

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

Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is the professional body for over 6,000 Principals and Deputy Principals leading 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.

We present the following key priorities for Budget 2022, and expand on these in the chapters below:

1. *Funding of supports to make primary school leadership more sustainable, including:*

- a. Facilitating supports for the clustering of small schools and implementing the proposals arising from the action research project currently being undertaken around the country
- b. Sanctioning at least one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals
- c. Securing administrative status for principals with two or more special classes & all special schools
- d. Increasing middle leadership capacity in larger schools
- e. Establishing teacher supply panels on a permanent footing and increasing their scope
- f. Ensuring supports for children with additional needs are fully resourced.

2. *Retention of pandemic supports for schools*

3. *Adequate resourcing of supports for vulnerable children adversely impacted by the Covid pandemic.*

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss this submission in further detail with the Minister and her officials.

2. SUPPORTS FOR SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In July 2019, IPPN initiated a significant project to look at all aspects of school leadership, the main aims of which are 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
- examine proposals and identify opportunities that will contribute to sustainable school leadership in the future.

There are six key strands which impact on the sustainability of school leadership, which will be examined as part of the project, including:

1. Shared understanding of leadership
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. We anticipate that the project will conclude, and key proposals identified, within the next two years.

In the meantime, there are a number of key supports that need to be funded, to make primary school leadership more sustainable in the short-term:

1. Facilitating supports for the clustering of small schools and implementing the proposals arising from the action research project currently being undertaken around the country
2. Sanctioning at least one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals
3. Securing administrative status for principals with two or more special classes and principals of all special schools
4. Increasing middle leadership capacity in larger schools

5. Establishing teacher supply panels on a permanent footing and increasing their scope
6. Ensuring supports for children with additional needs are fully resourced.

SMALL SCHOOLS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

A key input to the Sustainable Leadership project is the action research project looking at supports that will make school leadership more sustainable in small schools in rural areas ([See DE Press Release](#)). The bottom-up approach being piloted in six clusters around the country will provide rich information about the challenges and innovative solutions to alleviate the work overload of teaching principals in these schools, and will inform IPPN's recommendations for future budgets.

Implementation Cost

The implementation cost for this project is currently being reviewed by the Department of Education and the education partners.

Recommendation

We ask that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the Department of Education fully support and resource the initiatives and supports identified through the system-wide analysis being done as part of the research project. For Budget 2022, the request is to fully fund the project and the action research for the coming year.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TIME FOR TEACHING PRINCIPALS

More than half (55%) of Irish primary school principals are 'teaching principals'. These school leaders have two critical roles to fulfil. They have full-time duties as teachers, more often than not teaching in multi-grade settings. They are also school principals with significant leadership and management responsibilities, many of which cannot be delegated. They are in an impossible situation – they can focus neither on their teaching nor on their leadership role, both of which are critical to the school, its pupils and its staff.

Teaching principals have the least ancillary staff support, as this also is tied to pupil numbers, despite the fact that they are teaching full-time and desperately need the support of ancillary staff. There are other vital supports needed in smaller schools, and structural issues that also need to be addressed.

However, our focus and priority for Budget 2022 is on securing a minimum of one day a week for teaching principals on a permanent basis.

School leaders want and need **dedicated time to focus on leading the teaching and learning in their schools**. 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.

Teaching principals were given one 'release day' per week from September 2020, and this was extended to the 2021/22 school year, *'to relieve the administrative burden arising from the changes and the impacts of Covid-19'*. This effectively means that these school leaders get 37 days (of the 183 days in the primary school year) to lead and manage their schools, which is a significant improvement for many of the leaders of the smallest schools, some of whom normally have only 19 days per year to do the same role. It is imperative that this one day a week to lead teaching and learning is allocated on a permanent basis.

IPPN's rationale for additional leadership and management time is further articulated in Appendix I.

Implementation cost

In a Dáil debate in April 2019, then Minister McHugh confirmed that this would cost €7.5m per annum. It is likely the current estimate would be lower, as additional days have been allocated since then.

Recommendation

IPPN urges the Department of Finance and the Department of Education to acknowledge the importance of sufficient dedicated time for teaching principals to focus on leadership and management by putting one leadership and management day per week for teaching principals on a permanent and statutory footing from Budget 2022.

ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS FOR PRINCIPALS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS & SCHOOLS WITH TWO OR MORE SPECIAL CLASSES

There is a small number of teaching principals in special schools (c. 15), and approximately 25 teaching principals leading schools with two or more special classes. This cohort of school leaders is under significantly more pressure than most others. As noted above, they teach full time, have all the same responsibilities as their administrative colleagues and, in the case of the latter cohort, have also committed to opening multiple special classes. It is generally accepted that the workload involved in leading and managing the teaching and learning in a special school or a school with a special unit is considerably more than in mainstream schools and mainstream classes.

Implementation cost

The cost impact depends on how many 'release' days each of these teaching principals currently has (between 23 and 35). In relative terms, it involves a very small investment in 40 schools carrying a significant leadership burden. We estimate the additional cost to provide administrative status to these school leaders to be in the range of €1.15m and €1.25m per annum.

Recommendation

To enable these principals to effectively lead and manage what are very complex school environments, we urge the Department of Education to appoint them on an administrative basis. As well as alleviating the significant burden on individual school leaders and improving the leadership capacity, this would also signal the Department's intent to fully support special schools and those that commit to opening special classes, to meet the increasing demand for such support for vulnerable children and their families.

MIDDLE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN LARGER SCHOOLS

As noted in previous budget submissions, the role of principal in any school is unsustainable without an appropriate middle leadership structure in place. The moratorium on middle leadership posts introduced during the economic crash in 2009 meant that many schools lost their entire management team, with the exception of the deputy principal post. While there has been a partial restoration in all schools, many larger schools have minimal capacity and it is insufficient to adequately support the principal or to deliver on the leadership and management responsibilities expected of them. Middle 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 distribution of leadership and management responsibilities to 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 circular 63/2017 – Leadership and Management in Primary Schools, which IPPN very much welcomed, and also DES circular 44/2019 – Recruitment/Promotion and Leadership for Registered Teachers in recognised primary schools.

IPPN welcomed the partial restoration of middle leadership posts in Budget 2018, and understood and supported the rationale behind the prioritisation of smaller schools if it was not possible to achieve full restoration in one school year.

Larger schools have significant leadership and management challenges also, and they also require sufficient middle leadership capacity to deliver quality teaching and learning, as well as to meet the myriad requirements of the education system.

In this context, IPPN considers, in particular, that:

- The principal's role as instructional leader may necessitate delegating particular areas of the curriculum to curriculum leaders / co-ordinators
- Some of the day-to-day management and administration tasks of the school must be delegated to the middle leadership team
- The middle leadership structure should be tasked with relieving the principal of substantial administration and communications responsibilities, as the post-holders will be responsible for these aspects of their particular areas of responsibility.

Research

Dr. Siobhán Kavanagh conducted doctoral research relating to middle leadership and reviewed the relevant literature to ascertain the impact of middle leadership in schools. Some of her research is highlighted here, as it 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.

Implementation cost

In a Dáil debate on 22nd September 2020, Minister Norma Foley confirmed that the estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level would be in the order of €19m per annum.

Recommendation

IPPN is calling for the moratorium to now be lifted from all schools to the largest extent possible, to ensure that the rebuilding of leadership and management capacity can be facilitated right across the sector in a fair and equitable manner. We believe this should start with increased capacity

- in larger schools whose middle leadership has been decimated owing to the moratorium over the past decade and who have not seen any alleviation measures in recent years
- in special schools, and
- in smaller schools with special classes, given the added complexities of leading and managing these schools.

ESTABLISHING TEACHER SUPPLY PANELS ON A PERMANENT FOOTING AND INCREASING THEIR SCOPE

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.

Recommendation

This is a cost neutral initiative. 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.

ADEQUATE SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

The management of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary schools is another significant contributor to work overload and stress for primary principals, and needs to be addressed to make the role more sustainable. This is explored in more detail below in Section 4 ‘Adequate Resourcing of Supports for Vulnerable Children’.

3. RETENTION OF PANDEMIC SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOLS

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, particularly those who have no/poor broadband and inadequate technology to avail of online support – during periods when school buildings were closed, children 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 PPE and related equipment/materials
2. Expanded funding of school meals to support disadvantaged pupils
3. One leadership and management day per week for teaching principals
4. Flexible use of substitution time that could not be provided due to lack of capacity.

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

IPPN is calling for the pandemic-related supports to be extended 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.

4. ADEQUATE RESOURCING OF SUPPORTS FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

URGENT MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS – SEVERE COVID IMPACT

Several organisations have conducted research into the impact on children of the pandemic, including children’s charities, European and global organisations and universities. A common theme is the severe psychological impact on a significant cohort of vulnerable children, particularly those whose families have lost loved ones, whose parents have lost their jobs, and those coping with alcohol, substance, and physical and emotional abuse in the home, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Dr. Paul Downes (Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Associate Professor of Psychology of Education, Institute of Education, DCU) who researched this issue, encapsulates the key issue for primary schools here:

“A teacher can offer support as mental health promotion and stress prevention, but is not a therapist. The need to meet the complexity of emotional needs is not addressed by NEPS or generic pre-packaged wellbeing programmes, as neither provide or are suitable to provide ongoing individual therapeutic supports for trauma and adverse childhood experiences. The National Wellbeing in Schools Policy 2018 of a teacher as ‘One good adult’ is no substitute for qualified emotional counsellors/therapists.”

Recommendation

IPPN urges the funding of increased psychological counselling capacity nationwide - through NEPS/HSE/NCSE - so that all schools and families concerned about the mental health of vulnerable children can avail of this critical support on an urgent basis.

FUNDING TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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 more limited supports being made available. While the new models are evidence-based and work in theory, the pilot projects did not include all types of primary school, thus the assumptions and conclusions are flawed. For example, how many primary schools with multiple special classes, with a significant proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds where the schools were not in the DEIS programme were included in the pilot projects? If there were insufficient schools with these profiles involved to unearth the issues, challenges and benefits of the proposed models for those schools, the pilot projects did not reflect the reality.

The management of SEN 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, including those with disabilities. 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 the 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. And the funding of non-staff resources is clearly

inadequate to meet the needs of children with additional needs, as so many applications for funding are rejected.

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. As noted above, the pilot of the new SNA allocation model was limited in its scope and did not unearth all of the key issues schools of varying types and sizes will face when it is implemented. It remains to be seen whether it will be any better in meeting the needs of children and in reducing the challenges experienced by schools.
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.

IPPN sets out here the key goals that school leaders would like to see reflected in the NCSE Strategy 2022-2026, and therefore funded in Budget 2022 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.

Recommendation

Funding needs to be provided to ensure that all the children in our schools receive all 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 are

now also calling for the strategic aims outlined in the NCSE Strategy 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.

Appendix I – Rationale for additional leadership & management time

In the Irish primary school system, owing to DE policy, more than half (55%) of primary school principals are ‘teaching principals’ - they teach full-time in addition to their school leadership role. The proportion of school leaders who teach has fallen significantly over the past few decades, from almost 80% in 1996 to 58% in 2017. This is due to population growth leading to increased enrolments; amalgamations and school closures; as well as small changes in the threshold for ‘administrative principalship’ (non-teaching school leadership) introduced by the Department of Education and Skills in 2013, 2016 and 2018.

What is currently available and how it is calculated

Outside of the additional days provided to teaching principals on a temporary basis during the pandemic, during the official 183-day school year, teaching principals have a number of leadership and management days free from teaching duties according to the number of mainstream class teachers, as set out below ([See Circular 19/2020](#)):

School Size	Leadership & Management Days per school year	% time allocated to school leadership by DE
Principal + 0/1/2 teachers	19 days *	10%
Principal + 3/4 teachers	25 days *	14%
Principal + 5/6 Teachers	31 days *	17%

*Principals with a special class are entitled to four extra days per year, which was a welcome development in acknowledging the significant leadership and management responsibilities and workload attached. IPPN strongly advocates for principals of schools with two or more special classes to be given administrative status.

The calculation of school size above includes mainstream class teachers only. It excludes ex-quota posts such as special education teaching posts, special class posts, HSCL and it does not take into account special needs assistants, ancillary staff, bus escorts, nor other staff such as nurses and occupational therapists that are often allocated to special schools. These additional staff members add huge value to each school but also result in significant additional duties for the teaching principal, as all staff must be managed, led and supported.

Teaching principals have between 10% and 17% of their time allocated to school leadership and management by the DE, compared with 100% of time allocated to their 'administrative' counterparts leading schools with seven or more mainstream class teachers.

It should be noted that teaching principals also have the least ancillary staff support, as this also is tied to pupil numbers, despite the fact that they are teaching full-time and desperately need the support of ancillary staff.

This is an inequitable situation that must be urgently addressed.

Impact on Teaching Principals

Teaching principals tell us that lack of time to deal effectively with their workload is having a negative effect on their ability to focus on leading teaching and learning. This should be a serious concern for the DE because of the inevitable consequences for schools. An international study by the London School of Economics in 2014 of management practices concludes that it is leadership that makes schools successful. Michael Fullan's '[Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning: Proof beyond reasonable doubt](#)' also makes a powerful argument that if we expect our school leaders to function effectively as leaders, then we must support them with sufficient time to do so.

Dr. Philip Riley of Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia presented IPPN with stark evidence that Irish teaching principals' health and wellbeing is suffering as a direct consequence of their role. He points out that school leaders

'score on average well above the population on all the negative elements (burnout, sleeping troubles, somatic and cognitive stress) and below the average on positive measures (self-rated health, mental health, coping, relationships and self-worth).'

He further comments that

'Teaching principals (...) report lower levels of physical and mental health, coping, confidence, autonomy, personal wellbeing and a raft of other negative factors, along with the highest levels of work-related stress. (...) The current report presents strong evidence of the negative factors associated with the role.'

The health and well-being of almost 60% of the primary school leaders in our country is at serious risk.

'Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion – Well-being in Primary Schools', published jointly by the DE and the Department of Health, suggests that *'within the school context, positive mental health promotion should focus on enhancing protective factors and minimizing risks.'* No school principal would argue that the mental health of children is not vitally important. It is ironic that school leaders are being asked to implement strategies to protect and minimize risks for the children in their care while their own workload impacts significantly on their own health and well-being.

There has been a marked increase in the number of principals using IPPN's Leadership Support service in recent years. It is absolutely clear that many are stressed and overwhelmed by the challenges of the dual role. Many are availing of early retirement or stepping back from leadership to focus solely on teaching, as there is no dignified, fair process for principals to step down without loss of seniority and pension.

In short, the current situation is unsustainable - something has to change.

There is significant evidence that the quality of leadership in schools impacts directly on the quality of learning of pupils. There is evidence that lack of time and inadequate administrative supports to deal effectively with workload are barriers that prevent teaching principals from spending 'quality time' on their leadership function and there is evidence that this is having a particularly negative effect on the health of more than half of primary school leaders. This situation is no longer sustainable.

The Statements of Practice outlined in the DE publication [*'Looking at our Schools 2016 – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools'*](#) need to be achievable by every school, and by every school leader. Increasing leadership and management days for teaching principals set out in this submission would significantly improve their capacity to fulfil their responsibilities, which will ultimately lead to the improvement in education outcomes for all children.

Providing a minimum of one leadership and management day per week on a permanent basis would help ease the burden on teaching principals and would signal serious intent on the part of the Department to address the significant problems highlighted for many years by IPPN and other education partners in relation to their role.