how are awkward numbers such as  $2000-78$  done? What language is used in teacher demonstrations? What about division, multiplication, addition?

## 3. How is children's mathematical language developed?

Do teachers encourage children to talk about maths? Help children learn maths terms, such as odd number, rectangle, average, by developing, displaying and modifying "working definitions" together in class. Teach explicitly words that have different meanings in maths like factor, face, odd.

## 4. How are problems used in class and where can you get good problems?

Children can learn mathematics by solving well-chosen problems; children needn't be shown what to do before they solve a problem. Learners only

get good at problem solving by solving problems. In tests children must decide which operation to use when solving problems; in textbooks, multiplication problems are mostly found at the end of the multiplication chapter, removing an important decision for learners. Solving and discussing one good problem a day can be more effective than solving several routine problems. Find problems at <http://nrich.maths.org/public/> and <http://www.nctm.org/resources/content.aspx?id=16387> (subscription needed for this one).

## 5. How are individual differences accommodated?

Choose open-ended problems that children can attempt at different levels (e.g. I have 5-cent, 2-cent and 1-cent coins in my money box. If I take out three coins, how much could I have?). If a child has a condition that affects a competence needed for learning maths (e.g. memory, attention or psycho-motor skills), how will the teaching compensate for the affected competence? Children can help each other to learn by explaining their ideas and having others express the ideas in their own words.

## 6. What opportunities do staff have to develop their teaching methods and their own mathematical knowledge?

Although many teachers had no opportunity to learn maths for teaching in college, most CPD opportunities focus on developing teaching methods. Discuss with colleagues problems such as these and create similar problems for discussion: [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/lmt/files/LMT\\_sample\\_items.pdf](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/lmt/files/LMT_sample_items.pdf). Watch the documentary *Fermat's Last Theorem* on YouTube, and discuss its relevance for teaching. Join [www.nctm.org](http://www.nctm.org) and subscribe to the journal *Teaching Children Mathematics* for articles about maths teaching.

## 7. How are children's mathematical skills developed?

Are children asked to reason in response to questions such as why? How do you know? Can you put that into your own words?

## 8. How do teachers motivate children to learn maths?

Children learn more and learn better when they are motivated to do so. How does your school motivate children to see themselves as people who are good at maths?

## 9. How is maths assessed?

How are standardised test results used to plan future teaching and to inform parents? What other forms of assessment complement standardised test results? Do children self-assess?

## 10. What kind of written and oral feedback do learners receive?

Photocopy a page from a child's maths copy; ask all teachers to respond to it in writing as they usually would. Which responses help most? Identify principles for responding to children's written maths work. Do teachers tell children if their answers are right or wrong? Children's independent learning can be helped when they say if they are confident in their answer and why.

## 11. How do textbooks help teachers in responding to the questions above?

What textbooks are used? What are their limitations? How do teachers overcome the limitations? Are the textbooks followed diligently from task to task and from page to page?

## 12. What role is envisaged for parents in developing their children's knowledge of mathematics?

How can parents complement the work of school? How can they create high expectations in maths for their child? How much help should they give with homework? Are parents consulted about the plan? Do they know the answers to the questions above? What is said and written about children's maths performance in parent-teacher meetings and in school reports?

## 13. What do you want to achieve in teaching maths?

Maths teaching can promote disciplined thinking among children. What are the maths teaching goals in this school? What is the time frame for achieving them? How will you know if the goals are achieved?

These questions might be difficult to answer. But engaging, even with some of them, and recording the discussion should contribute to a school plan that can change practice.

*Seán's research interests are in mathematical knowledge for teaching, teacher education and mathematics textbooks. His website is [www.seandelaney.com](http://www.seandelaney.com). You can contact Seán by email to [sean.delaney@mie.ie](mailto:sean.delaney@mie.ie).*



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# Now why didn't I think of that?

By Seán Cottrell



A few years ago while visiting the city of Ottawa I had an opportunity to visit some schools – a ‘busman’s holiday’ if ever there was one. Being truthful, if we didn’t have the opportunity to visit other schools, the chances of observing and adopting good practice are reduced.

*Ask each teacher to identify children who fit under this category of unique needs/ medical conditions – typical examples include epilepsy, diabetes and life-threatening allergies*

We were shown the staffroom of a city centre school which had a high percentage of children for whom English was not their first tongue. The principal informed us that they also have a high turnover of staff and that, at a planning meeting, they identified a health and safety risk arising from having many new teachers who don’t know the children or, in some cases, their basic needs. To counter this, they placed a display board in the staffroom with A4 size photographs of approximately a dozen boys and girls ranging from 4 to 15 year olds. Below each photograph is the child’s name, parents’ names and numerous contact details (parents, minders, GP), a brief description of their medical condition, where their medication is stored, who is authorised to access and/ or administer the medication and whether specific training is a requirement to administer the medication. Some of the photographs also contain other detailed information to be given to paramedics if the child has to be hospitalised in a hurry.

At first glance it wasn’t obvious to me from across the staff room what the photographic display was about. On hearing the explanation, the light bulb went on in my head and I figured this was a wonderful idea and yet so simple. Day in, day out new teachers observe these photographs in the staff room and attention is drawn to them by senior teachers. The purpose of the photograph is purely to optimise the level of instant recognition, all the other written detail plays a secondary role to the knowledge that the child has unique and important differences to bear in mind.

*If the parent supplies a photograph and other requested details, in effect they are giving their consent to display it.*

In addition, they introduced a process to ensure that when a teacher is on sick leave and a substitute teacher has one of these children in his/her class, the teacher automatically refers to a senior teacher before proceeding with any intervention.

If implementing such a practice in your school, it might be worth considering a few points:

1. Ask each teacher to identify children who fit under this category of unique needs/ medical conditions – typical examples include epilepsy,

diabetes and life-threatening allergies – rather than more routine conditions such as mild asthma or intolerance to wheat or dairy products

2. Show a mock-up template to the parents of the children you have in mind
3. Invite the parents to fill in the details – assuming they are agreeable to your plan
4. In order to maximise recognition of a child from their photograph, introduce one photograph per week and, when complete, rotate photographs regularly.

Naturally, parents have the right not to have their child’s photograph on the staff room display area. This point should be made in the letter sent to parents requesting contact details, medical condition (and related details as outlined above) and photograph. If the parent supplies a photograph and other requested details, in effect they are giving their consent to display it.

This idea is incredibly simple. If your school has other simple but clever ideas, why not share them with 3,300 fellow principals? Email your ideas to [geraldine.darcy@ippn.ie](mailto:geraldine.darcy@ippn.ie).

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# Your School and Printing

## IPPN National Support Office Case Study

Because of IPPN's organic growth over the last 10 years, the addition of new hardware to our IT and administrative infrastructure was somewhat ad hoc. We moved from having one master PC with one attached 'slave' PC to a server (stored in a hot press!) with 3, 4 then 5 and eventually 11 PCs networked as new staff came on board. Additional staff and additional PCs naturally led to a dramatic increase in printing requirements.

In the early days, as with schools, we reacted to the needs of our members, with the printers and copiers meeting our immediate requirements. Our National Support Office aimed to find and acquire printers and copiers as cheaply as possible, if not for free.

Expenditure on toner cartridges and other print related consumables, typically fall under on-going revenue expenditure, which can often slip under the radar when undertaking a cost review. The annual cost of running and

keeping our printers and copiers in toner, cartridges, drums and all the other consumables, when analysed, took up an exorbitant amount of our budget.

Today, with 11 workstations at IPPN's National Support Office, all networked to a main server – the same set up now applies to our print. We have networked all staff to a centralised, fast, well-featured, easy to use, cost-effective, colour multi-function printer. A multi-function printer is what the name suggests – a printer that offers additional functions, typically printing, copying and scanning – with fax as an optional extra – a printer which is fast and very inexpensive to use.

We have the print default settings – to print on both sides of the page, to output in black and white and at a lower resolution – to reduce the number of pages printed, to eliminate inadvertent colour printing and save on toner. Printing in colour or on single pages

now requires an additional keystroke – a simple process that saves money.

This is considered best practice. Your current IT infrastructure or the geography of your school, among other factors, may dictate a variation on this approach and a change in work habits, but ultimately, it will save your school a lot of money.

In 2011, IPPN partnered with EMS Copiers in managing our print requirements. Their service is exceptional; with a same day or early next day turnaround on our delivery and service requirements for our National Support Office based in Cork.

There are many other facilities and solutions available to you from EMS Copiers relevant to your specific needs and requirements. You can contact EMS Copiers on 1890 770 770, by e-mail to [info@emscopiers.ie](mailto:info@emscopiers.ie) or online at [www.emscopiers.ie](http://www.emscopiers.ie).



EMS Copiers – Preferred supplier of copiers, printers and multi-function devices to IPPN's National Support Office, Cork

# Principal Advice Seeing the wood from the trees

by Angela Lynch, Principal Advice Manager



Sometimes it is so hard to see the wood from the trees.

A parent approaches you in an agitated state, saying that she does not want Ms. X teaching her child for the coming year.

You have a very unhappy teacher, who is refusing to accept the class allocated to him/her.

The Chairperson of the Board of Management tells you that he/she has been contacted by a group of parents who are unhappy with the way the school is being run and has agreed to meet them the following day.

One staff member is taking a Grievance Procedure against another staff member alleging bullying.

You have a very difficult relationship with the school secretary, who is threatening to involve the union.

You are a teaching principal who is overwhelmed by the pressure to maintain levels of enrolment and your health is suffering due to the demands of your role.

It could be child protection, recruitment or conflict management of any kind, the list is endless. Common to all these scenarios, is the stress and the energy that is expended in trying to manage all these issues. They drain you. Unless correctly handled, they will impact greatly on the teaching and learning in the school. This is where the Principal Advice Panel may be able to help. Each member of the panel is a principal, who in the course of their working lives will probably have come across these issues. Calls of this kind are received on a daily basis in the Support Office. Some of them are of a factual nature and may be answered by a member of the Support Office team or by email. Others need a safe confidential space to discuss the matter and explore the various options. You will be engaging with someone well experienced in dealing with these human relationship management and conflict resolution issues. It is virtually certain that they will have encountered similar problems themselves in the course of their working lives in school.

## HOW TO USE THE PRINCIPAL ADVICE SERVICE

You can access the Principal Advice service by contacting the IPPN Support Office on 1890 21 22 23. Your call will be logged and a member of the Principal Advice Panel will return your call within 24 hours, Monday to Friday. Sometimes your call may require an urgent response. Conscious of the fact that three out of four members are teaching principals and that the members of the Advice Panel are themselves working principals, I ask that you would indicate the most suitable time for a call back and the number on which you want to be contacted. Please ensure that if you are using a mobile number, it is kept switched on. If contact cannot be made after 2 attempts, you will be advised by text or email to resubmit your query to the Support Office. To give some idea of the Principal Advice service, from the 1st September 2011 to the end of July 2012, over 1600 calls were logged to the Principal Advice Panel alone, not including factual queries such as circulars, events and technical issues.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Sometimes the advice you seek may not require a conversation. It may be factual or could be answered by email. For this reason [advice@ippn.ie](mailto:advice@ippn.ie) is available to you. This email service is facilitated by members of the Principal Advice Panel only, yet the advice given is available to all principals subscribed to that mailing list. Refer to the protocols in relation to mailing lists on page X.

## PLANNING PROMPTS AND RESOURCE BUNDLES

During the past year, the new principals' mailing list has included weekly 'planning prompts'. For the coming year, these planning prompts will also be posted on [networking@ippn.ie](mailto:networking@ippn.ie) and may be helpful with your planning. In addition, a number of 'Resource Bundles' will be placed on the IPPN website. The first of these is on the topic of recruitment and appointment of staff. The provision of these bundles, which has all available information on particular topics in one place, is a priority for IPPN this year. These bundles will be your first port of call when it comes to queries of a procedural nature.

Since last September, when first appointed to the position of Principal Advice Manager, I have had the privilege of engaging with many highly-committed and dedicated principals, some of whom have been experiencing difficult times. I have learned so much from you and I continue to be inspired and committed, together with my colleagues in the Support Office team and principals on the Principal Advice Panel, to serving you in any way I can. If you need help, please call us and allow us to support you. We work together for one purpose – chun 'tacaíocht, misneach agus spreagadh a thabhairt dá chéile'.



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It is advised at the start of any recruitment process that you check with the DES to ascertain if the post is warranted and to check with your local panel operator/diocesan office to ascertain the status of the panel. The BoM may be required to appoint from a panel. If the panel is clear the BoM can then be given permission to advertise the position. The recruitment process as per Appendix D of Constitution of Boards & Rules of Procedure 2011 may then be completed.

- If you have a maternity leave post to fill remember that this is a substitute position but should be properly advertised
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Leading and Learning

# A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs

By Sarah Jane Flaherty, Healthy Food for All



Healthy Food for All (HfFA) is an all-island initiative seeking to combat food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. HfFA has developed *A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs*, which provides practical advice on setting up and running breakfast clubs in schools and community settings. The Guide will be launched on September 13th and will be available to download from [www.healthyfoodforall.com](http://www.healthyfoodforall.com).

Breakfast has long been considered the 'most important meal of the day'. In the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Report*, 13% of Irish school children report that they never eat breakfast on a weekday, with a marked increase seen in those from lower social classes, girls and older children. This same study found that 21% of school children report going to bed or school hungry as there is not enough food at home. Skipping breakfast is reported to affect

cognition, memory, concentration and behaviour in school. Children going to school hungry cannot fully participate in class, which can have a detrimental impact on their personal, cognitive, social and educational development. There are a number of reasons why children do not eat breakfast. These include poor appetite in early morning, family tension at breakfast time, working parents who need to drop children, and lack of food in the home. Breakfast clubs are a great opportunity to ensure that children who may not have breakfast before attending school do so.

Breakfast clubs have been linked to a range of benefits. They are shown to have a positive impact on school attendance and punctuality. Breakfast clubs have been cited as the fourth most effective intervention of the School Completion Programme, which aims to support young people at risk of early school leaving.

Breakfast clubs are more than just a means of providing food to children. They are an opportunity to engage with children and parents on an informal basis and can be an important support service for many families.

*A Good Practice Guide for Breakfast Clubs* provides a step-by-step guide on setting up and running a breakfast club, including case studies of existing clubs to show how they work in different settings. HfFA hopes that this guide is informative and practical and will help schools and community groups to set up and run breakfast clubs in their local area and provide a positive support to many families in their community.



# ICT Tips

## Interactive whiteboard and projector maintenance

By Colin Vaughn



In recent years schools have invested greatly in technology and practically every school in the country now has a projector and/or an interactive whiteboard (IWB) in each classroom. IWBs and projectors have in many cases replaced the traditional whiteboards and it is important to ensure that they function correctly and are maintained to ensure long life and reliability.

### IWBs

The whiteboards themselves tend to be very reliable, requiring very little maintenance; some problems can arise with connectivity problems between the laptop/PC and whiteboard. Unplugging and reconnecting the USB plug resolves the majority of problems, however it doesn't resolve all problems. Driver files located on the computer allow communication to the IWB. These can sometimes become corrupt or lost. Updating the driver will resolve practically all problems. Most IWB manufacturers have a website presence and release driver updates which are usually located on their support or downloads page. Updating the drivers is usually a simple step by step process and takes a few minutes. Note: The drivers need to be updated on each PC that connects to each whiteboard.

### PROJECTORS

Projectors tend to be very reliable and will run for years if properly maintained. They run at very high temperatures and have built-in cooling fans which work to cool the lamp and internal components. These fans can allow up to fifty cubic meters of air pass through a typical projector in a day and most projectors have filters which collect and trap dust before entering the projector. Filter cleaning is most important yet often ignored. Most manufacturers have recommended intervals for cleaning these filters and it is good practice to check and clean these on a monthly basis.

On the older Sanyo & Promethean projectors, for example, there are usually two filters, one to the front and one to the rear of the projector. While the rear filter is relatively easy to see and remove, the front one tends to be ignored as it can be difficult to find and awkward to remove. To clean these filters, the projector must first be powered down and allowed to cool. Remove and blow out excess dust, for stubborn dust a small art brush can be handy to remove any build-up.

It is also good practice to periodically clean the projector casing and lens. Again with the projector

powered down, an art brush, feather duster and soft cloth can be used to clean around the projector and the collection of dust that can accumulate on the top surface. Most camera/chemist shops can provide soft lint-free cloths for wiping the lens area. A vacuum cleaner can be used to remove heavier deposits of dust. Avoid using any form of abrasive cleaners and never spray air or fluids into the projector.

Some projectors over time will become noisy, dull and faded which makes it difficult to view the image, particularly on bright days. In some cases the lamp may be due for replacement. Lamp hours can be checked on the projector settings menu; a typical lamp should last in excess of 2,000 hours. The likely cause for poor and faded images is dust ingress and build-up on the optical components. The dust build-up on the fans makes the projector much noisier as the fans must work harder to maintain cooling. After 3 to 4 years of continuous service, the projector may be in need of a service or 'optical clean'. An optical/internal clean is a specialist task which, in most cases, will return the projector to its former glory - it prolongs the life of the lamp and the projector and should ensure many more years of happy and reliable service.



# Physical Education: Challenges and Possibilities



## The Current Situation

Schools are busy places, where tremendous energy is put into the creation of stimulating learning environments. School communities are faced with considerable challenges in addressing the current emphasis on literacy and numeracy, while at the same time covering all other areas of the curriculum. In that context, this article argues for the importance of a comprehensive physical education (PE) programme in Irish primary schools.

International research points to the positive effects of physical activity for children. Regular participation in appropriate activities can be beneficial for a child's physical, social and intellectual development. Involvement in regular physical activity at a young age may also help to establish lifelong patterns of activity. Current guidelines advise that children should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day, but concerns have been raised that most children's activity levels fall short of these targets.

Considering that children spend a sizeable proportion of their day in school, activities undertaken during school time can make a valuable contribution to their accumulation of daily physical activity. We suggest that a broad and balanced exploration of the PE curriculum should be at the core of children's learning, where they can acquire important physical and social skills and develop positive attitudes towards physical activity. The one hour per week designated for PE can make an important contribution to children's overall activity levels if the lessons taught are varied and well-structured, focusing on clear learning outcomes. This can then be supplemented by other organised activities that might take place during breaktimes and as part of a school's extra-curricular programme.

## Reflecting on the Principal's Role

The school principal has an important leadership role to play in the development of an inclusive PE and school sport philosophy. Ensuring that *all* children are given the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills should be central to that philosophy. Engaging in practices that promote PE and physical activity as key components of school life would be a good starting point. Embracing the concept of

*physical literacy* could provide the basis for a whole school approach focusing on the each child's holistic development. Private PE consultant Margaret Whitehead (see <http://www.physical-literacy.org.uk>) has described physical literacy as 'the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding' that enables the formation of lifelong patterns of physical activity.

Devoting time at an upcoming staff meeting to a discussion of your school's PE implementation might generate some interesting ideas. Perhaps one element for improvement could be prioritised for this school year?

*Considering that children spend a sizeable proportion of their day in school, activities undertaken during school time can make a valuable contribution to their accumulation of daily physical activity.*

The development of a whole school approach can also be assisted by some contemporary initiatives. The Department of Education and Skills currently promotes a model of school self-evaluation to evaluate and improve teaching and learning. Accordingly, participation in the Active School Flag (ASF) initiative is one way for schools to review current practice in PE, physical activity and school sport ([www.activeschoolflag.ie](http://www.activeschoolflag.ie)). The actions prompted by the ASF format can significantly improve provision in schools, and impact positively on children's experiences of physical activity.

The Irish Primary PE Association ([www.irishprimarype.com](http://www.irishprimarype.com)) has succeeded in raising teachers' awareness of a wide range of issues relating to PE, and the establishment of regional 'communities of practice' has provided teachers with opportunities for continuing professional development. The teacher-led structure of each community of practice ensures that the issues raised are directly relevant to the

local context and new ideas can filter back into schools quickly.

From a national perspective, the extension of the B Ed degree to four years from September 2012 has the potential to provide student teachers with more expertise in the teaching of PE. In particular, some students will be able to avail of additional elective modules leading to varying degrees of subject specialism. This provides a unique opportunity to build on the work already being done in our colleges to promote an inclusive model of PE based on key learning outcomes.

In practical terms, the work done by teachers during PE can be supported by promoting a physical activity 'atmosphere' throughout the school. The provision of physical activity notice boards, for example, can increase children's awareness of internal school events, and of events in the wider community. The creation of attractive outdoor play areas (through playground markings, climbing frames etc) is another way to develop positive attitudes towards physical activity. Finally, some schools have implemented structured breaktime activities led by teachers or, increasingly, by the children themselves. By designing a varied suite of activities, children can be motivated to participate in a range of individual and group activities.

The old adage 'A healthy mind in a healthy body' appropriately describes our vision for the development of a population of physically educated children. We encourage principals to reflect on a vision for their own schools that places PE at the centre of all children's learning through the provision of a comprehensive programme of physical activity founded on quality PE.

*This article has been written by members of the Colleges of Education Physical Education Consortium (CEPEC). CEPEC comprises of the PE lectures in Mary Immaculate College Limerick; St Patrick's College Drumcondra; Colaiste Mhuire Marino; Froebel College of Education; and Church of Ireland College of Education Rathmines. Correspondence should be addressed to Richard Bowles ([richard.bowles@mic.ul.ie](mailto:richard.bowles@mic.ul.ie)), PE Lecturer in Mary Immaculate College.*

# Principal in Profile: Brian Torpey, Principal, St Mochullas NS, Tulla, Co. Clare



Mr Torpey, you are the best principal ever'. What a wonderful way to start your day. The lovely greeting came from a 5 year old. What had I done to earn such a title? The previous day had been gloriously sunny and everyone was given an extra 20 minutes at lunch time. The day was starting out great.

One of the infant teachers is out sick. I am on my way over to check that everything is going okay with the sub when my phone rings, Damien White asking me to write a piece for Leadership+.

*Over the years we amalgamated with the local Convent, built an extension and have grown to a school with 277 boys and girls.*

I try to say no to some of the requests that come my way but saying no to IPPN is not one of them. Since I was appointed principal in 1995 I have had a great relationship with IPPN. At that time our school was a single sex school with 87 boys. Over the years we amalgamated with the local Convent, built an extension and have grown to a school with 277 boys and girls. Through those exciting times IPPN have always been there. From the first meeting we had with Jim Hayes and Seán Cottrell in a hotel in Ennis when we set up our networks, it has always been a great support.

The sub is doing very well and is getting great support from the teacher next door. As I get back to the office there is a parent waiting to speak with me. I always feel that when a parent comes to see me they have a reason for doing so therefore I try to make sure that I can give them enough time. 15 minutes later I am leaving the meeting and feeling in need of a lift. 277 pupils, 19 staff and sometimes a school can be a lonesome place. A Minsneach course I did told us to release the endorphins whenever we got the chance. Just then I hear the 5th class teacher playing 'Red is the Rose' on the piano and the class singing along. I step into the back of the room and join in. Those endorphins are great

things altogether.

I finally get into the office and lay out the day's work with the school secretary.

We are having a Croke park hour on Thursday and I need to circulate the agenda. I want to finalise our time table for these hours for next year. Also if the fine weather is to continue we will have to start planning our SESE trips; hurling today at lunch time for the younger

*Some staff asked me to start e-mailing the newsletter but I have described myself as the Archbishop Leferve of education, a stick in the mud traditionalist.*

classes. Get all this down on the Rolla sheet and send around to all. Some staff asked me to start e-mailing the newsletter but I have described myself as the Archbishop Leferve of education, a stick in the mud traditionalist. More have described me as a Luddite, a word I had to look up. The truth is I have to be comfortable with the way I work and make sure the important message is not lost in translation. A hard copy in the hand assures me that all have received the message.

11am. Time for a quick cup of tea and a chat.  
11.20 am. The first class teacher wants to send me up a group of children who have been making a great effort with their written work. Again another endorphin moment watching the eyes of the children light up as you praise them for their good work.

Lunch time and everyone is out enjoying the fine weather. There is no doubt about it but when the sun shines our little island is a piece of heaven.

1.30pm and another phone call. This time from a mother I have been working with regarding her son and some difficulties he is experiencing. We finish the call and I outline a course of action. I ask her to trust me that I will follow

through with it and she replies 'I trust you with my children every day', a thought that we should always keep in our minds.

Home time and I like to be out at the school gate to see everyone safely home. Two of the teachers are bringing the girls out to camogie training. We have a good team this year and the boys are progressing nicely.

Need to meet with the sub before she goes home and get her to sign all the necessary forms. The deputy principal and I are meeting at 3.30. She has recently been appointed and is approaching her job with infectious energy. She has introduced a reading programme, Accelerated Reader, to the school and it seems to be working very well. Will be a good finish to a good day.

Brian is contactable by email on [btorpey@stmochullas.com](mailto:btorpey@stmochullas.com)

The cover of the 'nature/art manual for primary schools' by Gordon D'Arcy. It features a blue background with the word 'NATURE' in large, colorful, block letters. Below the title are illustrations of a butterfly, a flower, a pencil, a bird, and a seahorse. The text 'nature/art manual for primary schools' is written in a blue, sans-serif font. The author's name 'Gordon D'Arcy' is at the bottom right. A yellow oval at the bottom contains the text 'See [www.gordondarcy.ie](http://www.gordondarcy.ie) For details and to order your copy'.

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# IPPN mailing lists - Your network at the click of a button

- [networking@ippn.ie](mailto:networking@ippn.ie)
- [advice@ippn.ie](mailto:advice@ippn.ie)
- [county e.g. Leitrim@ippn.ie](mailto:county.e.g.Leitrim@ippn.ie)  
newprincipals@ippn.ie (for principals appointed since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 only)

Following the summer break, we are pleased to announce that the IPPN mailing lists have been re-instated and are fully operational once more. These mailing lists are IPPN's own social network and your first point of contact for answers to many of those queries you encounter every day. By using the mailing lists, you are tapping into the collective knowledge of thousands of colleagues with a wealth of advice, information and support to offer.

*There is no question too great or small and you will undoubtedly connect with someone who has experienced what you are going through*

The following guidelines and protocols for using the IPPN mailing lists have been devised to make the mailing lists as effective as possible for members:

## PURPOSE

The IPPN mailing lists are designed as a support for principals.

*Their success is reliant on the goodwill, collegiality and professional integrity of the principals using them*

Colleagues use this service with an expectation of confidentiality and collegial support. We acknowledge and encourage the support and goodwill generated on these mailing lists and will continue to expect all postings to be professional in tone and nature at all times. Personalised comments, whether positive or negative, are not posted.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Mailing lists are *not* private – they depend on the integrity of members' use. Although only email addresses from current IPPN members have access to the mailing lists, it is possible for a member to forward an email s/he gets via networking to a third party. Unfortunately we know that some members have forwarded emails to staff, boards of management, friends, school suppliers etc. This is not professionally or ethically acceptable. A breach of this nature will result in the member being removed from the mailing list and their membership of the Network reviewed.

Although we can back-trace emails, and sharing with third parties is prohibited in our protocols and terms & conditions, IPPN cannot guarantee total security – this is the responsibility of the email recipient.

In addition, members are advised NOT to share information which they would not be able to stand over from a professional point of view. The vast majority of potentially sensitive scenarios can be phrased in a generic, non-specific way. Remember when you reply to a query it is viewed by thousands of principals – you may be helping more than one colleague with your response but also remember that anything you say is read by everyone on the mailing list.

For this reason we strongly recommend that all members use a **personal e-mail address for IPPN communications** which professional communications can be directed to.

## ANONYMOUS POSTINGS

If your email is of a sensitive nature, please send it in a plain text email to [info@ippn.ie](mailto:info@ippn.ie) and ask that it be sent to [advice@ippn.ie](mailto:advice@ippn.ie) or [networking@ippn.ie](mailto:networking@ippn.ie) (choose the most appropriate for your query) and ask to remove your full name. We will then add a 'name and school with the editor' note. Do **NOT** submit your query directly to a mailing list. Remember to sign the email fully according to the details outlined below.

Emails will only be posted anonymously on request where it involves a sensitive issue surrounding an interpersonal issue with a

member of staff or an issue with a parent/pupil/board member.

## TRANSPARENCY

To maintain the open nature of the networking mailing list, all emails submitted require standard information in the email signature. Please remember to include the following details at the end of your posting:

- First name & Surname
- School Name
- County
- Roll Number

Emails are released to the mailing lists every few hours during office hours (9.00am – 5.00pm, Monday to Friday). Emails submitted to the mailing list after 4.00pm on Friday or anytime on Saturday and Sunday will be released the following working day.

## COMMERCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Where another principal has asked for a recommendation of a service, it is acceptable to offer the name of a company and your experience of dealing with them. On these occasions, a member of the Support Office team may also direct you to the companies who support IPPN through attendance at the Conference Expo and advertising in Leadership+.

*IPPN Mailing lists have provided immeasurable support and help to thousands of principals and has served an important function in building and strengthening our network*

As one of the most popular members' services, We look forward to seeing the service used in this way in 2012/2013 and invite you to direct any queries or feedback to [rachel.brannigan@ippn.ie](mailto:rachel.brannigan@ippn.ie).

## How to subscribe to the IPPN mailing lists

If you have not already completed your membership form for 2012/2013, you can subscribe to the mailing lists in the pink section of the form.

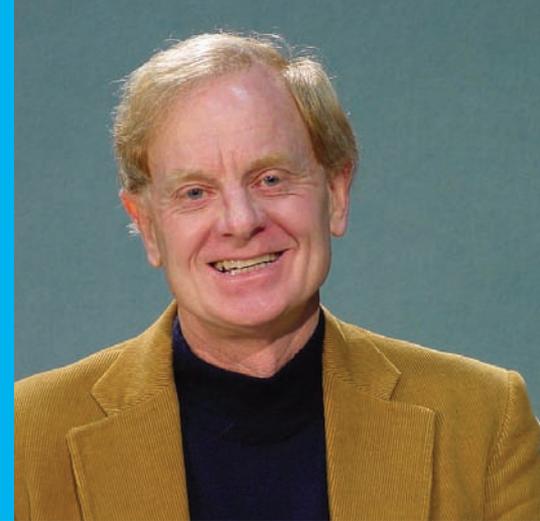
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A full list of terms and conditions of use are available on [ippn.ie](http://ippn.ie).



# Characteristics and Practices of Successful School Principals

By Dr Darrell Latham, Senior Lecturer, University of Otago  
College of Education, New Zealand



We now know principal leadership makes a difference to school improvement and that innovative schools have effective leaders. Leadership is somewhat a paradox in that we want ordinary, humble leaders but we demand from them extraordinary results. The challenge then has been identifying which aspects of leadership make a difference. The following describes the lessons learned as a result of recent New Zealand research into successful school principalship.

The *International Successful School Principals Project* (ISSPP) commenced in 2002 and involved countries including Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and the USA. The focus for the ISSPP was to investigate practices across these countries. In the wider international context, researchers set about identifying the characteristics and practices of successful principals and sought answers as to how these are influenced. The project commenced as a result of educational leadership researcher Kenneth Leithwood asking a straightforward question – ‘What do we know about school principals in a range of different national contexts?’

Even though there were contextual differences related to schools, political systems, economies, education policies and the make-up of students, a common feature across all countries was that the principal was seen as the crucial figure in the school’s success. The most exceptional feature noted was the enthusiasm and passion principals exhibited and their devotion to education, students and the community. It seemed that principal leadership practices that united countries were far greater than those that divided them.

## The New Zealand Context

New Zealand became involved in the ISSPP in 2008 and we set about seeking answers to two simple questions:

1. What practices do successful New Zealand principals use?
2. What factors give rise to successful New Zealand principal leadership?

Initial research investigated successful school principals and built on findings from other countries. A range of schools and principals were

involved in the research, which was based on school type, size and location. Inclusion was based on positive external reviews and being acknowledged by one’s peers as being successful in their role.

New Zealand’s education system was subject to significant change as a result of the educational reforms of the late 1980s. The introduction of self-managing schools **where the accountability and autonomy for decision-making and financial expenditure rests substantially with the school board has required a rethink of the principal leadership paradigm.** While most countries have undergone similar reforms, in comparison, New Zealand schools have seen greater devolution of decision-making and been subject to increased marketization, contestability and accountability measures. Therefore, of particular interest to the New Zealand research team was the influence of ‘self-managing schools’ on successful principal leadership. While there is no one model of leadership, from the international and the New Zealand research literature we were able to identify a range of educational values, personal and interpersonal qualities, competencies, decision-making processes and strategic actions in which effective principals engage.

## What practices do successful principals use and which factors give rise to successful principal leadership?

The New Zealand case study findings confirm the importance of personal factors, leadership style and leadership skills and strategies that contribute to successful principal leadership.

### Personal Characteristics

Principals bring to their position a range of personal characteristics that include values and beliefs, social justice and working with the community. Personal traits included their passion for education and ensuring that children were always their centre of interest. Pride, work ethic, eternal optimism, excellent communication skills and the ability to work collaboratively were also noted.

### Successful New Zealand Principals

- **have a passion for education** – desire and enthusiasm for wanting to make a difference
- **have pride and self-belief** – positive

self-belief and engagement with school and community

- **undertake critical self-reflection** – reflect on their leadership, performance and contribution
- **have a positive work ethic** – sense of positive purpose, ‘can do’ attitude and hope for the future
- **have previous life experiences** – bring life experiences to the principalship
- **develop levels of resilience** – confident, assured, ability to bounce back and creative ways of coping
- **portray the human face of the principalship** – exhibit warmth, loyalty to the school and community, approachability, ethics of care and lack of pretentiousness.

### Leadership style and leadership skill

Capacity building in New Zealand schools is an important aspect of the principal’s position and involves creating the conditions, opportunities and experiences for collaboration and learning in order to bring about effective change. Core factors identified for success included developing collaborative cultures that are collegial, supportive and people orientated.

### Factors identified for principal success include

- **management** – having the technical skills in school management processes and procedures
- **communication and consultation** – listening, articulating ideas and facilitating development
- **knowing when to lead** – striking a balance between leading and letting others lead
- **reflective capacity** – reflecting on making schools and communities stronger and healthier
- **interpersonal connectedness** – high levels of interaction, personal involvement, trust and loyalty.

### Leadership Strategies

Successful school leaders improve teaching and learning and thus pupil outcomes indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, teaching practices and through developing teachers’ capacities for leadership.

### Strategies employed by successful principals include

- **a focus on student achievement** – vision for learning and developing all-round achievers
- **community and staff consultation** – inclusiveness, community and educational leadership
- **strong leadership team and quality teaching staff** – collaborative and complementary staff
- **continuous school improvement practices** – willingness and desire for innovation
- **vision and purpose** – a clear, shared and realistic vision for the future of the school
- **student achievement and meeting needs** – vision for learning and a student-centred school
- **growing other leaders** – shared decision-making, collaborative and being a role model
- **finger on the pulse** – involvement at the grass roots level, active listening and networking
- **cultural integration** – fostering cultural diversity and inclusiveness in school life.

The above findings are firstly, indicative of both a principal's capacity and capability to engage in self-reflection and secondly, their ability to be responsive to the changing educational environment while maintaining connectedness to both their school and community.

During the second phase of the research personal factors e.g. leadership style, leadership skills and strategies contributing to successful principal leadership were further investigated. Further in-depth case study research of exemplary NZ principals was undertaken and the findings were analysed to discover how they sustained success.

### Successful Principals focus on core leadership activities

It was found that successful principals consistently focussed on core leadership activities associated with the following

- A focus on the fundamentals of teaching and learning
- Using a variety of familiar leadership strategies
- A strong bias towards people-centred leadership
- The ability to engage in critical self-reflection about their leadership role and future direction
- Maintaining and growing leadership success
- Dealing with challenges and tensions associated with professional and personal lives
- Being a multi-dimensional leader e.g. mediator, advisor, professional leader and manager.

Bringing out the best in students, teachers and the community requires principals who are not fainthearted or shrinking violets. To the contrary, successful leaders weave webs of inclusion and are innovative. What this research has shown is that while there is no one single model of the practice of effective leadership, there are a range of practices in which successful principals engage. We are now able to identify a comprehensive collection of personal and interpersonal qualities, dispositions, educational values, proficiencies, strategic actions and decision-making processes which effective NZ principals use.

What is clear in the New Zealand context is that a significant deceptively simple factor at the heart of successful principal leadership, often downplayed or overlooked, is collaboration. It is at the core of developing effective pedagogical leadership and the research has shown that leaders who develop and support practices that encourage the sharing of teaching and learning strategies are at the cutting edge of leadership innovation.

A simplistic definition of collaboration infers working and consulting with others. However, it should not be seen only as teamwork, partnership or being cooperative. It needs to be viewed in the wider context where the collaborative leader is required to reconceptualise their role as leader. What is inferred is significant engagement not only within their own schools but also with other schools and the community at large.

Greater engagement, known as 'systems leadership', suggests considerably more engagement with other schools in order to bring about change. 'Specifically, a system leader may be defined as a school leader who is willing and able to shoulder wider system roles and in doing so is almost as concerned with the success and attainment of students in other schools as they are with their own.'

The New Zealand research has shown that the qualities, leadership values and actions of the principal in successful schools has developed beyond professional standards to a focus on teaching and learning, personal and professional growth and to relationship building in the wider community.

In many ways the job description requirements of the average New Zealand school principal defies reasonable logic. The ability to walk on water comes to mind, as does the motto of being six foot tall and bullet proof. The expectations required of them know no boundaries.

NZ principals are required to be responsive to government demands at a moment's notice. Furthermore, they regularly take the brunt of unfair criticism when it comes to student progress and from a political perspective they are often between a rock and a hard place.

None the less, what requires to be acknowledged is that successful principals are shaping the future direction of education. Through a mix of leadership strategies, values, qualities and actions, they are positively influencing teaching and learning and reshaping educational leadership as we know it.

*Reference list with the editor.*

*Dr Darrell Latham is a senior lecturer at the University of Otago College of Education, New Zealand. He works in the Centre for Educational Leadership and Administration. His research interest includes teachers' and principal's perceptions of school leadership and the politics of education*



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# Still in school after 61 years!

By Seán Fitzgerald, Primary teacher for 45 years, principal for the last 34. Retired principal of Scoil Muire Barron, Boys' National School, Edenderry Co Offaly (retired 31st August 2012)



A product of one of my newly-married parents' celebrations after the 2nd World War, I had my first primary school experience in the grand university that was Knockjames National School. It was a two-room, one-teacher school hidden in the lush growth of the remote hills of the north western part of the parish of Tulla in East Clare.

The primary school of my infancy had 'technology' amounting to four walls, a shaky roof, an open fireplace—fuelled by parents' turf - 4 small windows and a door. It had benches for the ragged children ranged in ages from four to fourteen—numbering in total around 25. It had no electricity or light source other than what nature offered through the porthole windows.

Sanitary conditions amounted to two tiny sheds, each with a concrete bunker fitted with an escape drain that led to the depths of the nearby sodden fields. It had a wooden lid – suitably perforated with an average posterior-sized opening. Every Friday it was purged of all its recycled material by buckets of water retrieved by the children from the little river that babbled its way through the nearby hills.

My first primary school had one young lady teacher who cycled the miles along the rough untarred narrow country thoroughfares - to a little school in a place that doesn't exist on any map - Knockjames!!! Her task in her 9.30am to 3pm shift was to fill heads with the knowledge of where the world came from and how the world worked. She taught numeracy and literacy and singing and sewing to heads that ranged from crying weanling baby infants to hardy fourteen year old adolescent furry-faced lads and young women. The older children were part-time teachers of the very young while our teacher carried out the impossible task of coordinating and choreographing the day's activities, in the absolute ultimate of a mixed class!

When I escaped from school at holiday time and weekends, my influences were turf-saving, hay-saving, feeding cattle, cleaning sheds, sowing and minding crops and even in those days there was homework. I went to monthly Confession and to Mass every Sunday and Church holiday. Media was a Micheál Ó hEithir match on the radio on Sunday afternoon. I said my prayers nightly.

My primary school education in Knockjames ended after 9 years. The school also ended its days on the same day. Old age and years of neglect brought an end to the school. Nowadays its remains are hidden beyond forensics in a forest of undergrowth, briars and forestry.

Against this background I reflect on the experiences of an average child in my current school.

*The child in my current school is dropped from a car at the gate. He spends his day surrounded by technology and the latest playground equipment and facilities.*

The child in my current school is dropped from a car at the gate. He spends his day surrounded by technology and the latest playground equipment and facilities. He has access to instant information on any topic. He has a fully fitted-out school network and computer room. He has interactive whiteboards, email, I pads, visualisers and a twitter account. He has a mainstream teacher, a resource and learning support teacher or Special Needs Assistant as required. He has so many books in his bag that he stores many of them in school and brings the remainder home if needed. He has central heating for the cold days. He has access to hurling, football, soccer, swimming, basketball, badminton, athletics, tag rugby and a marked-out play area in his school yard.

His teacher has a box containing 23 books of curricular content on the widest-possible range of subjects and activities, a laptop computer, long- and short-term plans as well as IEPs, assessment reports and psychological reports. His principal has a room full of school plans and policies on every conceivable eventuality that may befall the school—possibly his school has a policy on what you do when you find you don't have a policy.

His escape from school influences is Sky+ TV with instant pause, rewind or record, with advertising every ten minutes on any one of its hundreds of channels. Tabloid media and TV

bombard his thinking. He wears designer gear - Nike or Adidas - and image is everything. He styles and gels his hair in whatever way the social media and current pressures dictate. He must have the latest iPhone or smartphone and a Facebook account. He has to deal with peer pressure and bullying issues. Christmas starts in September. God's name is either Ronaldo or Messi and occasionally Shefflin. God lives in either Old Trafford or Anfield or Stamford Bridge or The Noucamp and only occasionally Croke Park! Communion and Confirmations have become festive occasions—with playboy stretch limos, live bands and all-night discos marking his most recent religious attainment.

Did I really miss out by being born so long ago?

To contact Seán, email [snfitz2@eircom.net](mailto:snfitz2@eircom.net).

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IPPN's Executive Committee reviewed the Policies & Plans section of the website over the Summer and many documents have been replaced or amended to ensure they are of high quality. Policies and plans considered obsolete have been deleted and replaced. This QA review work is ongoing. If your school has a policy or plan that is not already available on our website, or which would supplement available resources, we would appreciate if you would submit it for review by email to [rachel.brannigan@ippn.ie](mailto:rachel.brannigan@ippn.ie).

The following are the new resources available in the different sections of the website:

## SUPPORTS & SERVICES DES CIRCULARS 2012

- 0022/2012 - Career Break Scheme for Special Needs Assistants in Recognised Primary and Post-Primary Schools
- 0021/2012 - Parental Leave Amendment for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post-Primary Schools / Leasú Ar Shaoire Do Thuismitheoirí Do Mhúinteoirí Cláraithe I mBunscoileanna Agus In Iarbhuscoileanna Aitheanta
- 0013/2012 - Comhchlár Dioplóma Iarchéime um Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil Leantach do Mhúinteoirí atá ag obair i dTacaíocht Foghlama agus Oideachas Speisialta 2012/2013 (Note: Gaelige version wasn't available on the DES website until June)

## POLICIES & PLANS SCHOOL POLICIES

- Administration of Medication Policy (revised)
- Ciapadh Collaí
- Data protection and record-keeping policy
- Display of Pupils' Work Policy
- Enrolment Policy - Autism Unit II
- Exemption from Irish Policy (revised)
- Home/School Partnership Policy
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy (revised)
- Local Community Links
- Parent / Staff Communication (revised)

- Reception, Assembly and Dismissal of Pupils Policy (revised)
- School Booklet comprising key school policies
- School Policy Checklist (revised)
- School Tours & Excursions Policy (revised)
- School Visitors Policy
- Use of common areas / equipment.

## ADMINISTRATION

- Accounts
- Administrative Days - List of Tasks
- Application Form
- Audio-visual equipment
- Code of Conduct for Outside Agencies - Facilitating Children's Sport and Arts Activities
- Data protection and record-keeping policy
- Data Protection Commissioner - Rules and Information for 'Data Controllers'
- First Aid
- Hire and Use of School Premises Policy (revised)
- Incident Report Form
- Instrument Rental Agreement Form.

## PARENTS & PUPILS

- Anaphylaxis Action Plan Form
- Cód Iompair / Code of Discipline (Gaeilge/English)
- Homework for Absent Children
- Illness/Injury Parent Notification Form
- Internet Parent Permission Form
- Letter to Parents - Child Protection
- PE Exemption - Letter To Parents
- Seachtain na Gaeilge Resources
- Transfer to Secondary School Policy.

## SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT & CURRICULUM PLANNING

- Art Therapy
- Assessment & Recording Policy
- Cúntas Míósúil II (revised)
- Display of Pupils' Work Policy
- Exceptional Ability & Giftedness Policy
- Language Skills Plan
- PE Plan
- Penmanship (Handwriting) Plan
- Pupil Report Form - Guidelines for Teachers

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy
- RSE - Letter to Parents
- Religious Education & Faith Development Policy
- Scéim Coicíse (revised)
- Scéim Coicíse Single Class
- Scéim Coicíse Two Classes
- Strategies for Spellings.

## HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Laptop Use Agreement Form (Staff) (revised)
- Parent/Teacher Meetings - Guidelines For Teachers
- Staff Meetings Policy & Guidelines.

## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

- Guidance Note - Relevant Contract Tax (Value Added Tax) (Gaelige and English versions)
- BoM Guidance Note - RCT and VAT Reverse Charge.

## RECRUITMENT - TEACHERS

- Primary Teachers - Appointment Form 2012/2013

## RECRUITMENT - ANCILLARY STAFF

- Caretaker Interview Questions
- Caretaker - Schedule of Duties.

## RECRUITMENT - SNAs

- Notification of SNA leaving.

## ABOUT IPPN NEWLY-APPOINTED PRINCIPALS

- Mentor Request Form (revised)
- Newly-appointed principal Contact Details Form (revised)
- Newly-appointed principal (revised)

## POLICY & NEWS LEADERSHIP+

- Leadership+ Issue 69 - June 2012

## PRESS RELEASES

- Seven in 10 parents say primary school standards have risen or stayed the same - IPPN-RedC poll.



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# Administrative Support to Principals

By Gerard Ruane, Principal and Mary McMahon, Administrator,  
Scariff National School, Scariff, Co. Clare



I am the teaching principal of Scariff National School. We have 169 children, nine teachers and one Special Needs Assistant. As all principals are acutely aware, our role is becoming increasingly demanding and a highly-skilled secretary is essential so we can focus our attention on leading the school. I am blessed with such a person, Mary, who I delegate the office administration to so that I can divide my time effectively between preparing for and teaching my class, supporting teachers, holding meetings, leading the development and progression of the school and, on my administration days, visiting classrooms. In this article, Mary discusses her role and how it has evolved over the years from that of secretary to full-time office administrator.

*Gerard Ruane*

I started work as a part-time school secretary in Scariff National School when I was appointed as a community employment supervisor in October 1995. With the introduction of the Ancillary Grant, the CE scheme ceased and I was employed by the school as a part-time secretary. As the grant increased so did my hours and duties and I now work full-time – 30 hours per week with 25 days holidays per year, the majority of which I take during August, when end of year is completed and all is set up for the beginning of the new school year.

Over this time my role has also changed considerably – not a sudden change but rather one that grew and evolved to fill the needs of the school. The secretary needs a very varied set of skills to carry out the duties now expected of the role – which include typing, filing, photocopying; good interpersonal skills when dealing with staff, parents, pupils and outside agencies; IT skills and desktop publishing to assist with booklets for Confirmation and First Communion and other school activities as well as knowledge of data management, office equipment, accounts, PAYE/PRSI and other revenue returns. Patience and a good sense of humour also help to get one through the more difficult times! All work is done in consultation with the school principal and correspondence and all other details which are submitted by the school are discussed and/or checked by Gerard prior to submission.

Advanced IT skills have become vital in my role. Information regarding pupils and other school information needs to be recorded in an effective system. I operated from a Microsoft Access Database, which I had developed to meet our needs over the years. In March of this year we moved to Aladdin Schools, which is an excellent data management system. My previous knowledge of database systems and a vision of one's requirements were invaluable to administer and set up the system effectively – I'm still learning! The real strength of this system is that all the information is stored in the one place and changes in details only have to be made once. We use TextaParent which is invaluable for short urgent messages. As with Aladdin Schools, this system needs to be maintained over the year and fully updated for the beginning of each school year. OLCS is another online system which has been introduced in recent years and the school secretary is expected to be the data entry person for this system. In addition to doing the online returns, I also record and file the various certificates and other manual records required by this system. I prepare the figures for the October Annual Census Returns for which I used my Access database in previous years but for October 2012, I look forward to using Aladdin, which promises to provide all the information needed from within the system.

I also liaise regularly with the Treasurer of the Board of Management. I am responsible for the payment of all school bills and bank lodgements. We use Airgead Bunscoile, which is efficient. This programme is effective as it means that information only needs to be entered once and it provides an up-to-date bank balance and Treasurer's reports – very important at times of the year when income is in short supply.

To keep up to date on current administrative requirements for schools, I check Departmental Circulars regularly. New circulars need to be brought to the attention of the principal immediately but the school secretary also needs to be aware of changes and how to deal with them when discussing the matter with the principal.

Over the past two years, I have developed a school website which I maintain as regularly as

possible. This is something which I enjoy and work on more as a hobby than a duty so I find myself working on this in my own time.

*To keep up to date on current administrative requirements for schools, I check Departmental Circulars regularly.*

The principal and I operate a daily communication system whereby I list things which need to be done. This allows us to prioritise duties and update each other on task progression. This is a simple Microsoft Word document – generally with single line tasks and replies to indicate progression. Gerard starts work before I do and he lists tasks to be completed on the document. During the day, I record any messages and/or tasks for Gerard that come in. He is in class when I start work so this means class time is not interrupted to discuss tasks. We meet after school to discuss the tasks. We update progress on each task on the document so we have a record of everything. It has developed into an eighty-three page document for the past year. It also means we have a record of everything we have done and all messages received which can sometimes prove handy!

Suitable, relevant training needs to be provided for school secretaries so they can work effectively. This needs to be organised on a national basis and needs to be specific to the job requirements.

I really enjoy working as a school secretary. I'm constantly busy, the work is varied and I never really know what the day will bring – good or bad! The downside to the job is the rate of pay.

The day when secretaries were expected to carry out basic secretarial duties such as photocopying, typing and reception duties are long gone. Nowadays the role is more that of an office administrator. The Department should recognise the role which is now expected of school secretaries and pay for those skills accordingly.

*Mary McMahon, Administrator*

# On your behalf

Since the last issue of Leadership+, IPPN met with the DES, education agencies and other bodies in relation to the following:

## JUNE:

- Special Education Support Service (SESS) – to discuss CPD arrangements for the next school year
- IPPN Executive Committee meeting – plan of work for forthcoming year
- IPPN National Committee meeting – consultation with network representatives from each county; CPD plans in each county network
- DES Inspectorate in relation to the teacher questionnaires in WSE/WSE-MLL processes and School Self Evaluation – draft circular and SSE guidelines
- Teaching Council in relation to Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme providers
- National Parents' Council AGM – the positive role of parents in their child's education
- Sheila Nunan, INTO in relation to the relentless growth in principals' workload and the consequent impact, both professionally and personally
- Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children and the DLP/DDLP roles in relation to child protection as outlined in the new legislation
- Presented at the Fianna Fáil education conference on small schools
- IPPN Executive Committee / Support Office – strategy and planning meeting for 2012/2013

- Department of Children & Youth Affairs meeting regarding the National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG)
- National Induction Programme for Teachers – Consultative Group/Oversight Committee.

## JULY:

- IPPN met with Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn in relation to the impact of cutbacks on schools, supports required for newly-appointed principals as well as the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.
- New director of the Teaching Council, Tomás Ó Ruairc – concerns regarding expectations of principals in relation to NQTs
- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) – Inez Bailey, director – in relation to literacy and numeracy strategy
- Healthy Food for All (HFfA) Advisory Committee Meeting
- Teaching Council – Student Teacher Placement Working Group
- School Self Evaluation advisory working group – departmental circular and guidelines.

## AUGUST:

- ICP Council Meeting and Gender Equity Conference – regarding education for girls in Africa
- IPPN Executive Committee meeting.



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# School Self Evaluation

By Anna Mai Rooney, Principal, St Louis GNS, Monaghan Town and IPPN Executive Committee member



The Department of Education and Skills is now focusing on School Self Evaluation (SSE). Introducing yet another initiative to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools may understandably be met with frustration and skepticism by practitioners on the ground. For many years, the Tuarisc Scoile, Whole School Inspection (WSI), Whole School Evaluation (WSE), School Development Planning and DEIS three-year improvement plans have taken much of the time and energy of teachers and principals. The documentation and recording of the various steps and processes involved were particularly energy-sapping without being obviously beneficial. However, there is light at the end of this particular tunnel. Up until now the Tuairisc Scoile, WSI and WSE (both standard and MML) were 'done to' schools by the DES Inspectorate. Typically the arrival of the official notification triggered a frenetic dash to get all the documentation in place and a few days of intense scrutiny, followed by a lengthy report, a sigh of relief and a return to business as usual for another seven years.

*SSE is a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review whereby the principal, deputy principal and teachers, in consultation with the board of management, parents and pupils, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school.*

Is School Self Evaluation going to be more of the same? Hopefully not. There are a number of key differences worth noting. SSE is a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review whereby the principal, deputy principal and teachers, in consultation with the board of management, parents and pupils,

engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school.

Chief Inspector Harold Hislop and Assistant Chief Inspector Deirdre Mathews consulted with all education partners in the development of this new evaluation model. This consultation, including a number of pilot projects to test the reality in schools, has taken place over the past two years and is ongoing. It is encouraging that the initial pilot projects have been positively received. As part of the consultation process, IPPN invited the Inspectorate to speak directly to principals at county network events and in workshops at our annual principals' and deputies' conferences. In IPPN's own feedback, our focus is of course on school improvement and learning opportunities for children but we also placed a strong emphasis on reducing principals' workload where possible.

*We are pleased that the opinion of IPPN has been sought and listened to along the way.*

Naturally there will be some reluctance to embrace School Self Evaluation as yet another new initiative. But perhaps it is not so new, if one considers it as one further step along the road of School Development Planning. It may well be a positive change for schools.

We are pleased that the opinion of IPPN has been sought and listened to along the way. A key element of School Self Evaluation which will be favourable to principals is that the whole teaching staff in a school will be required to collectively evaluate all the key elements that make for effective teaching and learning. This will allow the entire school staff to assume responsibility for the quality of learning throughout the school. School Self Evaluation will not be 'done to us'; it will be 'done by us to ourselves', acting as a team. The skills acquired through the school development planning process will be key in School Self Evaluation, as the teaching staff as a unit choose aspects of curriculum provision to examine. Teachers, led

by their principal and deputy principal, will in effect become inspectors of their own work. Teachers will be required to collectively put measures in place to evaluate their collective progress against their own targets. Because teachers are more involved in assessing their collective effectiveness, it is far more likely that SSE will become a more effective agent for school improvement than a single assessment of performance once every 7 years. SSE will rightly place greater emphasis on actual improvements to children's learning, and on how this is measured, and far less emphasis on the enormous folders of plans and policies which previously dominated school inspection visits.

*Because teachers are more involved in assessing their collective effectiveness, it is far more likely that SSE will become a more effective agent for school improvement*

SSE is more respectful of the professionalism of teachers and principals and entrusts them with setting their own targets and improving their practice. Future visits by inspectors will hopefully focus on three main issues:

1. Is School Self Evaluation being carried out on an ongoing basis?
2. Are all staff members and the wider school community engaged in the SSE process?
3. Is the knowledge gained from SSE being used to bring about actual improvement in teaching and learning in the school?

While this trust brings a great responsibility to the school community, it is also an opportunity to improve the educational experience of each and every child. Principals and teachers together must grab this responsibility with both hands and demonstrate our ability to make it work. Professional development planned for early in the new school year and provided by PDST will go a long way to assist in this process.

# And Finally....

## THE WISDOM OF CHILDREN

**'Never trust a dog to watch your food.'**

Patrick, age 10

**'When your dad is mad and asks you 'Do I look stupid?', don't answer.'**

Hannah, age 9

**'Never tell your Mum her diet's not working.'**

Michael, age 12

**'When your Mum is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair.'**

Taylor, age 11

**'A puppy always has bad breath – even after eating a Tic-Tac.'**

Andrew, age 9

*Courtesy of [www.instanthumour.com](http://www.instanthumour.com)*

## LIPSTICK

A number of 12-year-old girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. The main problem was that, after they put on their lipstick, they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints. Every night the caretaker would remove the marks and the next day the girls would put them back. Finally the Principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the caretaker. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the caretaker, who had to clean the mirrors every night (you can just imagine the yawns). To demonstrate how difficult it had been to clean the mirrors, she asked the caretaker to show the girls how much effort was required. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it.

Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror.

**There are teachers.....and then there are educators**

**Mother: How do you like your new teacher?**

Son: I don't. She told me to sit up front for the present and then she didn't give me one!

**Mother: Does your teacher like you ?**

Son: Like me, she loves me. Look at all those X's on my test paper!

**Son: I'm not going back to school tomorrow**

Father: Why not?

**Son: Well I've been there a whole day,**

I can't read, I can't write and they won't let me talk, so what's the use?

*Courtesy of [schooljokes.com](http://schooljokes.com)*



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# IPPN County Networks

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## September– October 2012

Kerry	Tuesday 18 September, The Brehon, Killarney, 4pm
Westmeath	Tuesday 18 September, Mullingar Park Hotel, 4pm
Meath	Thursday 20 September, Navan Education Centre, 4pm
Louth	Thursday 20 September, The Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, 4pm
Wexford	Monday 24 September, Wexford Education Centre, 4pm
Carlow	Monday 24 September, The Dolmen Hotel, 4pm
Longford	Tuesday 25 September, Longford Arms Hotel, 4pm
Wicklow	Tuesday 25 September, The Glenview Hotel, 4pm
Tipperary	Wednesday 26 September, Anner Hotel, 4.30pm
Waterford	Wednesday 26 September, Waterford Teacher Centre, 4pm
Clare	Thursday 27 September, Clare Education Centre, 4pm
Roscommon	Thursday 27 September, Abbey Hotel, 4pm
Galway	Monday 1 October, Ardilaun Hotel, 7.30pm
Sligo	Monday 1 October, Sligo Clarion Hotel, 4pm
Cavan	Tuesday 2 October, Hotel Kilmore, 4pm
Leitrim	Tuesday 2 October, Carrick on Shannon Education Centre, 4pm
Kilkenny	Wednesday 3 October, Hotel Kilkenny, 4pm
Kildare	Wednesday 3 October, Kildare Education Centre, 4pm
Donegal	Monday 8 October, Clanree Hotel, Letterkenny, 4pm
Cork	Monday 8 October, Silver Springs Moran Hotel, 4pm
Monaghan	Tuesday 9 October, Monaghan Education Centre, 4pm
Mayo	Tuesday 9 October, The TF Royal Hotel, 4pm
Offaly	Wednesday 10 October, Tullamore Court Hotel, 4pm
Laois	Wednesday 10 October, Maldron Midway Hotel, 4pm
Limerick	Thursday 11 October, Woodlands Hotel, 4pm
Dublin	Thursday 11 October, Red Cow Hotel, 4pm