



IPPN Submission to the National Parents Council - Primary

Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027

November 2022

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2 INTRODUCTION

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is the officially recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. Established in 1999, IPPN is an independent, not-for-profit, voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the Department of Education (DE), the National Parents' Council Primary (from here referred to as NPC), management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of over 6,000 Principals and Deputy Principals, leading Ireland's 3,200+ primary schools.

IPPN shares NPC's stated aim of wanting *'to see an Ireland where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential'*. Accordingly, we set out in this submission IPPN's suggestions for consideration with regard to the NPC Strategic Plan for the period 2023 to 2027 and look forward to engaging with the NPC in implementing elements of the plan in the coming years.

3 IPPN SUGGESTIONS

3.1 PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS

At the core of any school's work are the relationships among those in the community it serves – the pupils, parents, teachers, SNAs, ancillary staff, deputy principal and principal, as well as the Board of Management, the Parent Association, the Student Council and other organisational structures in place in many schools. Whether these relationships are effective and positive determines to a large extent the culture and experience of all who learn and work in the school. As the representative organisation for parents,, in the case of NPC, and as the professional body for school leaders in the case of IPPN, whatever we and others working in the primary education sector can do to promote the development and enhancement of positive, effective relationships in all schools will reap rewards for everyone in those communities.

We recognise the responsibility of school leaders and school staff to ensure that all of their interactions with children and parents are underpinned by professionalism, respect and equity. However, by way of context, interpersonal issues negative interactions and even challenging behaviour, in relation to working with parents, are among the top issues raised by IPPN members – principals and deputy principals – when availing of our Leadership Support service. These issues cause significant stress and worry, and add to the already significant workload of school leaders. In recent years, IPPN has focused on providing CPD to members relating to *Dignity and Respect in the Workplace*. We believe this to be the cornerstone of a positive culture for everyone involved in schools. This work has broadened out to our work with NPC in relation to Misneach, as we appreciate that schools, led by new principals, need additional support and guidance to ensure that the key relationships formed by principals with parents are positive from the very beginning of their leadership role.

IPPN also fully supports the work of Partnership Schools Ireland (PSI) and its powerful partnership model. Ultimately, ensuring that there is dignity and respect in a school community is a shared responsibility and does not rest with staff alone. Any attempt at addressing these issues will be more effective if that shared understanding of the responsibility of every member of a school community to

uphold a positive culture is embedded from the beginning. By this, we mean the point at which a new parent engages with a school to enrol their child, a new pupil begins their learning journey, a new member of staff is inducted or a new Board of Management is constituted. These are all key points at which the culture of the school, and the importance of dignity and respect by and for all stakeholders in it, could and should be addressed and cultivated.

3.2 GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

It can be very challenging to address an issue with a school/parent if the relationship is already in some way 'damaged'. The guidance and support required will be very different, and potentially less effective, than a situation that has not escalated.

Training the NPC helpline staff in relation to the Dignity and Respect in the Workplace approach would be a very positive step. IPPN would be happy to share with NPC the Resource Bundle on this, which we provide to members via CPD and our website.

3.3 LEARNING FROM COVID PANDEMIC

If there was one positive outcome of the pandemic, it was an increased awareness of the importance of school, and of face-to-face teaching and learning, among all stakeholders – children, staff and parents alike. The negative impact of successive lockdowns necessitating periods of remote learning - and even remote learning was not a given for all children/families – has been shown by various research studies to be significant, with ongoing effects on learning, relationships, and mental health.

During this period, the level of engagement between families and schools grew significantly, as various tools were embraced to keep the lines of communication open between home and school. Parents who were concerned about their children could seek support and advice, and teachers who were concerned about a child's learning or wellbeing could reach out to offer guidance and support.

This enhanced understanding of each other's role in supporting children's wellbeing and learning is welcome and should be encouraged. This could include encouraging parents to contact the school early on with any concerns about their child, before any issues may become more entrenched and more challenging to address.

A further suggestion is to keep the focus of any engagement between home and school on the child and his/her/their needs, and what can be done to support them. This can avoid situations from becoming more challenging and is more likely to result in a positive outcome for all parties.

If the Inspectorate has not been asked to provide input to the strategic plan, this may be something the NPC would consider, given the deep expertise and in-depth research conducted by the Inspectorate in recent years in relation to the impact on teaching and learning of the pandemic and of school leadership.

3.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Schools have always relied on the support and volunteerism of parents in various aspects of their work, not least the governance role of parent nominees on Boards of Management. Generations of parents have committed themselves to this work, and many others have enhanced their children's experience of school through involvement in sports, musicals, plays, concerts, projects that enhance the school environment, and myriad other activities.

In the absence of the long-awaited Student and Parent Charter, NPC (and IPPN, with our members) has a role in communicating the importance of positive and meaningful parental involvement in schools, and of the establishment and support of parent associations as a key communication conduit between schools and the parent body. IPPN believes that there should be a parent association in every school, and that each parent association should have a formal constitution setting out its purpose and the ways of working, which would be developed in consultation with the school's board of management. The provision of templates and guidance for effective partnerships with parent associations could be facilitated via the NPC website. Indeed the joint NPC/IPPN 2010 publication [*Supporting Each Other - a guide to best practice for the effective partnership between Principals and Parent Associations*](#) - could be updated and circulated to all schools and parent associations via our websites and other communication channels.

In the past, a focal point for parents in supporting schools has been on fundraising. The lobbying by NPC, IPPN, management bodies, INTO and others over the years has resulted in some improvement in capitation and ancillary funding of schools, yet there continues to be a shortfall of funding to meet basic costs, to the order of 40-50% (Grant Thornton, 2018). Ongoing advocacy by NPC, management bodies and others is required to get to a point where no school needs to fundraise to pay the bills, nor to give children a positive experience of school through the provision of resources and supports to

enhance their learning. Equity for all children has to be the ultimate aim, with free education in terms of books, uniforms and transport the starting point.

Fundraising can also be something that causes tension in schools between Parent Associations and Boards of Management. Best practice would dictate that all such activities and the purpose of such fundraising should be agreed with and approved by the Board of Management in advance.

3.5 GOVERNANCE

No matter how small the school, two parents will be members of the Board of Management of every primary school, unless there is an agreed shared governance structure in place among two or more schools. Those who have served at least one term on a Board will appreciate the complexity and serious nature of the work of boards. There are significant legal, financial, health and safety and other compliance aspects to the Board's governance role, as well as oversight responsibilities in the areas of recruitment, child protection, GDPR, enrolment, procurement, maintenance and the completion of capital projects.

The onerous responsibilities are detailed in the Governance Code of the Charity Regulator, with which every charity, including schools, must comply. Given the breadth of these responsibilities and the importance of strong governance, the very least any board should expect is access to professional expertise in relation to these matters, particularly where the composition of the Board does not comprise such expertise, which is the case in the vast majority of schools. The fact that this expertise is not available, or funded, by the Department/Exchequer significantly compromises the capacity of Boards to adequately discharge their oversight and compliance functions.

Including the issue of governance, and the challenges related to it, in the NPC strategic plan would help to clarify the role of boards among those who serve, and to pressure the 'system' to undertake the structural reform that is required.

3.6 SCHOOL PRIORITIES

IPPN encourages school leaders to communicate clearly its School Plan and the activities it is planning in relation to School Self-Evaluation, with the parent body. We have provided a framework to set out the school's priorities over a 5-6 year period, which we refer to as the 'PIEW Framework'. See Appendix I for details.

This is something the NPC could help to disseminate through its strategic plan. It may help parents to better understand the school's strategic priorities and the need for a focus on such priorities.

3.7 INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

Communicating with parents is not a formal part of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), yet it can be an aspect of a teacher's work that causes considerable concern and stress where an issue arises that they are ill equipped to handle. The work NPC has done with DCU and other Higher Education Institutes in relation to a module to support teachers with this is excellent, and IPPN encourages NPC to work towards rolling this approach out across all of the HEIs that are involved in ITE.

In the interim, recording of the existing modules and placing them on the NPC website could facilitate access to such training by individual teachers and schools who wish to upskill in this area. IPPN would be happy to support this by letting members know about it via our communication channels.

4 CONCLUSION

IPPN welcomes the opportunity to feed into the consultation process that will inform the NPC strategic plan for 2023-2027.

The key points presented here could form part of the NPC strategic plan, as well as specific actions, including engaging with key stakeholders to deliver the plan.

A partnership approach to advocacy has significantly strengthened IPPN's work in recent years and the achievements we can point to are due in no small part to the collaborative efforts among education partners and deeper engagement on a bilateral basis with stakeholders in the primary sector. We believe that such an approach can be implemented at an operational level also, to enhance relationships both internally among staff and with external parties. IPPN would be very happy to discuss the proposals mentioned in this submission in more detail and to engage with you in achieving those aspects of the Plan that are a priority for both organisations.

Appendix I - The PIEW Framework: Prioritise – Implement – Embed - Wait

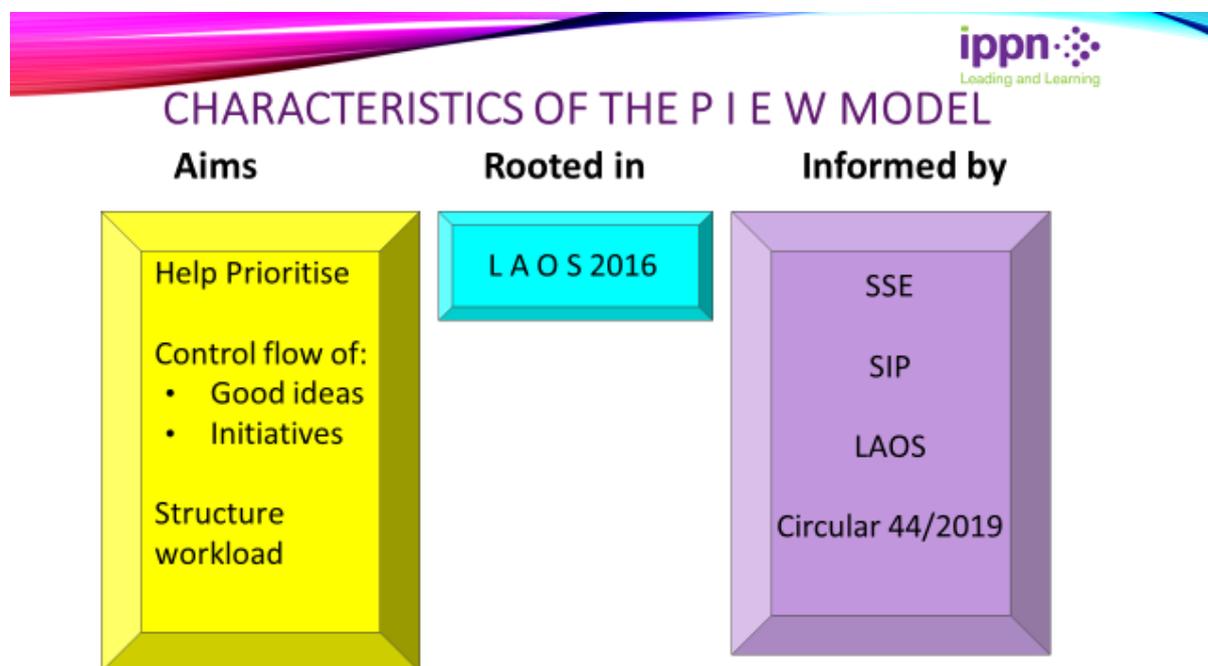
The key is not to prioritize your schedule, but to schedule your priorities

- Stephen Covey

The PIEW Framework has been designed by IPPN to help school leaders and school staffs to decide on, and work to, agreed priorities. It is used in an increasing number of schools nationwide and is proving very successful at creating the necessary time and space to lead.

The aims of the PIEW Framework are to provide school leaders with a practical model that will:

- allow the school leader to control and manage the flow of initiatives
- structure the workload
- provide a means of prioritising initiatives, considering
- the capacity of the school
- the ability of the initiative to enhance Teaching and Learning
- their importance in relation to the other competing initiatives
- the willingness and recognition by the School Staff that the initiative will be taken through all phases.
- enable the school leader to manage the expectations of those who would exert pressure to have their suggested initiative adopted by the school to the exclusion of others.



The PIEW Framework is based on the idea that system change takes time and goes through phases before the change is embedded in practice. It also captures the idea that no two schools are the same, that capacity to implement change is finite and that schools have to prioritise to ensure that any change has a chance to become embedded. To do otherwise is a waste of time – nothing

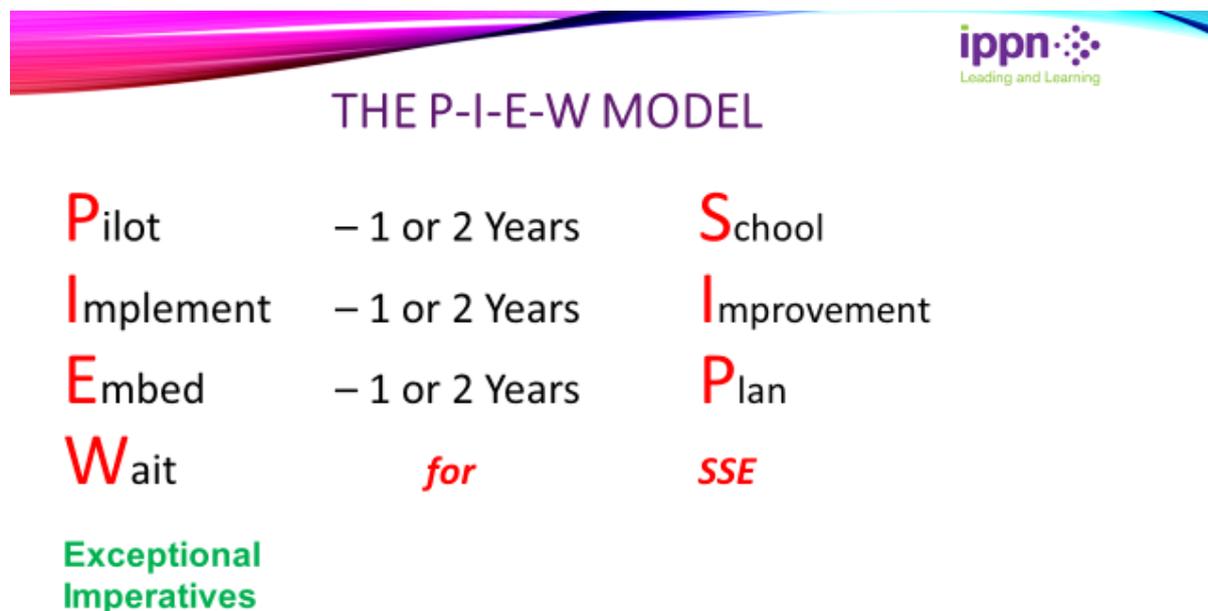
becomes embedded in the culture of the school; it's change for the sake of change with little or no longer-term impact on learning outcomes for children.

Looking at Our Schools (LAOS) 2016 and its Quality Framework works hand in hand with PIEW as a process of internal review and a way of working that enables schools to focus on implementing change and effecting improvement in teaching and learning.

The School Self-Evaluation and School Improvement Planning processes, as well as Department Circular 44/2019, which outlines a model of distributed leadership that is based on the Leadership and Management domains of LAOS, also inform the Framework.

Ultimately, PIEW offers a flexible approach that encourages schools to undertake a regular review to ensure a focus on current priority needs, to assume control of the agenda and to use SSE proactively to make a difference to the quality of teaching and learning, which is the core purpose of school leadership.

What is PIEW?



'P' stands for **Prioritise**, the agreed area(s) to be looked at, updated, changed if necessary, and often includes a 'Pilot' stage. Crucially, the amount of work to be prioritised in any school is based on the capacity of the school and how much work is still in the 'IEW' stages outlined below.

This is a 2-year phase, after which the area moves to the **'I'**, or **'Implement'** stage, over the following 2 years.

In years 5 and 6, the agreed changes or updates have become **'Embedded'**, represented by the letter **'E'**. This phase can include a review stage, to measure effectiveness, to check to ensure the learning has been embedded, and to agree what needs to change if this is not the case.

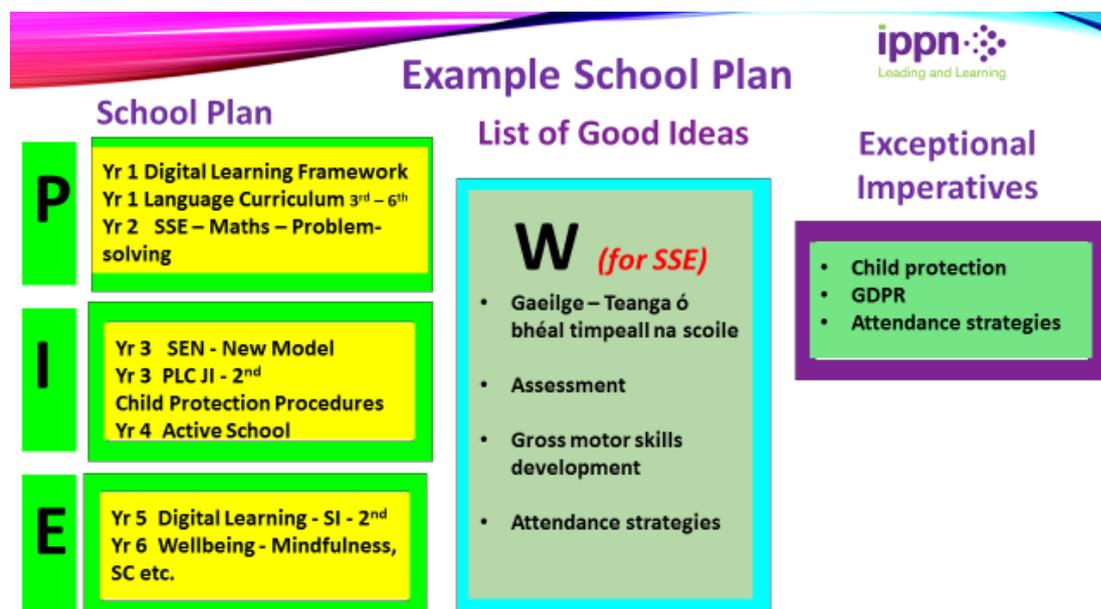
The **'W'** stands for **'Wait'**, or the ideas and suggestions that have been put on hold while the agreed priorities are worked through the 'PIE' elements. These ideas and suggestions, which can come from

staff members, parents, pupils, Board members and others in the school community, are noted under the ‘W’ of the PIEW plan. Every year, these ideas are discussed with the school staff and, depending on the capacity to pilot them, a small number are prioritised and added to the school PIEW plan and go through the phases as outlined.

For example, a school may decide to prioritise a specific curriculum subject, or aspect of a subject, as well as a key operational policy or the attainment of a ‘flag’ for environmental awareness, fitness or enterprise. Those are the agreed priorities and should not be added to until they are at the implement stage. The exception is Departmental imperatives, such as Child Protection or Data Protection, where changes in the law require a realigning of priorities for schools. In such case, the imperative will replace a previously identified priority until it is completed.

An important aspect of PIEW is the clarity it provides for the whole school community in terms of the school’s capacity for change and the agreed priorities. It also documents all the change taking place in the school over a period of time. Thus, it is a key communication tool that can be shared on the school’s website.

What this might look like for a school:



A number of key questions should be asked of any initiative that is considered for inclusion in the Waiting List:

- Why should the school undertake the initiative?
- How does this initiative contribute towards the teaching and learning in the school?
- How does this give expression to the Quality Framework?
- Is this rooted in the curriculum?
- Why is this more important, at this time, that another item on the Waiting List?
- Are we as a staff prepared to undertake this initiative for a period of 6 years to see it through all three phases?
- Have we the capacity to undertake this initiative properly?