

Prepared for:

- the Minister for Education
- the Minister for Finance
- the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform
- the Secretary General of the Department of Education

by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

**Table of Contents**

- 1. Introduction.....1
- 2. Sharing Leadership - developing a culture of shared leadership and Increasing Leadership Capacity  
2
  - Retain leadership and management days for deputy principals..... 3
  - Reduce the threshold for appointment of administrative principals and deputy principals..... 4
  - Extend CSL coaching and mentoring to deputy principals, all new principals and those new to DEIS6
- 3. Ensuring the Continuity of Provision to Children .....8
  - Provide Substitute Cover for All Approved Absences ..... 9
  - Create recruitment process and supply panels for substitute SNAs..... 9
  - Develop an appropriate process for the vetting of substitute SNAs who work across schools ..... 10
- 4. Addressing the Funding Crisis ..... 11
  - Bring grant funding into line with post-primary schools..... 11
  - Retention of COVID supports until the pandemic ends ..... 12
- 5. Fully Resourcing Supports for Children with Additional Needs ..... 14

**Appendix I – Dr Siobhán Kavanagh Research on Middle Leadership**

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is the professional body for over 6,000 Principals and Deputy Principals who lead 3,200+ primary schools, and is recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner. IPPN works with the Department of Education (DE), management bodies, unions, education agencies and other key stakeholders to advance primary education.

The focus of our budget submission this year is on sustainable leadership and those elements of funding that will have the greatest impact on primary schools and school leaders' capacity to fully discharge their leadership and management accountabilities. We present four key priorities for Budget 2023, and expand on these in the chapters below.

1. ***Sharing leadership*** – developing a culture of shared leadership and increasing leadership capacity by
  - a. Retaining leadership and management days for deputy principals (DPs) in schools with administrative principals and expanding the measure to include DPs in all schools
  - b. Reduce the threshold for appointment of administrative principals and deputy principals
  - c. Extending CSL coaching and mentoring to DPs, all new principals and those new to DEIS
2. ***Ensuring the continuity of provision to children by***
  - a. Extending and expanding teacher supply panels
  - b. Creating and rolling out a national process for appointing substitute SNAs
  - c. Developing a process for the vetting of substitute SNAs who work across schools
3. ***Address the funding crisis relating to soaring inflation and spiralling energy costs by***
  - a. Retaining COVID supports until the pandemic ends
  - b. Bringing grant funding into line with post-primary schools
  - c. Providing temporary alleviation of cost burden relating to inflation and energy crisis
4. ***Fully resourcing supports for children with additional needs by***
  - a. Adequately resourcing SEN supports in schools.

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss this submission in further detail with you.

---

## 2. SHARING LEADERSHIP - DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF SHARED LEADERSHIP AND INCREASING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

---

IPPN is currently finalising a three-year research project on sustainable leadership and intends to launch the resulting report later this year. The main aims of the project are to:

- examine the sustainability of school leadership roles in the context of leadership and school effectiveness
- identify the main contributing factors that compromise the sustainability of that leadership and
- examine proposals and identify opportunities that will contribute to effective and sustainable school leadership in the future.

There are six key strands which impact on the sustainability of school leadership and have been examined as part of the project, as follows:

1. Effective leadership and core purpose
2. Preparation for leadership
3. Recruitment
4. Time & space to lead
5. Sharing and supporting leadership
6. Governance.

There is widespread support for this project across the education sector, including from the Department of Education, the Inspectorate, management bodies, the teachers' union and other key stakeholders.

Future budget submissions will centre on the recommendations arising from the report. In the meantime, there are a number of key supports that need to be funded, to make primary school leadership more effective and sustainable in the short-term:

All research, much of it led by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), points to the critical need for further investment in the sharing of leadership and the development of leadership capacity in primary schools. At post-primary level, emerging research points to the impact of the investment in additional deputy principal posts and time for deputy principals and principals to collaborate as a major factor in supporting the sustainability of leadership. At primary level, we are prioritising the following:

## RETAIN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DAYS FOR DEPUTY PRINCIPALS

As noted in previous budget submissions, the role of principal in any school is unsustainable without an appropriate shared leadership structure in place. Such a shared approach to leadership has a significant role in school self-evaluation and school improvement planning, the management of special educational needs, mentoring of new staff and, in larger schools, managing communication.

The sharing of leadership and management responsibilities with the deputy principal and assistant principals is central to the effective functioning of any school. It provides a very necessary support for principals in carrying out their role. This is fully acknowledged in DES circulars [63/2017 – Leadership and Management in Primary Schools](#) and [70/2018 – Leadership & Management in Primary Schools](#).

All school leaders want and need **dedicated time to focus on leading the teaching and learning in their schools as this is in keeping with their core purpose as instructional leaders**. They also need time to plan and manage:

1. School Self-Evaluation and School Improvement Planning
2. Strategy and policy development
3. Meeting and resourcing special educational need, including the management of ASD and Speech and Language classes
4. Communications with staff, Board of Management, parents, education agencies and other external parties e.g. Tusla case conferences.

This is in addition to governance responsibilities, overseeing general administration, professional development and building projects, among myriad other accountabilities. The need for this burden to be shared in a co-leadership approach with the Deputy Principal is obvious, but this can only be achieved in a meaningful way if there is sufficient time and space for the principal and deputy principal to collaborate.

In recognition of this and of the many and varied additional responsibilities pertaining to the special school sector, administrative status was given to deputy principals in large schools (24+ mainstream classes) and in larger special schools (15+ classes). Furthermore, as a Covid measure, “release” days were sanctioned for deputy principals in schools where there was an administrative principal. Research by IPPN and CSL confirms that this dedicated time was transformational in these schools, allowing school leaders (the principal and the deputy principal) to collaborate on the various leadership and

management responsibilities and to more effectively plan and share the leadership. It also reduced stress levels and eased the perception of the leadership role being 'undoable'. However, it must also be noted that schools with teaching principals, who are most squeezed in terms of time and space for leadership and management, would have derived a significant benefit from release days for their deputy principals.

### **Recommendation**

IPPN urges the Department of Finance and the Department of Education to acknowledge the importance of sufficient dedicated time for deputy principals in schools with administrative principals to focus on leadership and management by placing the leadership and management days allocated during COVID on a permanent and statutory footing from Budget 2023. We further urge that the measure be extended to DPs in all schools.

### **REDUCE THE THRESHOLD FOR APPOINTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE PRINCIPALS AND DEPUTY PRINCIPALS**

An IPPN survey of school leaders, to which 1,332 principals responded, confirmed that the top two priorities were the provision of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals and a reduction in the threshold for Administrative Principals. IPPN's position paper on Principals' Workload had identified these two areas as crucial towards enabling a more effective means of managing the dual role of the Teaching Principal.

Appendix B of Circular 19/2021, combined with the Staffing Schedule for 2022/2023, sets out the enrolment schedule underpinning the appointment to administrative principal status. Ordinary primary schools, Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht require an enrolment of 175 pupils to appoint an Administrative Principal. In a DEIS Band 1 school, an enrolment of 115 is required while DEIS Band 2 schools require an enrolment of 142 pupils. Principals of small schools with an Autism unit of two or more special classes is administrative, yet a school with one special class has no recognition in relation to the threshold for administrative status, an anomaly that needs to be urgently addressed.

Currently, 60% of Principals are Teaching Principals, as 1,862 schools (of the 3,104 mainstream schools) in the state have fewer than 174 pupils – DE Statistical Report - [Provisional primary school data for the 2021/2022 academic year](#). Principals in these schools have full-time teaching duties with the exception of 37 'release days' (from the 2022/23 school year), with four additional days provided to those leading schools with a special class.

It is important to note that the number of teachers counted for the calculation of administrative days refers to mainstream class teachers only. It does not take into account additional support and ancillary staff such as learning support teachers, resource teachers, special class teachers, special needs assistants, ancillary staff or bus escorts. These additional staff members add huge value to each school but also result in additional duties for the Teaching Principal as all staff must be managed, led and supported.

IPPN believes that the current situation in relation to the threshold for administrative principalship is having a negative effect not only on the principal, but also on the staff, pupils and the entire school community. A principal who is teaching throughout the school day cannot provide effective leadership and guidance to teachers, staff, pupils and the wider school community. Today's educational landscape dictates that leadership and management duties extend well beyond the current principal administration days outlined above.

It is deemed necessary that a school with 174 pupils requires an Administrative Principal i.e. 183 administrative days per year. How then is it considered manageable, or justifiable, for a school with 173 pupils of fewer to have their principal as 'administrative' for just 37 days per year?

### **Recommendations**

Taking these realities into account, there are two alternative approaches to resolve this:

1. The fairest and most equitable way is to base the threshold for administrative status for school leaders, not on pupil enrolment numbers, but on the number of teaching staff in the school – mainstream, special education and resource/learning support teachers.
2. Alternatively, the current approach to the threshold for the appointment of an Administrative Principal would be reduced from the current 174 pupils to 142 pupils, which is the current threshold for DEIS Band 2 schools. This would enable a further 192 principals to avail of administrative status. The thresholds for the appointment of administrative principals in DEIS schools, and in schools with a special autism class would need to be reduced proportionally to maintain fairness and equity of provision between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.
3. The same approach to the above should also be taken with regard to deputy principals, to reduce the threshold from the current level (24+ mainstream class teachers) on a proportional basis, whether based on teacher numbers or on pupil numbers.

IPPN recommends that the first approach be taken – to base the threshold for administrative status – for both principals and deputy principals - on the number of teachers on staff rather than on the number of pupils.

#### **EXTEND CSL COACHING AND MENTORING TO DEPUTY PRINCIPALS, ALL NEW PRINCIPALS AND THOSE NEW TO DEIS**

A shared or distributed model of leadership in schools is common to many jurisdictions and is generally accepted as the most appropriate way of ensuring our schools are led and managed effectively. It is also recognised that this distributed leadership approach has the potential to enhance the sustainability of senior leadership roles within our schools, while also developing the capacity of those who may be appointed to those roles in the future. This is articulated by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) in its publication *Learning to be a School Leader in Ireland*: *“There is a growing belief that single-person leadership, such as that of the principal, is insufficient when it comes to leading learning and teaching in a complex organisation like a school, hence the emphasis on collective responsibility for leadership in schools.”*

In Circular 0070/2018 *Leadership and Management in Primary Schools*, the Department of Education establishes the rationale for such an approach to leadership. *“The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality pupil care, learning and teaching. Leadership in a school context, creates a vision for development, leading to improvements in outcomes for learners, and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes. In this way leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for pupil learning.”* The sharing or distributing of leadership thus moved from being a concept to be explored to being a policy imperative.

However, movement away from a hierarchical, duties-focused approach to the more inclusive approach to the leadership and management of our schools, where the contributions of all are valued and celebrated, cannot be assumed. It needs to be fostered, facilitated and embedded. It requires time, effort and investment. Promoting it as a policy imperative does not ensure its successful implementation. As McGovern puts it, *“Distributed leadership is not a quick fix support for school principals. Authentic and successful partnerships take time and considerable effort to consolidate.”*



The DE's *Looking at our School* 2016 policy document identified four domains within the quality framework for leadership and management. One of the four domains is 'Developing Leadership Capacity', which challenges school leaders to reflect on and develop their own practice while also empowering others to realise their leadership potential.

The policy document would appear to consider the principal as having sole responsibility for the empowerment of others, which is somewhat at variance with the espousal of a distributed leadership model. However, the statements provide an important reminder that school leaders do not always have to be the most expert person in the room or the person who is best placed to lead change or reform. It is more important that school leaders, in partnership with the wider leadership team, recognise where that expertise and capacity lie and then ensure that the leadership is shared and supported accordingly.

Fitzpatrick Associates, in its 2021 report *Evaluation of the Centre for School Leadership – Bridging Phase 2018-2020*, confirmed the value and impact of coaching and mentoring supports provided to principals since 2016 on their leadership practice, and on their confidence in the leadership role:

*'The CSL coaching service for school leaders remains a highly rated and valued support service by coaching recipients, and its need and relevance, quality of delivery, and developmental impacts for participants are each given very high ratings in turn.'*

*'The CSL mentoring programme was very positively received and regarded by recently appointed school leaders, and the role of the CSL in the training of mentors had been particularly commended.'*

There is no reason to believe that there would not be a similar impact on the small number of deputy principals engaged in the pilot of these programmes which is currently underway.

### **Recommendation**

To help schools to progress in the sharing of leadership beyond the person of the principal, IPPN advocates for the following, in collaboration with the Centre for School Leadership (CSL):

- Extension of the formal mentoring support established for principals in 2016 to deputy principals, entailing the training of deputy principal mentors in addition to principal mentors
- Extension of group mentoring supports to deputy principals (This would be an IPPN cost)
- Extension of coaching supports to principals who have already accessed coaching by an additional 2/3 sessions

- Extension of mentoring supports to principals who have recently attained DEIS status
- Extension of coaching to a greater number of deputy principals prioritising deputy principals with a newly appointed principal and those in schools that have recently achieved DEIS status.

---

### 3. ENSURING THE CONTINUITY OF PROVISION TO CHILDREN

---

To ensure continuity of provision to children, the system needs to

1. **Extend and expand teacher supply panels**, so that the need for urgent (unplanned) as well as planned absences can be met by the panels, and that all schools can avail of them
2. **Provide substitute cover for all approved absences**
3. **Create supply panels for substitute SNAs and an appropriate national process for the employment of substitute SNAs** - IPPN is developing a portal similar to SubSeeker to match vacancies with available substitute SNAs
4. **Develop an appropriate process for the vetting of substitute SNAs who work across schools**  
This is the barrier to making this work at a national level.

#### EXTEND AND EXPAND TEACHER SUPPLY PANELS FOR ALL SCHOOLS

The introduction and implementation of teacher supply panels across the country for primary teacher absences has been a very positive development for the sector and successful in helping to reduce work overload and stress for school leaders. In many cases, teacher absences are unplanned and require urgent attention to secure substitute cover so that children are not left without a teacher. Where a qualified substitute teacher is not available, the school is left with few options– to move children into other classes, ask Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers to cover the absence, or place an unqualified person in the class to *supervise* the children – none of which provides fully for the children’s educational needs.

The key issue is insufficient capacity – many schools are not covered by the panels and there is insufficient capacity in the existing panels. From the operation of the existing panels over the past year, the system will now have clear information to confirm the extent of the capacity gap. Addressing this will go some way towards alleviating the administrative burden on school leaders, and on teaching principals in particular.

IPPN will continue to work with the Department of Education to optimise the operation of the panels through the Sub Seeker system on EducationPosts.ie. To minimise the impact of teacher absences on children and reduce the administrative burden on school leaders, IPPN strongly advocates for the existing panels to be expanded to cover more schools and more absences, and for additional panels to be set up so that all schools have access to fully qualified substitute teachers.

### **Recommendation**

Expand teacher supply panels to all schools and increase the number of teachers on each panel to facilitate both planned and unplanned absences, ensuring all approved absences lead to a fully-qualified teacher providing an appropriate learning experience for the pupils.

### **PROVIDE SUBSTITUTE COVER FOR ALL APPROVED ABSENCES**

A related issue is the need to extend the provision of substitute cover for all approved absences. It is no longer acceptable to expect children to be 'looked after' during a teacher's approved absence, whether by another classroom teacher, by a Special Education Teacher or by a principal. These scenarios create issues including class over-crowding (with the consequent spread of illnesses), the lack of teaching and learning for the duration of the absence, the impact on all children, including those with special needs, and the workload implications for principals. Where teachers are absent, their pupils need and deserve to have a fully qualified teacher to teach the class and facilitate their ongoing learning.

### **Recommendation**

As per our previous recommendation.

### **CREATE RECRUITMENT PROCESS AND SUPPLY PANELS FOR SUBSTITUTE SNAs**

There is currently no agreed process or facility for schools to source substitute SNAs on a national level. Each school has to determine the best approach and make its own arrangements to find suitable people to take up vacant positions for the duration of the SNA's absence. The positive impact of teacher supply panels on children's learning, on school staff and on the workload of principals is significant. It would lift a significant burden if this successful model were replicated for SNAs.

It is worth noting that IPPN is developing a portal similar to SubSeeker to match SNA vacancies with available substitute SNAs. This would greatly facilitate schools who are searching for an SNA to cover a planned or an unplanned absence.

### **Recommendation**

Establish SNA supply panels for schools, in line with the substitute teacher supply panels, such that all schools have access to a panel; and there is sufficient capacity to cater for all approved absences, both planned and unplanned.

### **DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE PROCESS FOR THE VETTING OF SUBSTITUTE SNAs WHO WORK ACROSS SCHOOLS**

The current vetting system, which requires an individual to be re-vetted for every school separately, creates considerable barriers to an efficient recruitment process in relation to non-teaching staff such as SNAs (especially in relation to SNA substitution cover) and can result in children – including very vulnerable children - missing out on vital supports. It also negatively impacts the workload of school leaders and Boards of Management, which is a critical concern for the sustainability of leadership and the smooth running of primary schools. The simpler the process and the faster the information can be shared with schools, the easier it will be for schools to ensure that all staff employed are fully garda vetted and that all pupils are safe.

IPPN was consulted on proposed amendments to the Garda Vetting process and fully supports

- a mandatory system of re-vetting every three years
- moving to a system in which a person is vetted for the work they will be or are likely to be engaged in in that employment within categories of identified risk, rather than treating each clause in isolation, and avoiding the need for additional vetting during the same 36 month period if individuals are largely carrying out the same role
- Introduction of a mechanism whereby an SNA can make their vetting disclosure available electronically to any school employer that requires it for the purposes of the Vetting Act.

### **Recommendation**

Implement the proposals and agree a national process for the vetting of SNAs who work in multiple schools, which will meet the requirements of the Vetting Act.

---

## 4. ADDRESSING THE FUNDING CRISIS

---

There is a critical need to address the funding crisis relating to soaring inflation and spiralling energy costs. Two specific funding priorities for primary schools need to be addressed:

1. Bring grant funding into line with post-primary schools
2. Retention of COVID supports until the pandemic ends

### **BRING GRANT FUNDING INTO LINE WITH POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

It is acknowledged by many working in the primary education sector (and oft repeated in submissions) that capitation and ancillary services grant funding to primary schools is grossly inadequate. It is estimated that primary schools operate at a deficit of between 10% and 15% every year. This is despite rules that schools ought not to have any debt. Schools often resort to fundraising in an attempt to meet the shortfall, while some request voluntary contributions from families. This is hardly the best use of school leaders' and Boards' time and energy, and is grossly unfair when post-primary schools do not have to do the same to meet the same types of costs. The stress and work related to funding shortfalls has been highlighted in research by Deakin University (2022) and Maynooth University (2021).

Addressing this funding shortfall has never been more urgent, particularly in light of exponential increases in energy costs and increased costs related to inflation, which have added a further 40-60% and 8% to costs respectively in recent months, with no sign that these spiralling increases will abate or reduce. Bringing grant funding for primary schools into line with that provided to post-primary schools would go a long way towards addressing these issues, although it may not be sufficient in the short term to address the energy cost crisis. Increasing funding by 5% per year, as has been the approach in recent budgets, is wholly insufficient and does not even address inflation, which would be an issue even if costs were fully funded in the first place; this is categorically not the case.

IPPN also suggests that now is the ideal opportunity to put a new structure for funding primary schools in place. The payment of the grant funding in two yearly 'moieties' (instalments) should be discontinued. Consideration should now be given to the streamlining of all school funding (including the Ancillary Services grant) into a single operational grant with the elimination of ring-fenced grants,

which cause administrative issues, as acknowledged in the Department's circular 48/2009 – see below. This would give schools financial flexibility and enable them to set their own priorities on spending. A single operational grant, paid quarterly with the first payment made in August, would considerably reduce cash flow problems in schools. If this is not possible, at least three termly payments in September, January and April, as is the case in post-primary schools, would be a considerable improvement.

### **Circular 0048/2009 Voluntary Secondary Schools - Clarification regarding legitimate use of capitation funding**

*The purpose of this letter is to clarify that capitation funding provided this year for general running costs and funding provided for caretaking and secretarial services may be regarded as a common grant which the Board of Management can allocate according to its own priorities. In due course the grant schemes will be merged. In the interim grants will continue to be paid according to existing timelines and calculated separately as heretofore*

*Schools that are not in receipt of DEIS funding can utilise capitation or caretaker/secretarial funding to support book rental schemes or to otherwise help provide books for individual pupils where this is considered by a Board to be a priority for the school.*

### **Recommendations**

Bring capitation grant funding for primary schools into line with that provided to our post-primary counterparts, to address a long-standing anomalous and inequitable issue, and to ensure it increases in line with inflation.

### **RETENTION OF COVID SUPPORTS UNTIL THE PANDEMIC ENDS**

The supports provided to schools to enable them to safely reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to remain open, were very badly needed and also much appreciated. Schools need the assurance of guaranteed funding in order to focus on continuity of learning. Despite the additional funding, many schools have struggled to meet the needs of vulnerable children, especially those children who are at very high risk of COVID-19 who need to remain at home and those who have to isolate at home while recovering from COVID or awaiting a test result.

This emergency funding needs to continue until the pandemic risks have fully abated, including the following supports:

1. Funding of deep cleaning, PPE and related equipment/materials
2. Expanded funding of school meals to support disadvantaged pupils
3. Substitute cover for all staff absences
4. Flexible use of substitution time that could not be provided due to lack of capacity.

Many schools have requested that the additional funding for cleaning be retained beyond the pandemic, as it has facilitated an excellent standard of cleanliness in schools that is not possible with the capitation and ancillary grant funding at its current levels.

Additional funding to provide supports to vulnerable pupils would help to ensure equity in provision for all children during the ongoing pandemic. Funding of school meals, including during periods of school closure, is crucial to support children living in poverty - 109,401 children age 6-11 experienced poverty, according to the Educational Disadvantage Centre at Dublin City University.

### **Recommendation**

Retain the pandemic-related supports until all of the risks have fully abated and for additional funding to be provided for those schools whose capitation funding is inadequate to support vulnerable pupils in practical ways.

---

## 5. FULLY RESOURCING SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

---

At a recent meeting of the IPPN National Council, school leaders commented that the current system for providing and supports for children with special educational needs is ‘broken’, ‘dystopian’ and that it leads to ‘cultural apartheid. Council members contrasted this to the relative ease and speed of accessing supports for Ukrainian children fleeing conflict. This stark assessment and the disparity in how vulnerable children are supported applies to both the processes/procedures and the level of resourcing provided.

In summary, either children have needs or they don’t and these needs are either met or they are not. Schools cannot make up for a shortfall in the provision of supports that children with SEN require to learn and thrive in school. The heavy bureaucracy, the lack of transparency in decision-making, the excessive time taken to arrive at a decision and the level of unmet need have all been highlighted by many organisations, including by IPPN in its submission to the NCSE in May 2021. The Ombudsman for Children and many others in the sector have also pointed to the lack of provision in this area and the consequent impact on the children with SEN and other children in the school.

Every primary school supports children with special educational needs and/or those at risk of educational disadvantage. Where adequate teaching and SNA resources, equipment and learning resources are provided, these pupils can thrive and reach their full potential, which is at the heart of every primary school’s ethos and mission. There are far too many examples of funding not matching the need in our schools to conclude that the issue is not systemic.

DE, Inspectorate and NCSE research points to the success of the DEIS programme and pilot projects relating to SNA allocations and SEN resourcing in primary schools. Where the level of resourcing provided in pilot projects is extended to other schools, it is likely that the positive outcomes are replicated. However, moving from pilot to implementation often results in a far more limited suite of supports being made available, in order to reduce costs.

It is clear from IPPN and other research that the management of SEN in schools is a significant contributor to work overload and stress for primary principals, and needs to be addressed to make the role more sustainable. School leaders and teachers are among the strongest advocates for children with



additional needs. Principals generally have to fight for every support and resource – including human resources (teaching and SNA), staff training, equipment, learning resources, health and safety measures, infrastructural works - to facilitate the best possible environment in which the children learn.

The application processes to access these supports are cumbersome and time-consuming, often requiring forms to be sent to multiple agencies, as it's not always clear which part of the system (Department of Education/HSE/NCSE/other) handles each aspect.

Often these resources and supports are not forthcoming and the school is left to manage **as** best they can. This causes significant frustration and stress for the school, as well as the parents and the children, as clearly the outcome will be sub-optimal for the individual child, despite the best efforts of the school staff. Failure to adequately resource and support children with additional needs may also have an adverse impact on the learning of the other children in that class.

It remains to be seen whether the new School Inclusion Model will improve the situation. The pilot project was very limited in its scope and did not include all types of primary school, thus it is likely that key issues have not yet been surfaced or resolved.

Consultation with school leaders in relation to the NCSE Strategy for the period 2022-2026 highlighted the following issues relating to funding and resourcing:

1. School leaders feel that **children are not placed at the heart of decisions**, that funding drives all decisions made, and that not enough is being done to match the needs in schools with appropriate staffing levels and equipment, learning resources, and professional development for teachers and SNAs. Very high expectations are placed on schools to provide the very best possible education and environment for children with additional needs, yet the resourcing required to deliver this is often not provided to schools.
2. **The allocation of SEN resources based on the school profile is considered to be inadequate** by many school leaders. School leaders are frustrated by the lack of transparency with regard to how criteria are weighted and how allocations are calculated. The accuracy of the dataset used to determine these allocations has yet to be established and is compromised by its dependence on data being provided by state agencies and bodies outside of the education sector.

3. **Professional development of teachers and SNAs is wholly inadequate.** The PDST programmes that specifically supported school leaders in dealing with disadvantage and special needs were discontinued. This indicates a lack of awareness of the critical importance of ensuring that school leaders and all school staff members are fully aware of best practice in supporting children from a disadvantaged background and those children with SEN.
4. School leaders say that **too much emphasis is placed on primary care needs, and not enough on complex behavioural care needs**, which can be equally challenging for the child and for the teacher to manage and are a clear barrier to achieving potential, not to mention the general disruption it causes to everyone in the class.
5. **Children with mild and moderate learning difficulties would potentially benefit from enrolment in a special class designed to meet their needs**, as many do not cope very well in larger classes as they don't have adequate access to an SNA.
6. Schools report that **acquiring specialist therapeutic supports for children is very onerous and time-consuming**, and often requires liaison with several service providers to meet the needs of an individual child. Having speech and language, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and other such therapies administered centrally by one organisation – ideally the NCSE - would alleviate many of these issues and would doubtless be more efficient and cost-effective also.
7. The **resources, CPD and supports** that schools need to establish special classes **come far too late** and are often **inadequate** e.g. no extra funding is provided. Any remaining barriers to providing the capacity needed across the system to meet children's needs must be removed.
8. Some commented that **assistive technologies require review** as there are many lower cost options now available than those recommended, for example, low-cost apps that can be downloaded onto a child's device to help them engage with their learning more readily than other technologies that cost far more to provide and maintain.

### **Recommendation**

Funding needs to be provided to ensure that all children with special educational needs in our schools receive the supports they need to equitably reach their full potential, alongside their peers. Since 2008, IPPN has been calling for adequate funding to facilitate the full implementation of the EPSEN Act. Within that context, we call for the NCSE to be fully funded so that all pupils with additional needs – those at

risk of educational disadvantage and those with special educational needs – get the support, equipment and learning resources that will enable them to fulfil their potential.

Specifically, we are looking for the following to be funded in Budget 2023 and subsequent budgets:

1. **Provide funding, support and guidance to schools** to ensure that *every* child in the school has equal chance of achieving his/her/their potential
2. To **put the child at the heart of every decision** made by the NCSE
3. To **increase the capacity of NCSE to provide support and guidance to schools** as needed
4. To **centralise specialist therapeutic services** to more effectively meet the needs of children in schools, remove the barriers to access, reduce cost and greatly reduce the amount of time it takes to provide services. The NCSE should continue to lead the demonstration project to provide therapeutic supports in schools until it has been expanded to include all schools.
5. To **provide CPD for all school staff who engage with children with SEN**
6. To **provide CPD for all NCSE staff who engage with schools** – to raise awareness of how schools operate and what they deal with day to day, to improve consistency of decision-making and to ensure equity across all schools in terms of resourcing
7. To **build inclusion best practice in ITE programmes** in all teacher training colleges.

## Appendix I – Dr Siobhán Kavanagh Research on Middle Leadership

Dr. Siobhán Kavanagh conducted doctoral research relating to middle leadership and reviewed the relevant literature to ascertain the impact of middle leadership in schools. Her research explains why primary schools require adequate middle leadership capacity if the breadth and depth of leadership and management, especially that which pertains to teaching and learning, can be progressed to achieve optimal outcomes for students:

- Schools require a leader who can motivate both teachers and students to learn and the education system requires a leader who can meet the requirements and needs of all stakeholders. This is a significant undertaking for one individual.
- We must question whether placing this level of responsibility on one person is sustainable. The role and remit of the principal is overwhelming (Drysdale, Gurr and Goode, 2016); has grown exponentially (O'Donovan, 2015) and it is “unrealistic to think that any one person can discharge the role without the assistance of a considerable number of colleagues” (Martin, 2006).
- The literature acknowledges that principals require support and that the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities is essential to relieve this burden and improve teaching and learning (OECD, 2008, and LDS, 2007).
- Effective schools require a team of leaders that utilise their collective intelligences to transform the school into a learning community.
- Irish educational policy (DES, 2018) advocates for the utilisation of a distributed leadership model in schools
- Middle leaders are important for the successful functioning of schools (Turner and Sykes, 2007, Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014)
- Their role gives them a unique position which comes with a responsibility to enact change, while still being closely connected to and involved in teaching.

- When teachers take on an appointed middle leadership role, they have the potential to influence both policy and practice and are central to the implementation of new practices (Shaked and Schechter, 2017).
- Middle leaders have the potential to greatly influence the teaching and learning in their schools, from both a student and teacher support perspective. This aspect of the role of an ML in Ireland is in its infancy and needs to be further developed to harness the important and influential potential of the position of the ML as a conduit between policy and practice.
- Middle leaders can make a “powerful contribution to [...] school improvement” (Gurr, 2019) when they work well with school leaders.

Dr Kavanagh concludes: “The need for strong professional middle leadership is incontestable” (O’Connor, 2008, p.16) as it has the potential to affect teacher attitudes and beliefs, school culture and most importantly student outcomes.