



Step Down Facility for Principals

IPPN Position Paper

October 2015

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1. BACKGROUND

IPPN is the officially-recognised professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It 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 DES, the National Parents' Council, 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 6,600 Principals and Deputy Principals.

2. CONTEXT

The lack of a clearly-defined contract for Principals and an unclear role definition has been a cause of serious concern for IPPN since its establishment. In particular, the lack of an entrance strategy and, more particularly, an exit mechanism from the role requires urgent attention.

A school leader who feels he or she has no more to offer at a leadership level should be able step back from the role with dignity and without either reputational or financial loss.

3. THE ISSUE

Because of the scarcity of permanent posts, as well as the operation of the redeployment and supplementary panels and the anticipated results-based learning support allocation, principals who step down have very little chance of securing a permanent position under present conditions. The current system dictates that a school principal who relinquishes his/her post automatically becomes the most junior teacher in the school, regardless of previous experience or years of service. In contrast, a deputy principal relinquishing his / her promoted post loses the allowance for the position but maintains seniority in terms of their length of service.

In a recent survey by IPPN, to which 680 principals responded, equally divided between teaching and administrative principals, the following facts emerged which indicate a situation in urgent need of review:

1. Almost 1 in 4 teaching principals would urgently consider stepping back from their leadership role and returning to full time teaching
2. Approximately 1 in 8 administrative principals would do likewise if the opportunity arose.

These figures are indicative of the stress levels at which principals, particularly teaching principals, are operating. This fact has been borne out by the worrying results of a recent IPPN-sponsored Health & Wellbeing Survey of Principals carried out under the leadership of Dr. Philip Riley of Melbourne's Monash University.

While most principals are very positive about their work and enjoy most aspects of their role, many cite the impossibility of completing the job to their own satisfaction. This is mainly due to the ever-increasing demands which require continuous attention being foisted upon them by the DES and the various education agencies. IPPN considers it essential that a 'step down' facility is introduced for Principals and is willing to work with the DES and the relevant agencies to bring this about in a structured way.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fixed term contracts for a defined period (possibly 7 years) should be introduced, with a clause for review at the end of that period and with the possibility for a principal to step down and to continue in the teaching profession without loss of seniority and pension, as is the case for Deputy Principals.
2. If there is no vacancy in his/ her current school at the time of stepping down, the principal should be placed on the redeployment panel.
3. It would be appropriate for the DES to recognise a former principal's service in the role by allowing him/ her to retain a portion of the principal's allowance commensurate with the number of years' service as a school leader.
4. IPPN further suggests that it would be appropriate for the DES to recognise a former principal's years of service as a school leader in calculating that principal's pension entitlement, again to be commensurate with the number of years' service as a school leader.

5. CONCLUSION

The leadership role of the principal must be recognised in an appropriate manner. The introduction of a dignified step-down facility would ensure that those in leadership positions are treated appropriately.

Properly defining the role of the Principal must become a priority for the Department of Education and Skills. In redefining the role, cognisance must be taken of role fatigue and burnout and a workable mechanism put in place to facilitate a dignified step down from the role.