

# Sustainable Leadership Project

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IPPN's consideration of the concept, the importance of and issues relating to the sustainability of school leadership began in earnest in July of 2019 with a symposium attended by guests drawn from the broad spectrum of education stakeholders. The symposium was facilitated by Dr Karen Edge and, while a lot of ground was covered and much sharing of ideas took place, it was the fundamentally



differing perspectives that emerged, when considering the perception of school leadership, that left a lasting impression.

In truth, the room divided down the middle between practitioners and policy makers. Karen asked us to put a number out of 10 on the value attributed to, the impact of and the scope for professional fulfilment associated with school leadership. The average score that emanated from the policy making side of the equation was 8 while practitioners offered an average score of 4. When practitioners were asked to elaborate on the issues that contributed to their low score, the common refrain from policy makers was, "I never realised" or "I had no idea". The disconnect between how school leadership was perceived, as opposed to experienced, was stark.

The importance of addressing this disconnect as well as impacting positively on the sustainability of school leadership became clearer as a result of the further discussion and facilitation that took place at the IPPN Conference in January of 2020. It became readily apparent that this was an issue that not only had implications for the retention of existing school leaders but also for the recruitment of future leaders. It also highlighted the potential wider consequences both for leadership effectiveness and school effectiveness which are inextricably linked. Understandably, ensuring the sustainability of school leadership has emerged as a strategic priority for IPPN and the Sustainable Leadership project has been commenced to address that priority.

Academic and practitioner research, both nationally and internationally, has demonstrated conclusively that effective school leadership is second only to effective classroom teaching as a positive influence on and determinant of pupil learning. As the professional body for primary school leaders, IPPN aspires to empower us to provide dynamic leadership of our school communities resulting in inspired learners. From the system's perspective, it makes sense

that having the most effective people in school leadership roles will have a consequential positive impact on the effectiveness of those schools - the right people in the right positions, focusing on the right things.

Anything that supports and facilitates effective school leadership will have a positive impact on our leadership practice, school effectiveness and, ultimately, learner outcomes. However, the opposite is also true, in that anything that negatively impinges on or detracts from our potential effectiveness as school leaders has a detrimental impact on us, on our schools and, more importantly, on children. It behoves IPPN and the wider education system to ensure that any such impinging or negative factors are addressed to better ensure those entrusted with leadership roles are facilitated to lead our schools, as reflective practitioners, and true to our own contexts.

#### AIMS

By means of the Sustainable Leadership project, we hope to

- examine the sustainability of current school leadership roles and, in particular, that of the Principal
- identify the main contributing factors that compromise the sustainability of that leadership and, most importantly,
- examine proposals and identify opportunities that will contribute to sustainable school leadership in the future.

To assist us in achieving these objectives, we propose to explore and provide a coherent analysis of the context and current reality in which school leaders are operating. Furthermore, we intend to provide an overview of the issues impacting on the sustainability of that leadership. Arising from that analysis, we then plan to identify areas to be addressed and to suggest alternative approaches which could have a positive impact on the critical issue of school leadership for the education system as a whole.

#### THEMES

In our consideration of the issues to date, some of the early themes emerging are

- the absence of a shared understanding of what constitutes effective school leadership
- the challenge in maintaining a focus on our core purpose of leading teaching and learning
- the absence of a systematic

process of preparation for leadership

- the vexed issue of having the requisite time to lead our schools which has a particular resonance for teaching principals
- the lack of adequate infrastructural supports including leadership & management posts and administrative support and one which will come as little surprise to any of you
- the inadequacies of the current Governance structure and the consequential impact in terms of workload on the Principal.

We intend to explore each of these themes in greater depth. We also intend that our analysis will be underpinned by relevant research and data derived from the Irish context and reflective of international leadership practice. This is one of the most important and challenging aspects of the project as much of the evidence in the system is anecdotal. We are in the throes of conducting a research needs analysis and look forward to engaging with you and the education stakeholders to address this deficit in current, relevant and meaningful data. This may also involve the commissioning of specific research.

#### CONSULTATION

Thus far, we have engaged with the DE with regard to the project and welcomed their constructive feedback on our project scope document. The Board of Directors and National Council members have been briefed and I had the opportunity of briefing the attendees at Conference. We will continue to keep you updated as the project progresses.

However, by far the most important aspect of the project will be our engagement with you, the wider membership of IPPN, in terms of informing the process of identifying both issues and potential solutions. We will provide further detail on how we will structure that engagement at the County AGM's in the autumn and we also hope to take advantage of the network of support groups throughout the country in order to secure your direct feedback and opinions.

The hope is that whatever emanates from this process by way of a report will go some way to

- improving the sustainability of school leadership
- enhancing the effectiveness of school leaders with its consequential impact on school improvement
- increasing the attractiveness of the role for those aspiring to leadership positions
- providing greater clarity around roles and responsibilities
- ensuring improved infrastructural supports
- addressing the considerable concerns of IPPN's membership on this issue

#### PROJECT TEAM

The project team is listed in the panel below.

The project team looks forward to engaging with you further in the coming months and to bringing the project to a successful conclusion.

*If you would like to contact Brian about this article, you can email him to [editor@ippn.ie](mailto:editor@ippn.ie).*

Core Team	Post	Areas of Responsibility
1. Damian White	President	Time & space to lead / Teaching Principalship / Special schools
2. Páirc Clerkin	CEO	Preparation for leadership / Recruitment / Induction
3. Jack Durkan	Supports & Services Manager	Infrastructural supports / Middle Management / Co-leadership
4. Geraldine D'Arcy	Advocacy & Communications Manager	Research & Statistics / Data Analysis / Project Management
5. Brian O'Doherty	Deputy President	Effective leadership / Core Purpose / Governance / Project Lead