

Survey of School Leaders in Special Schools

Survey conducted in April/May 2026

(Initial analysis of quantitative data received from 122 respondents)

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Staff Numbers

Please indicate the total number of staff members (teachers, SNAs, bus escorts, ancillary staff, etc.) employed by the school.	
Answer Choices	Responses
1-10	02.46%
11-20	09.02%
21-30	09.84%
31-40	04.92%
41-50	13.11%
51-60	15.57%
61-70	09.02%
71-80	10.66%
81-90	07.38%
91-100	10.66%
More than 100	07.38%

Based on the mid-interval ranges, special schools have an average of **59** members of staff.

Please indicate the percentage of the total number of staff members employed by the school who are teachers.	
Answer Choices	Responses
1-10%	15.57%
11-15%	21.31%
16-20%	20.49%
21-25%	20.49%
26-30%	08.20%
31-35%	03.28%
36-40%	01.64%
41-45%	00.82%
46-50%	03.28%
More than 50%	04.92%

Based on the mid-interval ranges, teachers constitute **20.48%** of the total number of staff members being led and managed in special schools.

The allowances for principals and deputy principals are calculated on the basis of the number of teaching posts allocated to school.

These allowances do not take account of 79.52% of the total number of staff members who are being led and managed by school leaders in special schools.

Allocations

Please indicate the extent to which the different elements of the school's allocation of teaching and SNA resources are sufficient to meet the needs of the students.					
Element	Sufficient	Somewhat sufficient	Somewhat insufficient	Insufficient	Not applicable
Teaching posts	19.17%	33.33%	20.00%	27.50%	00.00%
Weekly post-primary co-operation hours	11.76%	21.01%	10.92%	35.29%	21.01%
Weekly part-time subject specialist post-primary hours	04.35%	13.04%	13.04%	32.17%	37.39%
SERC SNA posts	03.36%	15.97%	10.92%	66.39%	03.36%
Above SERC SNA posts	09.09%	24.79%	21.49%	35.54%	09.09%

A small majority of respondents (**52.50%**) indicate the school's allocation of teaching posts is either somewhat sufficient or sufficient to meet the educational needs of students.

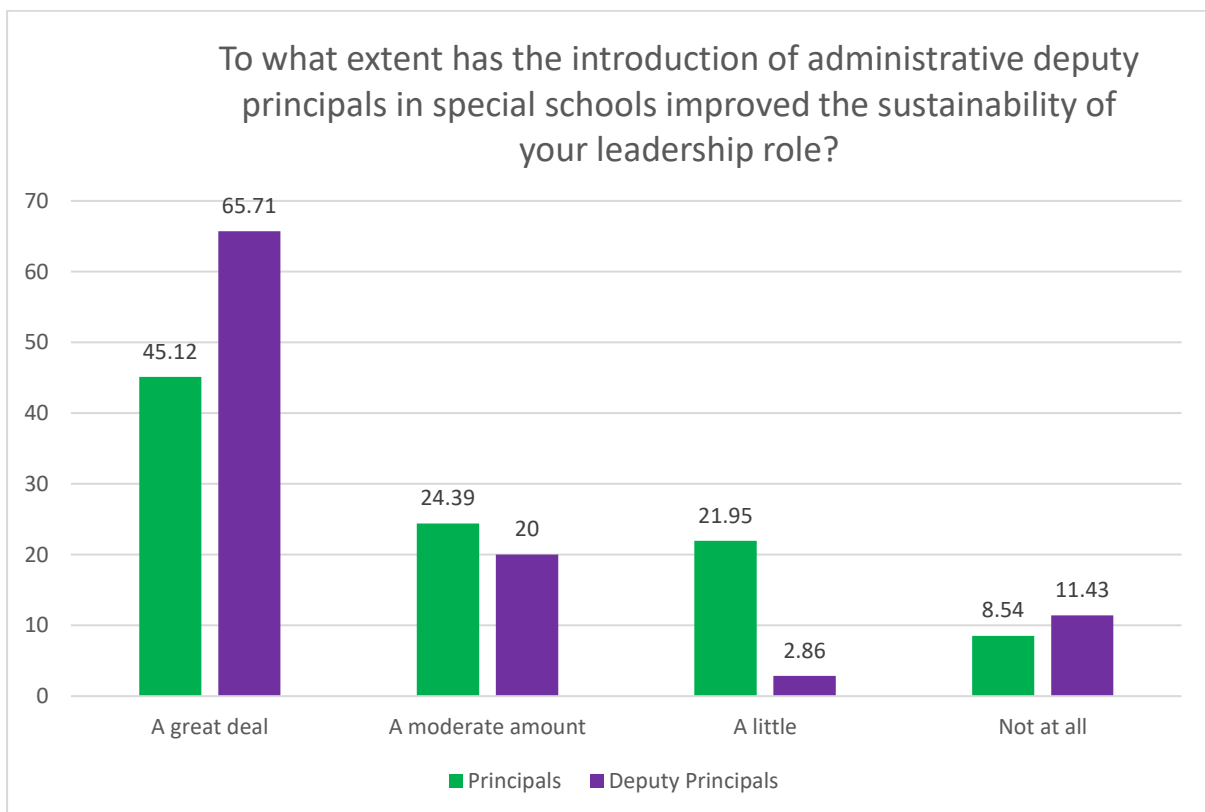
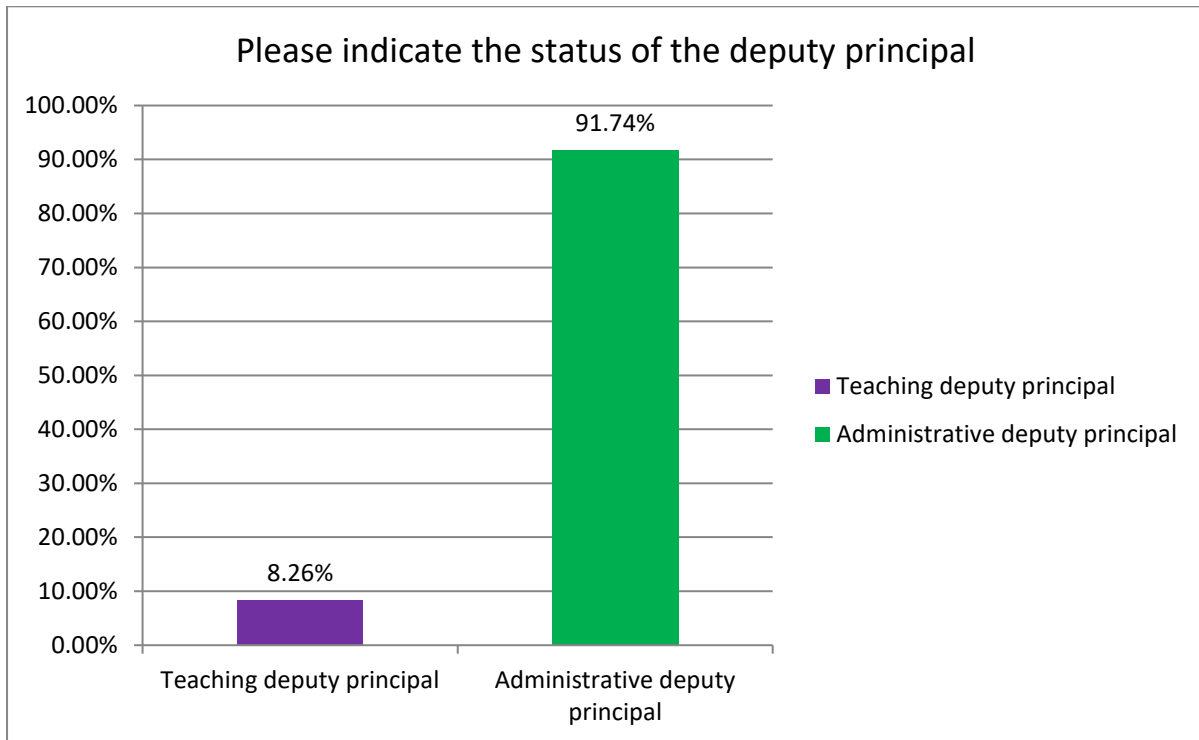
77.31% of respondents indicate that the baseline allocation of SERC SNA posts is either somewhat insufficient or insufficient to meet the needs of students.

57.03% of respondents indicate that the Above SERC allocation of SNA posts is either somewhat insufficient or insufficient to meet the needs of students.

The combination of these two statistics highlights a fundamental lack of staffing capacity within special schools to ensure the needs of students are met.

The lack of sufficiency of weekly post-primary co-operation hours and weekly part-time subject specialist post-primary hours suggests that the capacity to meet the educational needs of students pursuing post-primary programmes is compromised.

Allocation and Impact of Administrative Deputy Principal Posts



Role Demands

Responses of Principals

Please rank these issues in terms of their demand on your leadership time.	
Area of focus	Ranking
Staff management & HR issues	17.72
Dealing with behaviours of concern	16.65
Liaising with external agencies	14.26
Issues relating to buildings and maintenance	13.21
Liaising with / supporting parents	11.33
Dealing with issues relating to school finances	11.26
General administrative work / compliance filing	11.15
Provision of training for staff	10.62
School self-evaluation and school development	10.27
Leading teaching and learning	09.63
Pastoral care for students, parents and staff	08.84
Applying for additional resources, supports, equipment, specialist furniture, etc	07.97
Co-ordinating with clinical / nursing teams	07.66
Recruitment of staff	07.52
Health & safety audits / risk assessment	07.48
Work on behalf of the Board of Management (preparation for meetings / reportage)	06.91
Managing procurement processes	06.26
Attending care plan meetings, reviews, etc.	06.19
Attending case conferences / MDT meetings	05.10

Responses of Deputy Principals

Please rank these issues in terms of their demand on your leadership time.	
Area of focus	Ranking
Staff management & HR issues	17.50
Dealing with behaviours of concern	16.97
Liaising with external agencies	13.78
Leading teaching and learning	12.28
Liaising with / supporting parents	12.14
Issues relating to buildings and maintenance	11.72
Provision of training for staff	11.58
General administrative work / compliance filing	11.25
School self-evaluation and school development	11.19
Health & safety audits / risk assessment	09.39
Pastoral care for students, parents and staff	08.75
Co-ordinating with clinical / nursing teams	08.53
Applying for additional resources, supports, equipment, specialist furniture, etc	07.97
Dealing with issues relating to school finances	07.89
Attending case conferences / MDT meetings	06.39
Attending care plan meetings, reviews, etc.	06.36
Managing procurement processes	06.00
Work on behalf of the Board of Management (preparation for meetings / reportage)	05.47
Recruitment of staff	04.83

Sustainability of School Leadership Roles

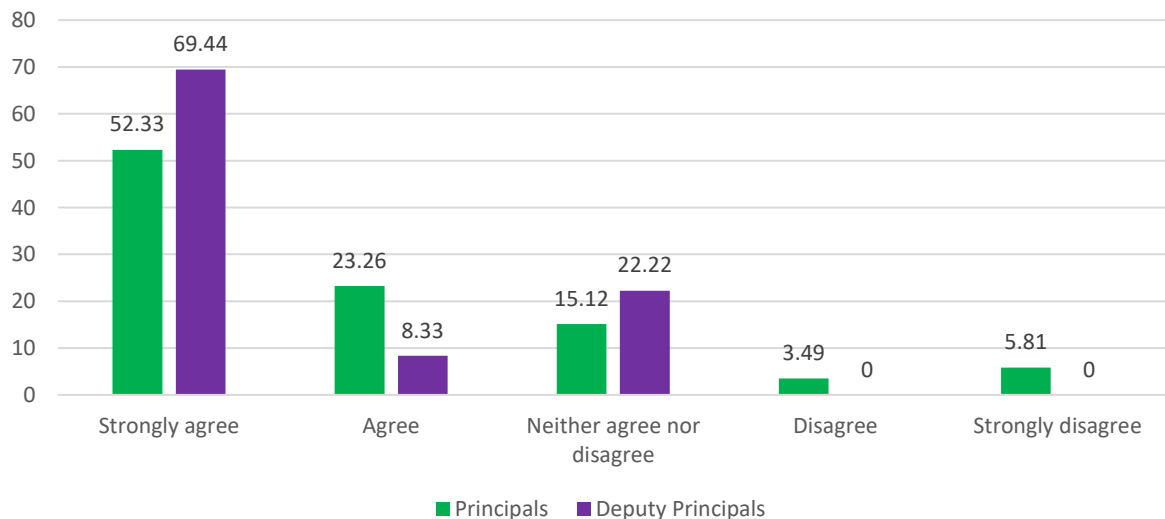
Please rate the current sustainability of your leadership role (1 being totally unsustainable to 10 where you are flourishing in the role).

For the purposes of this survey, the conducive conditions for leaders to flourish require that

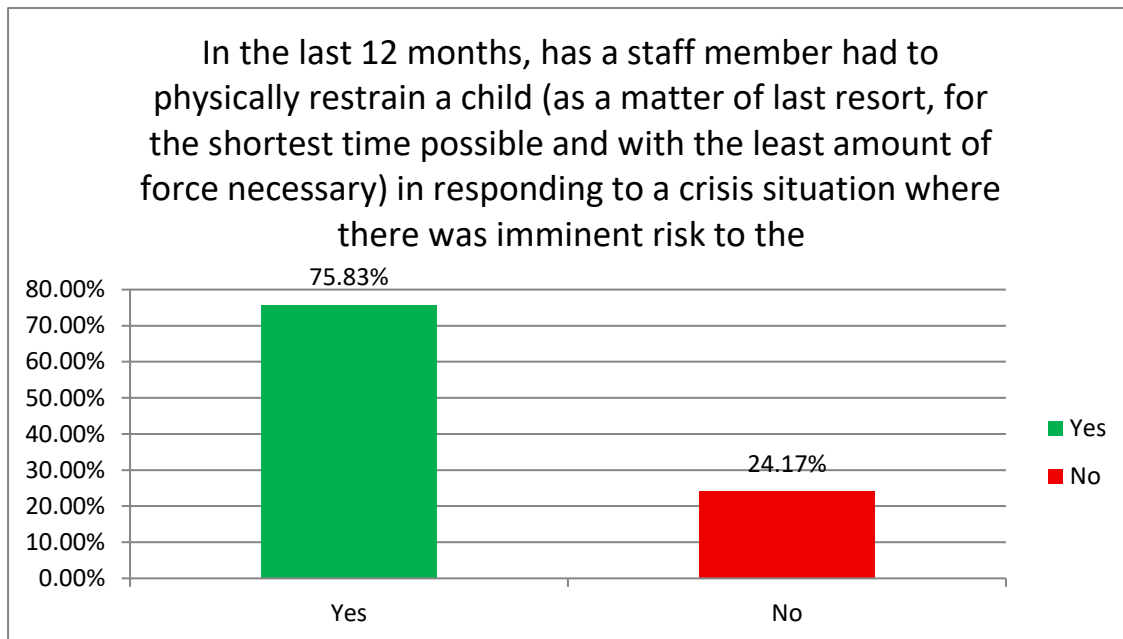
- there is clarity on what the focus of the work of school leaders should be
- sufficient leadership time is allocated to enable school leaders do that work
- the necessary structures are in place and sufficient resources are allocated to support the practice of leadership
- meaningful capacity exists for leadership to be shared
- the practice of leadership does not have a negative impact on the health & wellbeing of school leaders.

	Sustainability rating (out of 10)
Principals	2.60
Deputy Principals	4.73
Combined	3.23

The appointment of an Administrative Executive to the school, who would have responsibility for all non-educational administration, would have a positive impact on the sustainability of my leadership role and my effectiveness as a leader.



Responding to Behaviours of Concern

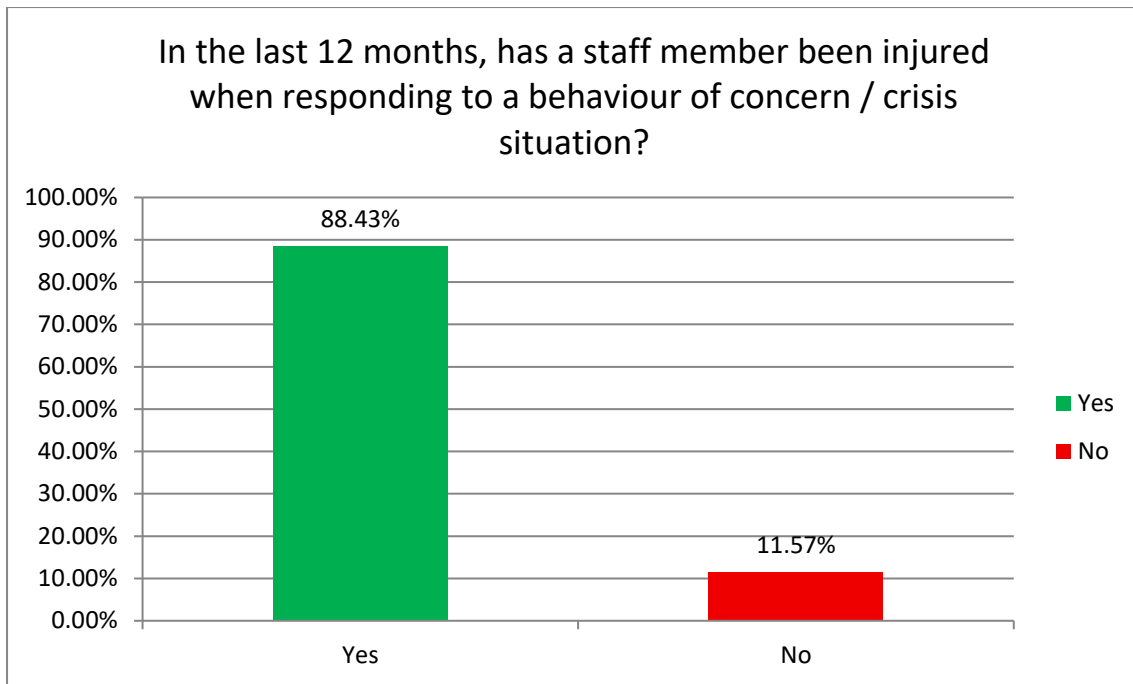


The percentage of mainstream schools where restraint was used in the last 12 months is **60.58%**.

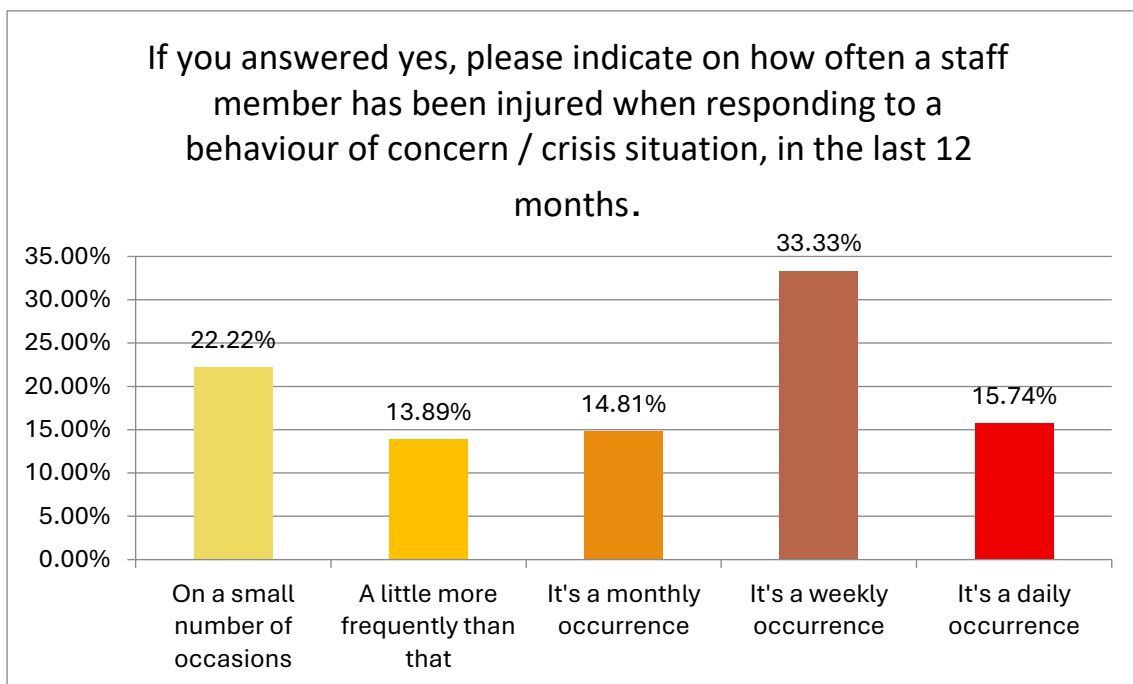


In mainstream schools, the percentage of staff members who had responded to the crisis situation and had not received training was **64.37%**.

While there is a higher prevalence of the use of restraint when responding to a behaviour of concern/crisis situation in a special school, there is a significantly higher likelihood that the staff member who had responded to the crisis situation and had received training.



56.28% of mainstream schools reported that a staff member had been injured in the last 12 months when responding to a behaviour of concern / crisis situation.



Where a staff member had been injured when responding to a behaviour of concern / crisis situation, **37.54%** of mainstream schools reported that it had happened on 5 or more occasions, in the last 12 months.

An injury to a staff member is a more common occurrence in special school and the frequency with which injuries occur is greater.

Statements about SEN & Special School Provision

Please indicate the extent to which you either agree or disagree with the following statements					
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Equal access to quality, inclusive education for all children must be a system priority.	67.23%	19.33%	06.72%	05.04%	01.68%
The extent to which schools can meet the additional needs of children is limited by the funds allocated for special education in the DEY's annual budget.	75.41%	17.21%	04.92%	02.46%	00.00%
That budgetary allocation is based on accurate, up-to-date data in relation to the numbers of students with additional needs that need placement in specialist settings.	08.20%	10.66%	23.77%	26.23%	31.15%
Special schools are neither primary or post-primary schools and should have a designation of their own	78.69%	09.84%	07.38%	03.28%	00.82%
The enhanced capitation grants for student in special schools are sufficient to ensure the adequate funding of the operation of the school.	00.82%	05.74%	12.30%	29.51%	51.64%
School staff have access to the requisite training, supports and resources to equip them to work effectively in a special school setting.	03.28%	09.84%	08.20%	48.36%	30.33%
School staff have access to the requisite training, supports and resources to equip them to respond effectively to behaviours of concern.	02.46%	08.20%	12.30%	44.26%	32.79%
The proposed changes to the Assessment of Need process, and the removal of the need for a diagnosis/professional report, will have a significant negative impact on the specialist provision of support and the appropriate placement of students in our school.	76.23%	14.75%	07.38%	01.64%	00.00%
A Home School Community Liaison teacher would enhance provision for students in our school.	81.97%	13.93%	01.64%	02.46%	00.00%
The school building and accommodation are suitable for the complexity of need and the health and safety of the students and staff in our school.	7.38%	18.85%	07.38%	20.49%	45.90%
The provision of school-based therapeutic supports will enhance the education experience of students in our school.	65.57%	19.67%	10.66%	01.64%	02.46%