



**Educator  
Health & Wellbeing**

# **The Irish Primary Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey**

**2022 Data**

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# 1 Research Summary



## Health and wellbeing

Many school leaders in Irish primary schools suffer from poor mental health. Over 45% of respondents indicated that they are 'highly' or 'severely' burnt out and many school leaders reported that their leadership role was unsustainable.



## Work roles and responsibilities

Irish primary school leaders reported that their job roles were complex and involved a variety of activities. Many school leaders indicated that they spent too much time on administrative duties and too little time on their core leadership responsibilities related to teaching and learning.



## Demands at Work

In general, school leadership work in Irish primary schools is demanding. Primary school leaders reported facing significant job demands in their roles, including regularly experiencing both more work than they could manage (quantitative demands) and having to work at a fast pace (work pace). Irish school leaders also experienced cognitive and emotional demands very frequently.



## Job resources

School leaders 'sometimes' experienced both high quality leadership and social support from colleagues. Leaders reported that they worked in schools where there were highly collaborative relationships, high levels of trust and a strong sense of justice among staff members.



## Work and health

The stressors 'sheer quantity of work' and 'a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning' were reported as the most significant sources of stress. There was a strong association between school leaders who felt that work had a significant impact on their home lives and both high burnout and high stress. High job demands were also associated with both stress and burnout.



## Work-life conflict

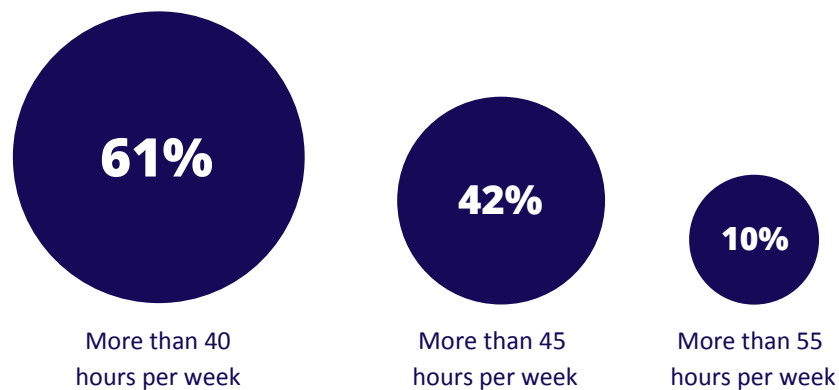
School leaders experienced work-life conflict (61%) significantly more frequently than a healthy working population.



## 2 Key Findings

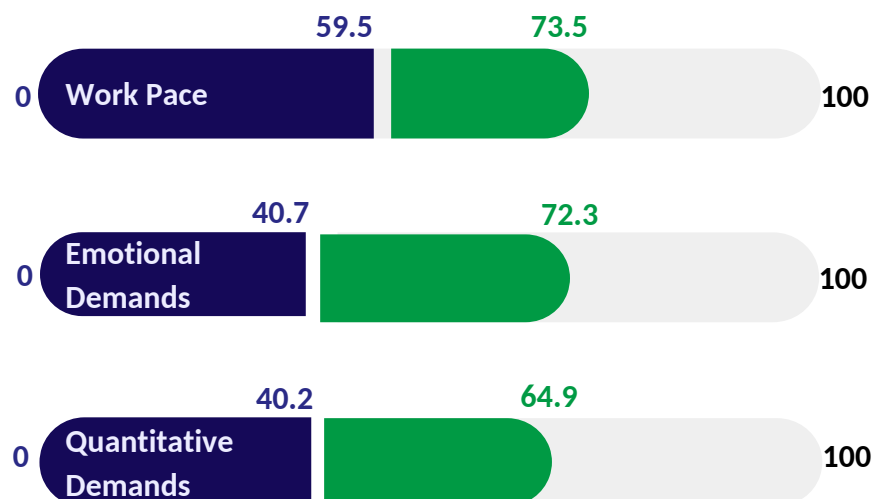
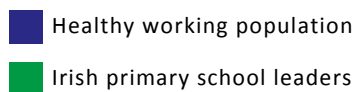
### Allocation of working time (school term)

61% of Irish primary school leaders reported working more than 40 hours per week, 42% reported working more than 45 hours a week and approximately one in ten (10%) reported working more than 55 hours per week.



### Demands at Work

School leaders in Irish primary schools faced significant job demands at work. Compared to a 'healthy working population' (Denmark), primary school leaders more frequently experienced having to work at a fast pace (work pace), emotional demands and heavy workloads (quantitative demands).





## Health and Wellbeing of School Leaders

Primary school  
leaders' average **Self-  
rated Health**

**61/100**

Healthy working population

**66/100**

Primary school  
leaders' average  
**Stress**

**52**

Healthy working Population

**27**

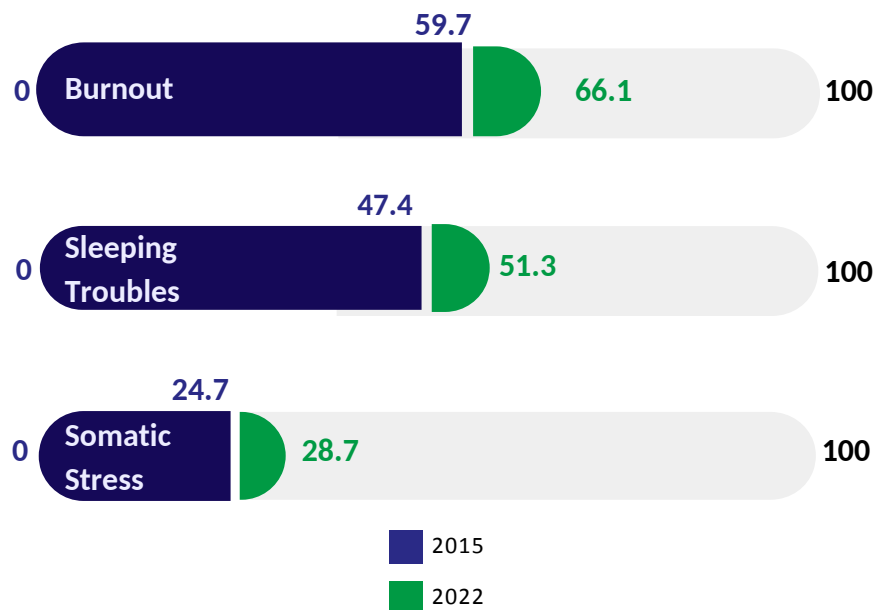
Primary school  
leaders' average  
**Burnout**

**66**

Healthy working Population

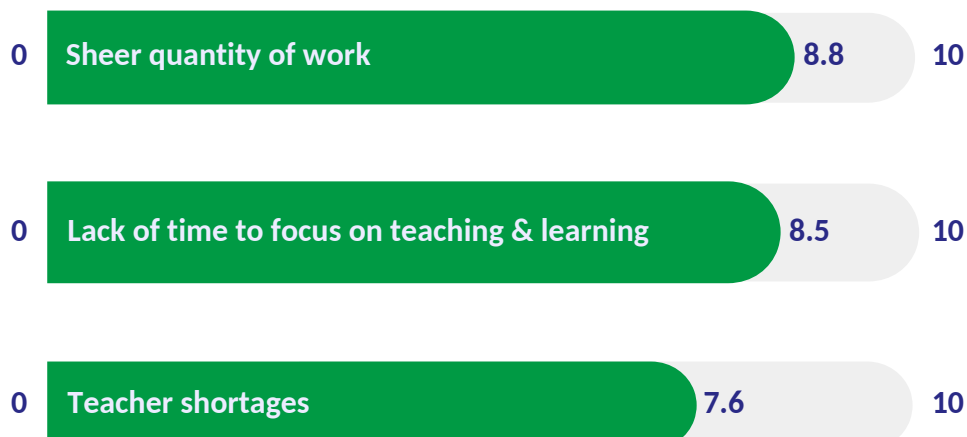
**34**

## Mental health outcomes:2015 vs 2022



## Major Sources of Stress

In 2022, sheer quantity of work was reported as the biggest source of stress and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning was reported as the second biggest stressor for school leaders. Teacher shortages was ranked as the third greatest source of stress for school leaders.

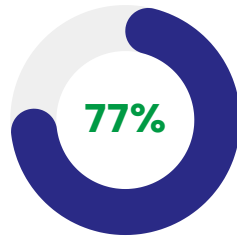




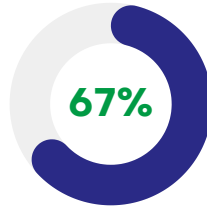


## Access to support

Most school leaders (77%) reported that their partner was a source of support. Colleagues from their place of work and leaders or colleagues that they had a professional relationship with a colleague in a different workplace were also reported as a source of support by high proportions of primary school leaders.



Partner



Colleague in workplace



Colleague in  
different workplace

## Leadership in the school: capacity for shared leadership

School leaders were asked to rate their capacity to share leadership on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means 'no capacity' and 10 means 'full capacity'.

**31.3%**

rated their capacity to share  
leadership as a 3 out of 10 or less

**5.7%**

rated their capacity to share  
leadership as a 9 or 10 out of 10

## Leadership in the school: sustainability of the leadership role

School leaders were asked to rate the sustainability of their role on a scale of 1-10, where 1 means 'totally unsustainable' and 10 means 'completely sustainable'.

**27.9%**

rated the sustainability of their  
role as a 1 or 2 out of 10

**2.2%**

rated the sustainability of their  
role as a 9 or 10 out of 10

## 3 Introduction

Recent events have highlighted the importance of school leaders and the vital role that they play in maintaining the stability of the school system. Throughout the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic school leaders adapted to rapidly changing circumstances and supported their staff members and school communities to adjust to new forms of teaching and learning. In the recent return to in-school learning, school leaders have contended with new challenges, including the implementation of Covid-19 control measures, staff shortages and the health of the school community (Arnold, Rahimi & Riley, 2021; Diliberti, Schwartz, & Grant, 2021).

These new pressures have added to concerns about the impact of school leadership work on leaders' health and wellbeing (Riley et al., 2021). There is evidence that school leadership work is stressful and negatively impacts on their mental health (Riley et al., 2021). School leaders' work is also important for teachers, school communities and school systems (Rahimi, Arnold, Horwood & Riley, 2022). The health and wellbeing of teaching professionals impacts on student learning outcomes and the sustainability of the workforce. Burnt out teaching professionals report that they experience lower levels of work engagement and job satisfaction, and they are more motivated to leave the profession (Desrumaux et al., 2015).

### **The Irish Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey**

To support the development of healthy, sustainable schools and school systems, it is critical that education stakeholders understand the importance of school leaders' work, health and wellbeing. This report presents results from the Irish Primary Principal and Deputy Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey. The report provides an overview of school leaders' health and wellbeing, working conditions and job roles.

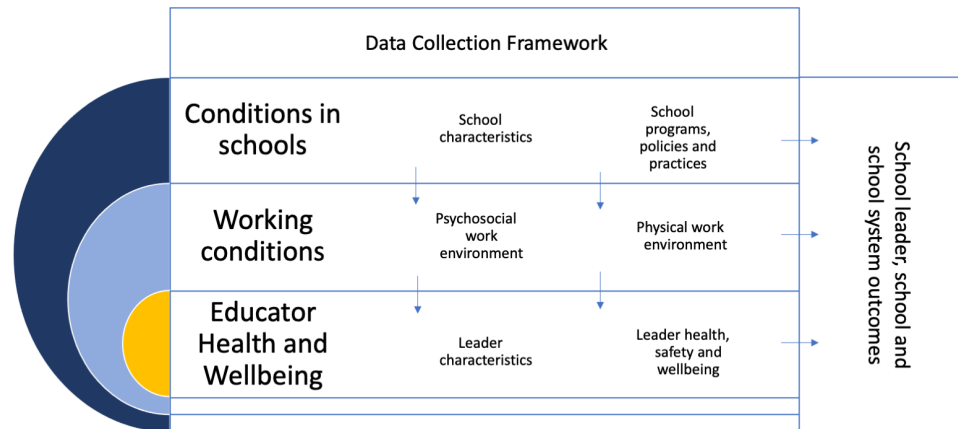
The findings in this report are derived from a three-year project to track Irish school leaders' work, health and wellbeing annually. The evidence generated through our analysis will inform policies and strategies to promote safe, healthy and sustainable work environments for Irish school leaders.

### **Measuring Irish school leaders' work, health and wellbeing**

The measures included in the survey were guided by our data collection framework for research into teachers' and school leaders' work and health (see Figure 1). Therefore, the survey covers the following key dimensions of leaders' health and wellbeing at work:

- health and wellbeing

- feelings about their work
- working conditions and the work environment
- leader characteristics
- school characteristics



**Figure 1. A research framework for school leaders' work, health and wellbeing (adapted from Sorenson et al., 2016)**

In the first section of this report, data on school leaders' health and wellbeing and their feelings about work is presented. The analysis of mental health focuses on data about the frequency with which Irish school leaders experience five different measures of mental health: stress, burnout, sleeping troubles, depressive symptoms and self-efficacy. In the analysis of school leaders' physical health, general health scores and reported medical conditions are examined. The analysis then examines school leaders' feelings about their work through the analysis of data on job satisfaction, work-life balance and intention to leave the profession.

The second section of the report examines primary school leaders' working conditions and work environments. The section begins with an analysis of school leaders' working hours, the allocation of their working time and their perceptions of the amount of time they have to fulfil their main duties. The analysis then focuses on school leaders' perceptions of the psychosocial work environment (the conditions under which they perform their work in schools), including the major demands and resources at work. The section concludes with the analysis of the relationship between the psychosocial work environment and school leader health and wellbeing.

In each section, the average scores for Irish school leaders in 2022 are compared with the average scores for New Zealand school leaders in 2021 (see Arnold, Rahimi, Horwood & Riley, 2022), and a 'healthy working population' (Denmark). Most of the measures in our survey are drawn from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-II)<sup>1</sup>. This questionnaire is regarded as the "gold standard" in occupational health and safety self-report measures.

<sup>1</sup> More information about the survey is included in the Appendix

The structure of the COPSOQ-II consists of higher order domains and contributing subdomains/scales. These have been found to be very robust and stable measures of the psychosocial work environment and health and wellbeing (Burr, Albertsen, Rugulies, & Hannerz, 2010; Dicke et al, 2018; Kiss, De Meester, Kruse, Chavee, & Braeckman, 2013; Thorsen & Bjorner, 2010). All COPSOQ domain scores are transformed to 0-100 aiding comparisons across domains.

## 4 Survey Respondents

The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) distributed survey invitations to principal and deputy principal members in February 2022. These results are reported from a total of 405 participants, including 346 participants who completed the survey and 59 participants who did not complete but answered important parts of the survey. This section of the report provides a breakdown of the survey sample.

### Gender and Role

298 survey respondents (74%) identified as female and 107 (26%) identified as male (see Figure 2). The vast majority of the sample (80%, n=322) worked as primary school principals. 83 participants (20%) were employed as either a deputy or acting principal (see Figure 3).

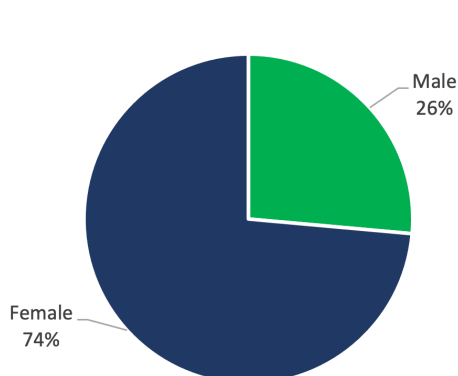


Figure 2. Sample distribution by gender

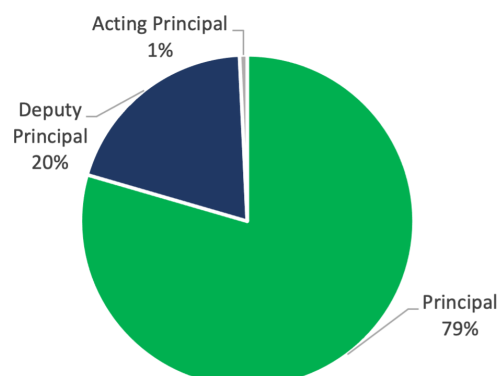


Figure 3. Sample distribution by role

### Years in current role

Many school leaders who completed the survey had extensive experience in schools; 44% of respondents had more than 12 years school leadership experience, and 46% had worked in schools for over 10 years before becoming a school leader (see Figures 4 & 5).

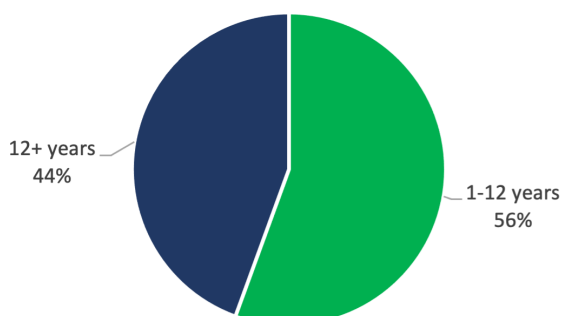


Figure 4. Sample distribution by years of leadership experience

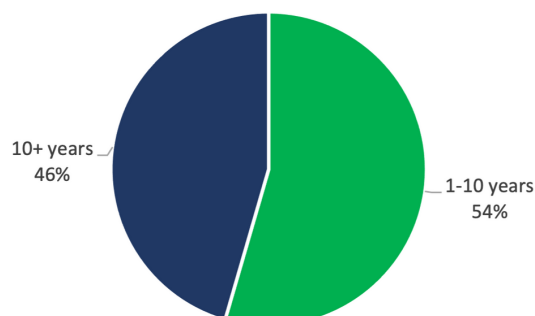


Figure 5. Sample distribution by number of years teaching prior to leadership role

## 5 Primary school leaders' health and wellbeing

In this section, we report on Irish primary school leaders' health and wellbeing. We begin with an analysis of school leaders' general and psychological health. We define psychological health as a 'sense of personal effectiveness for going through with (the) basics' of life and work (Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021). This incorporates both the absence of negative mental health outcomes, such as stress and depression, and basic positive psychological features that enable school leaders to engage in their work, such as self-efficacy.

### Irish primary school leaders' psychological and general health

We begin by analysing one indicator of general health (self-rated health), and three key indicators of psychological health: burnout, stress and sleeping troubles (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Key survey measures of general and psychological health**

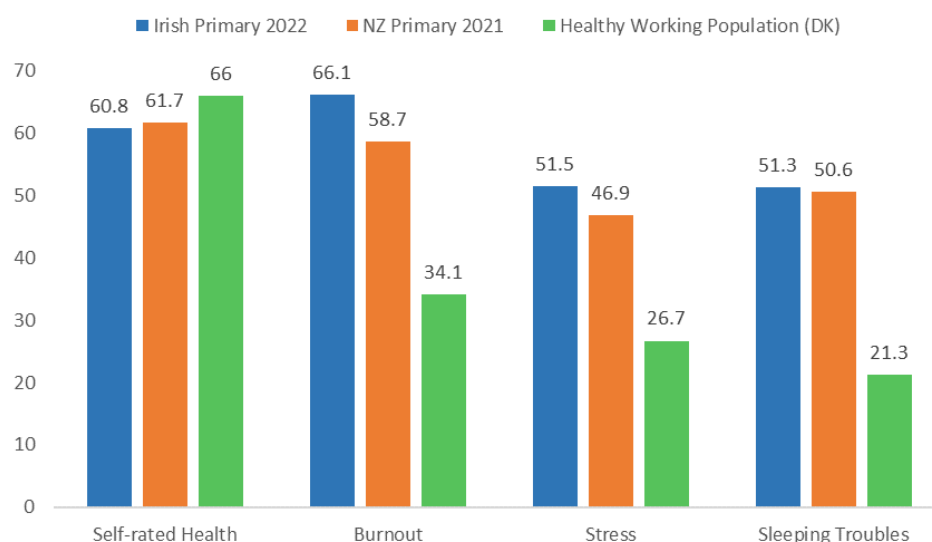
**Self-rated Health** measures the school leader's overall assessment of their general health.

**Burnout** assesses the degree of physical and mental fatigue/exhaustion.

**Stress** assesses the tension or strain resulting from exposure to adverse or demanding circumstances.

**Sleeping troubles** assesses sleep length and interruptions during sleep.

In 2022, Irish primary school leaders reported regularly experiencing burnout, stress and sleeping troubles (see Figure 6). On average, they reported that they experienced these negative aspects of mental health significantly more frequently than a 'healthy working population'. Irish school leaders also reported that they experienced two outcomes (burnout and stress) more frequently than primary school leaders in New Zealand. Irish school leaders' self-rated health was lower than the 'healthy working population'.



**Figure 6. Irish primary school leaders' health and wellbeing (means out of 100)**

## Levels of stress and burnout among Irish primary school leaders

Stress and burnout are key measures of occupational health and wellbeing. High levels of stress and burnout are associated with a vast range of negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Salvagioni, Melanda, Mesas, González, Gabani and Andrade, 2017). Figure 7 demonstrates that 37.3% of Irish primary school leaders report moderate burnout, 38.2% reported high burnout and 7.2% reported severe burnout. As demonstrated in Figure 8, 44.2% of primary school leaders reported moderate stress, 16.2% reported high stress and 2.6% reported severe stress.

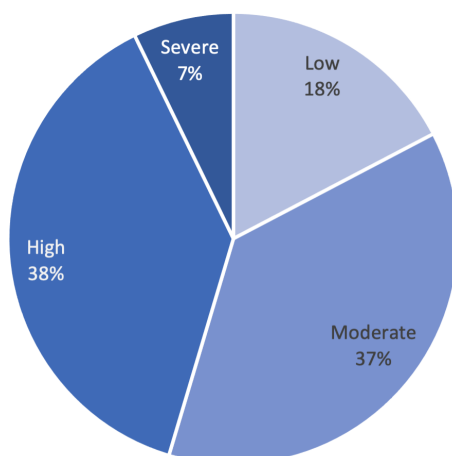


Figure 7. Irish primary school leaders' reported levels of burnout

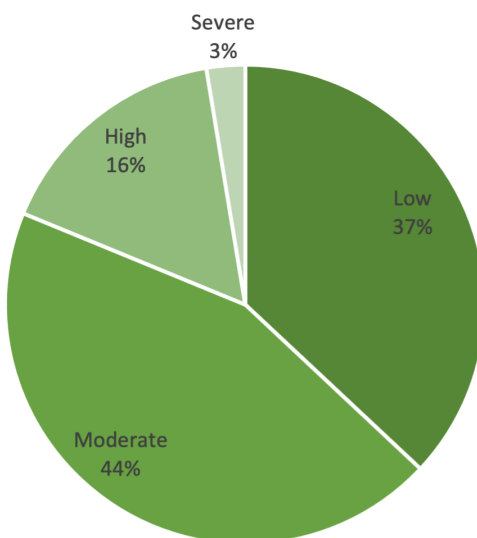


Figure 8. Irish primary school leaders' reported levels of stress

### Levels of stress and burnout among Irish school leaders

Stress and burnout are key measures of occupational health and wellbeing. High levels of stress and burnout are associated with a vast range of negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Riley et al., 2021). 37.3% of Irish primary school leaders reported moderate burnout, 38.2% reported high burnout and 7.2% reported severe burnout. 44.2% of primary school leaders reported moderate stress, 16.2% reported high stress and 2.6% reported severe stress.

These figures demonstrate that many Irish primary school leaders experience mental health difficulties and require urgent support.

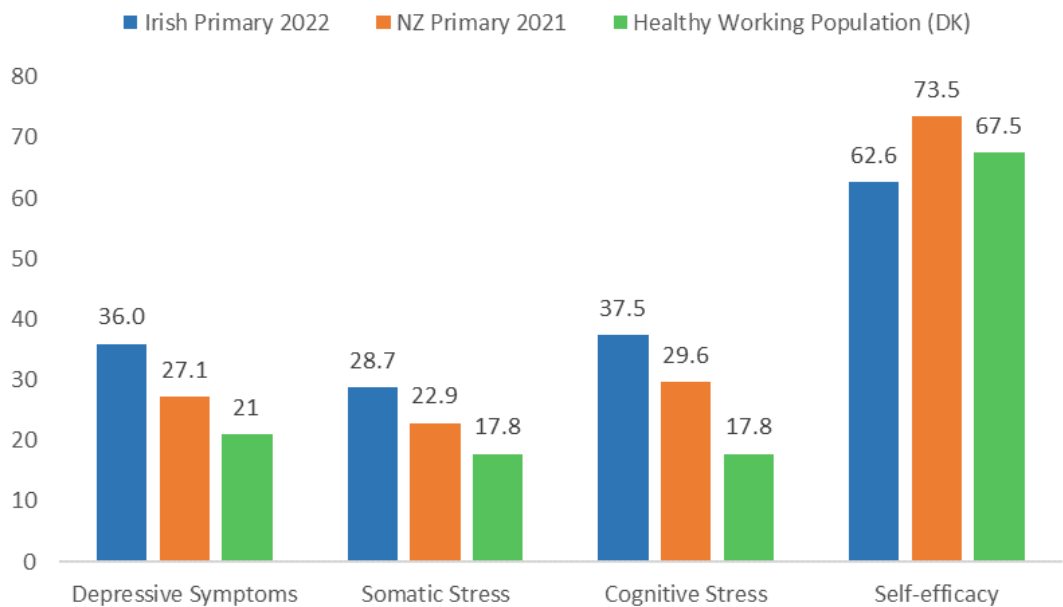
### Irish primary school leaders’ psychological health and wellbeing: additional key outcomes

The survey also gathers data on three other 'negative' indicators of mental health (Depressive Symptoms, Somatic Stress, Cognitive Stress) and one 'positive' indicator of mental health (self-efficacy) (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Key survey measures of mental health and wellbeing**

<b>Depressive Symptoms</b> measures the degree of depressive symptoms.
<b>Somatic Stress</b> assesses physical indicators of a sustained stress reaction.
<b>Cognitive Stress</b> assesses cognitive indicators of a sustained stress reaction.
<b>Self-efficacy</b> assesses self-confidence or the individual's faith in their own ability to solve the problems they face in life.

On average, Irish primary school leaders reported experiencing depressive symptoms, somatic stress and cognitive stress 'a small part of the time'. They experienced symptoms of these three indicators of mental health significantly more frequently than both primary school leaders in New Zealand and a 'healthy working population'. On average, Irish primary school leaders' self-confidence to go through life was significantly lower than primary school leaders in New Zealand and a 'healthy working population' (see Figure 9).

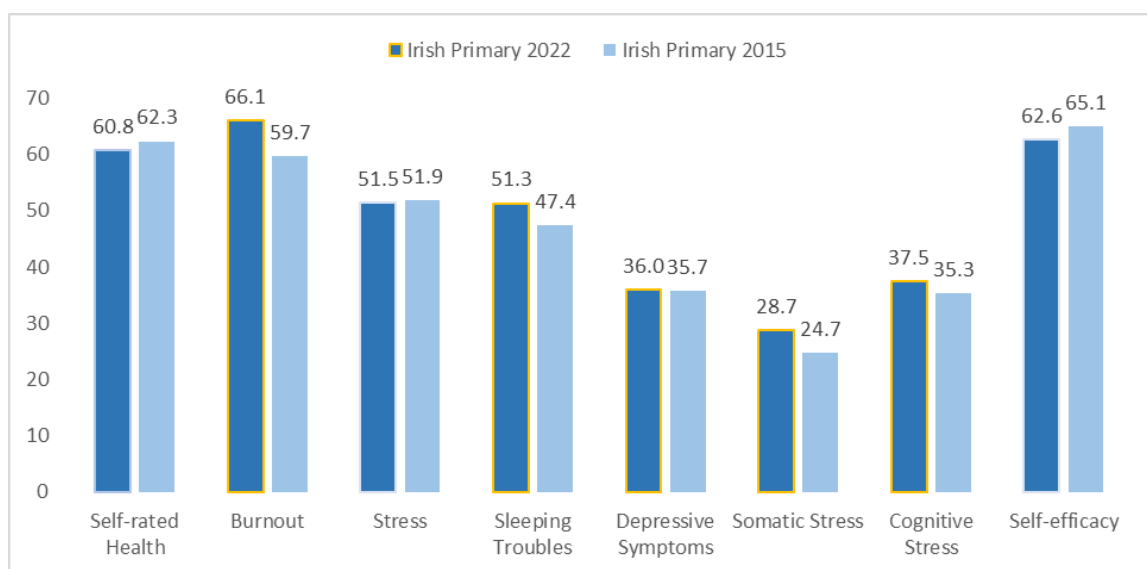


**Figure 9. Irish Primary school leaders' health and wellbeing measures (means out of 100)**



## Irish primary school leaders' general and psychological health and wellbeing: changes over time

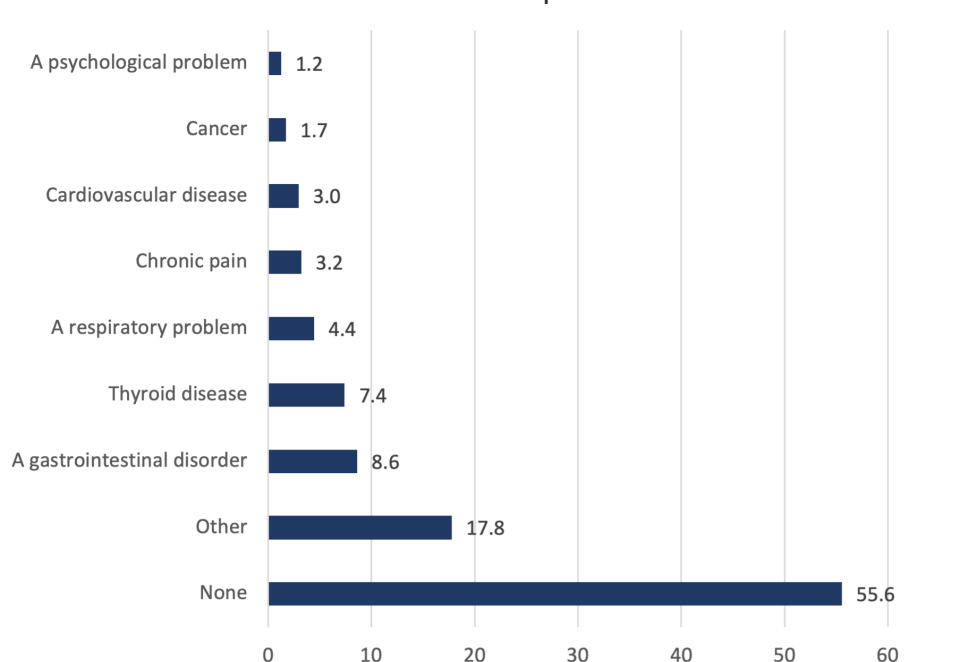
Since the last round of the survey in 2015, school leaders' average scores on several key indicators of mental health have deteriorated. On average, Irish primary school leaders are more burnt out, have more problems related to their sleep, and experience more cognitive and somatic stress in 2022 than they did in 2015. School leaders reported general health (self-rated health) and faith in their own abilities (self-efficacy) has also decreased since 2015 (see Figure 10).



**Figure 10. Irish Primary school leaders' health and wellbeing in 2022 and 2015 (means out of 100)**

## Irish primary school leaders' health: medical conditions and use of medication

Just under half of all Irish primary school leaders (44.4%) were diagnosed with a medical condition (see Figure 11). Gastro-intestinal disorders and thyroid disease were the most common medical conditions reported.



**Figure 11. Irish Primary school leaders' medical conditions in 2022 (%)**

Just under half of all Irish primary school leaders (45%) were taking at least one form of prescription medication (see Figure 12). Prescribed medicine to control cholesterol and medicine to reduce blood pressure were the most commonly reported prescription medications.

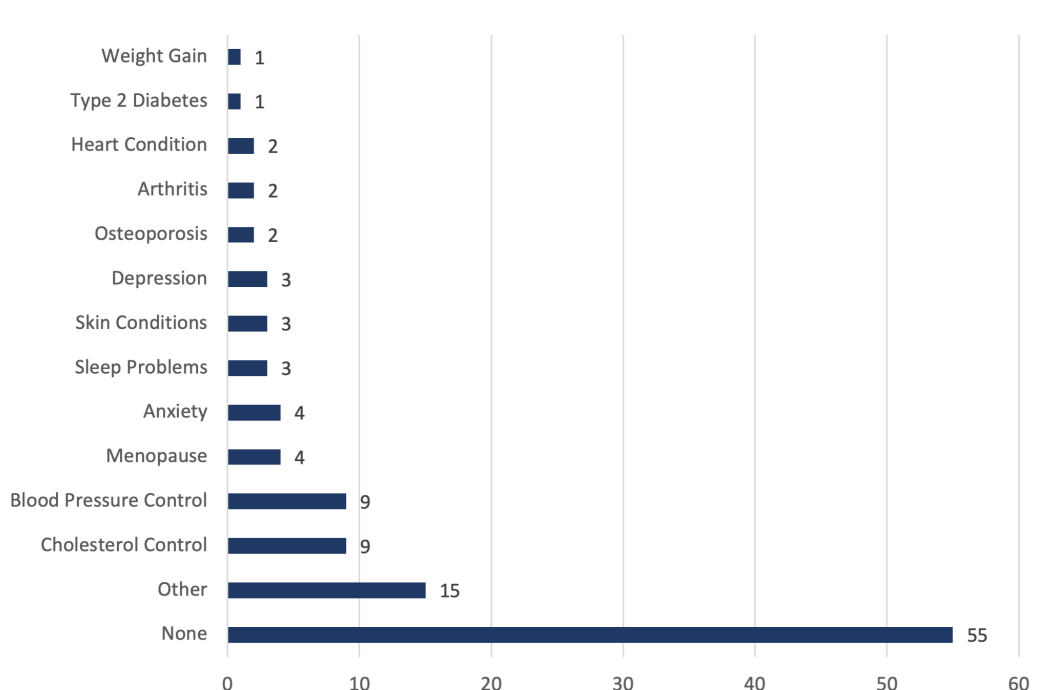


Figure 12. Prescription medication use by Irish primary school leaders (%)

### Primary school leaders' experiences of work

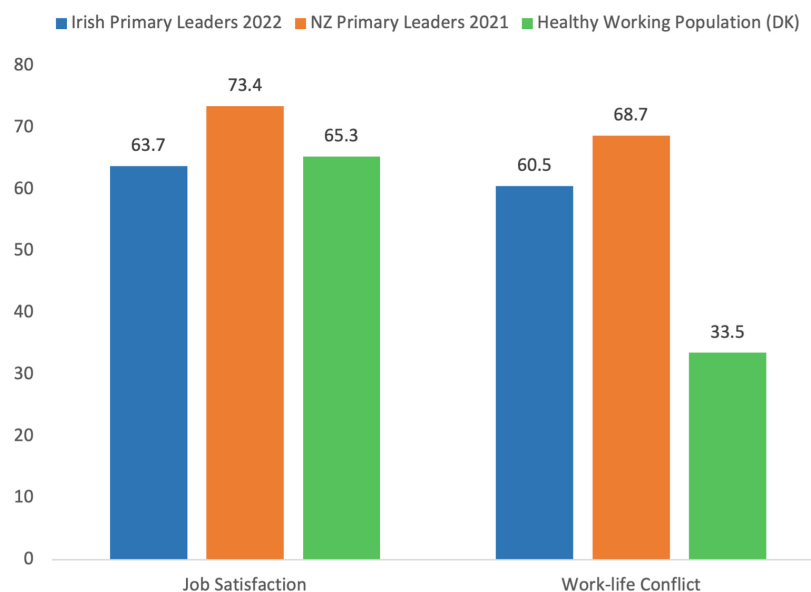
In addition to assessing school leaders' mental and physical health, we analyse school leaders' feelings about their work and consider how work impacts on their lives outside of school. In this section, we report on two key measures of school leaders' work experience: job satisfaction and work-family conflict (see Table 3).

Table 3. Survey measures of experiences of work

**Job Satisfaction** assesses the degree of pleasure or positive emotions that school leaders experience as a result of their work.

**Work-family conflict** measures the consequences of work on family/personal life.

On average, Irish primary school leaders reported feeling 'somewhat' satisfied with their work. Their reported job satisfaction is similar to a healthy working population but significantly lower than New Zealand primary school principals (see Figure 13). Irish primary school principals reported that they experienced some degree of work-family conflict. They experienced work-life conflict much more frequently than a healthy working population but less frequently than primary school principals in New Zealand.



**Figure 13. Job satisfaction and work-life conflict (means out of 100)**

## Summary

The survey results demonstrate that many Irish school leaders experienced negative mental outcomes in 2022. Approximately 45% of Irish primary school leaders reported experiencing 'high' or 'severe' levels of burnout. In terms of stress, only 37% reported low levels of stress and 19% reported experiencing 'high' or 'severe' stress. Irish primary school leaders' average scores on the key measures of mental health (stress, burnout, sleeping trouble, depressive symptoms, somatic stress and cognitive stress) were all poorer than the average scores for primary school leaders in New Zealand and significantly poorer than the average scores for 'a healthy population'. Taken together, these results indicate that many school leaders in Irish primary schools are suffering from poor mental health, and urgent action is required to address this issue.

## 6 Primary school leaders' psychosocial work environments

The psychosocial work environment refers to the set of conditions under which employees perform their work, such as workload, the quality of leadership and social support from colleagues. There are many different psychosocial factors or 'dimensions' that interact to impact on employees' experiences of their work. Some factors are always present at work while others may only occur occasionally or during particular times of the year. Some psychosocial factors are considered 'psychosocial risks' or 'hazards', because there is evidence that they can negatively impact on employee health and wellbeing. For example, long working hours, heavy workloads and low autonomy are associated with negative health outcomes (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). Conversely, other psychosocial factors can promote worker health and wellbeing, such as supportive social relationships and high levels of autonomy (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006).

This section of the report provides an analysis of Irish primary school leaders' psychosocial work environments. Given evidence that many school leaders work long hours to cope with the demands of the role, the section begins by analysing school leaders' average working hours and their allocation of working time. The analysis is then focused on the other key dimensions of school leaders' psychosocial work environments, including their job demands, relationships at work and work organisation.

### Primary leaders' average working hours

Participants had spent 41.1 hours on average on school management, staff supervision, interacting with other teachers, teaching and on other tasks related to their job in a full working week. Figure 14 demonstrates that over half of school leaders (55.2%) spent between 36 and 50 hours of their last full working week on leadership activities, 21.3% spent 50 hours on these activities, and just over one in ten (10.2%) spent more than 55 hours.

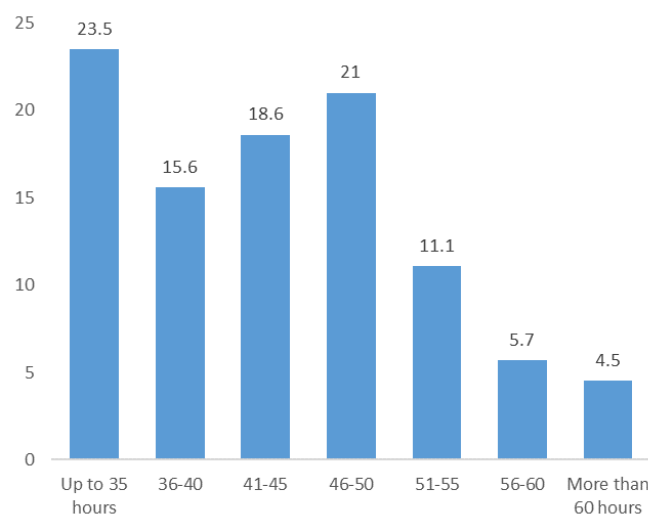
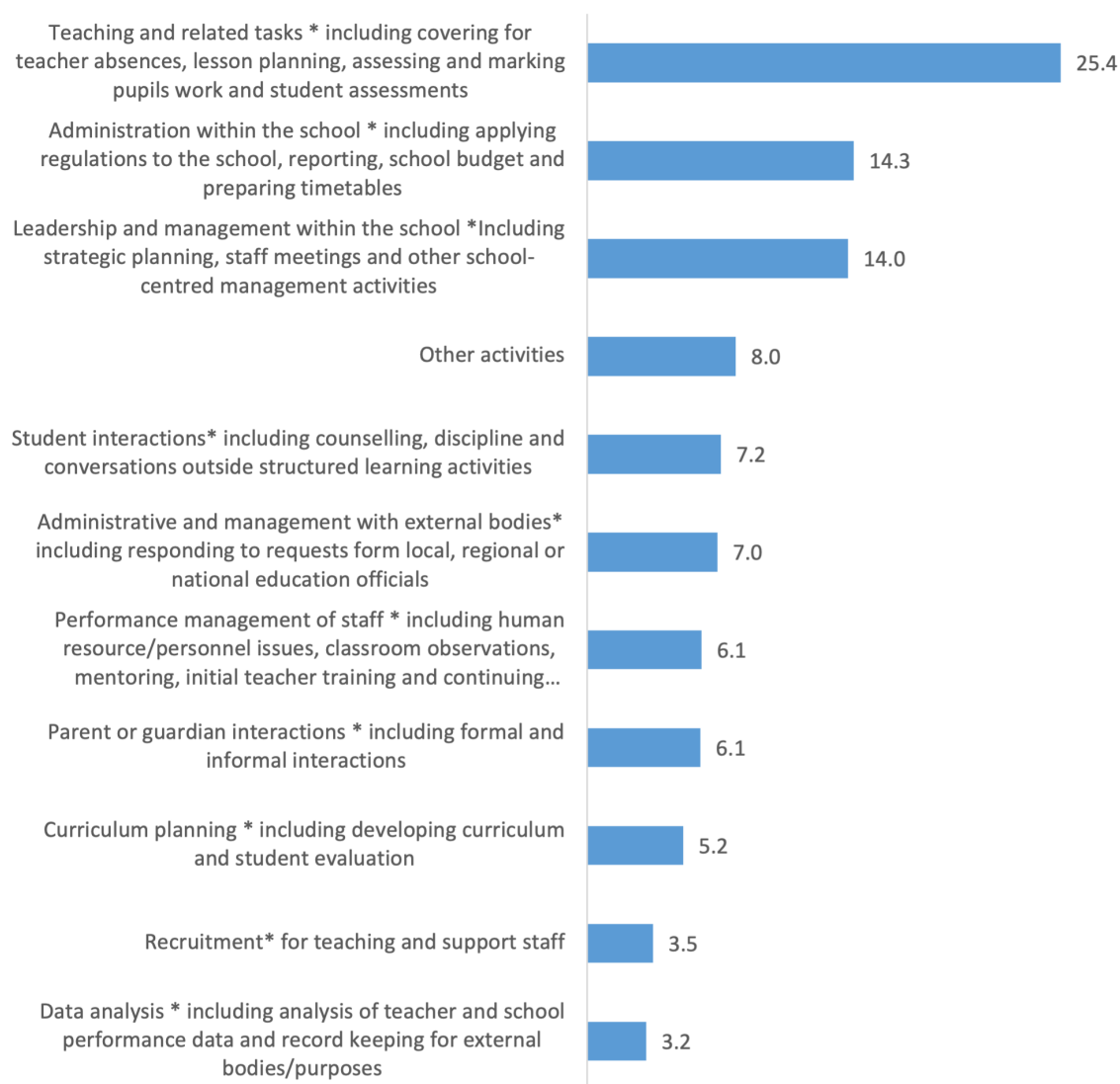


Figure 14. School leaders' average hours spent on school leadership responsibilities during their last full working week (%)



## Primary school leaders' work activities

In the survey, school leaders were asked about the amount of time they spent on different activities associated with their role. Figure 15 shows the average hours that primary school leaders spent on different leadership activities.<sup>2</sup> Irish primary school leaders reported spending the most time on 'teaching and related tasks'. On average, leaders reported spending more time on 'administration within the school' than on 'leadership and management'. School leaders also spent over seven hours on average in the reference week on 'Other activities', 'student interactions' and 'administration with external bodies'.

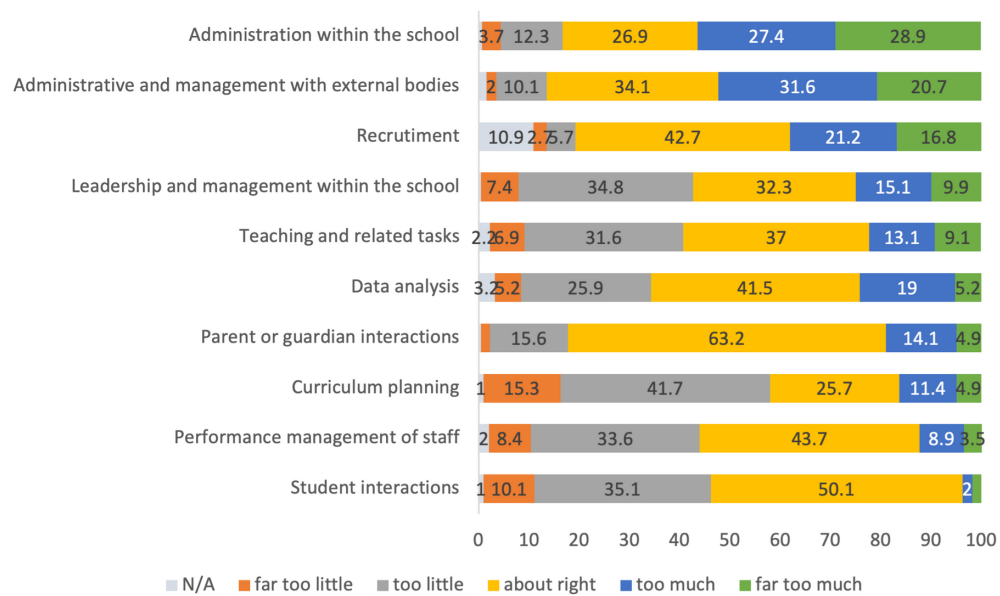


**Figure 15. Average hours spent on leadership activities during the last full working week (average hours)**

## Primary school leaders' perceptions of their work responsibilities

Primary school leaders were asked whether the amount of time that they spend on different activities is 'too much', 'too little' or 'about right' (Walker et al., 2019). Figure 16 shows school leaders' perceptions of the amount of time they reported spending on the different activities associated with their roles.

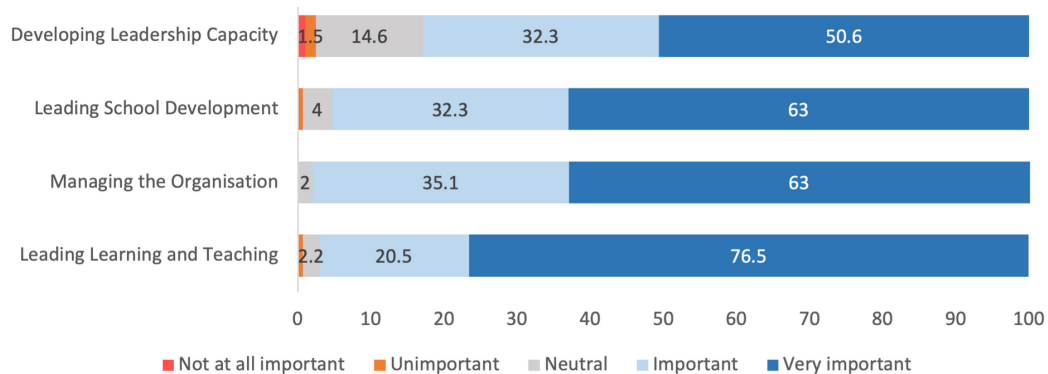
<sup>2</sup> Averages are presented for all school leaders who reported working on that activity



**Figure 16. Irish primary school leaders' perceptions about the amount of time spent on leadership tasks (%)**

As indicated in Figure 16, over half of all survey respondents indicated that they spent too much time on 'administration within the school' (56.3%) and on 'administration and management with external bodies' (52.3%). Over a third of respondents (38%) reported spent too much time on staff recruitment. Over half of the survey sample reported that they spent too little time on curriculum planning (57%), and significant proportions reported that they spent too little time on 'student interactions' (45.2%), 'leadership and management within the school' (42.2%), 'performance management of staff' (42%) and teaching and related tasks (38.5%).

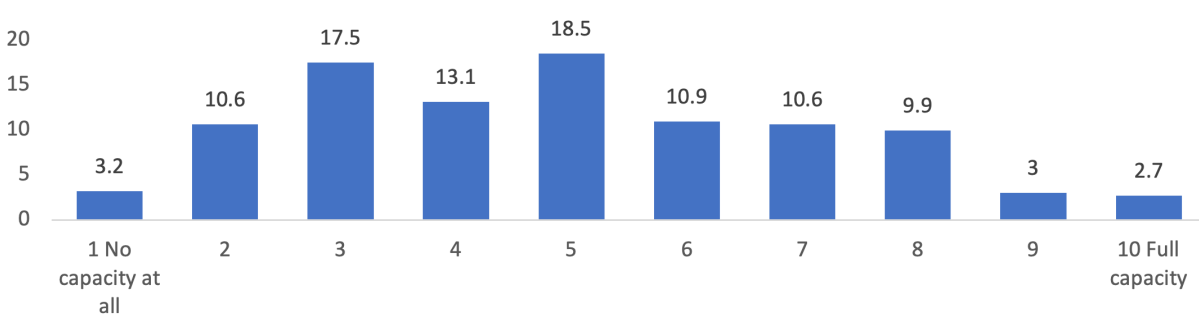
Figure 17 demonstrates primary school leaders perceptions about the importance of four key leadership activities. Over three quarters of school leaders (76.5%) reported that 'leading learning and teaching' were 'very important' leadership activities, and 63% reported that 'leading school development' and 'managing the organisation' were 'very important'. approximately half of the survey respondents indicated that 'developing leadership capacity' was very important.



**Figure 17. Irish primary school leaders' perceptions about the importance of key leadership responsibilities (%)**

## Opportunities to share the responsibilities of the leadership role among staff members

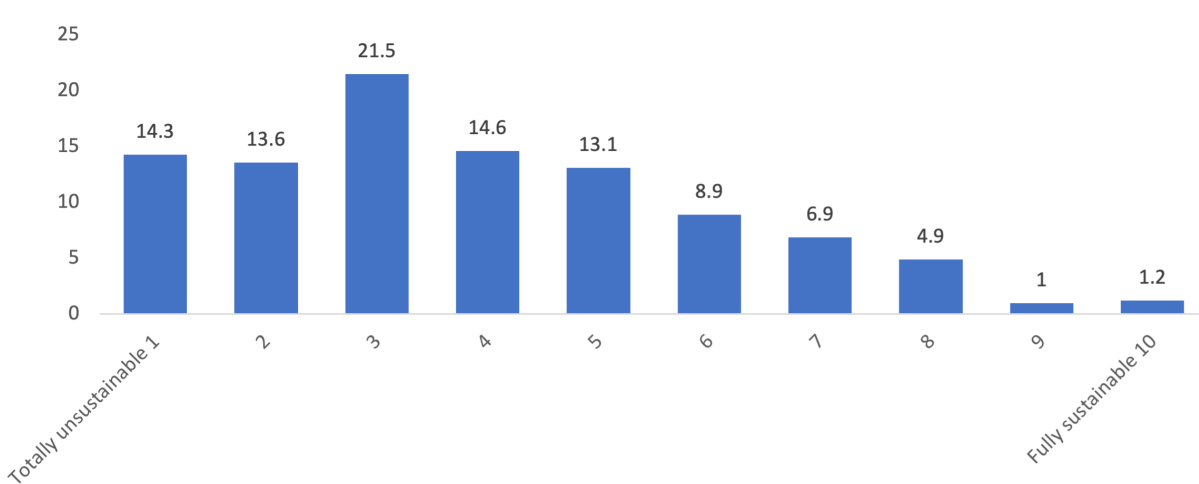
To assess whether school leaders are able to share or distribute leadership responsibilities, leaders were asked to indicate the extent to which there was capacity for them to share leadership in their school. Figure 18 demonstrates that only 5.7% of school leaders rated the capacity to share leadership as a 9 or 10 out of 10, and over 30% (31.3%) rated their capacity in their school as a 3 out of 10 or less.



**Figure 18. Irish primary school leaders' perceptions about the capacity to share the responsibilities of the leadership role in their school (%)**

## School leaders' perceptions about the overall sustainability of the school leadership role

To assess whether school leaders felt that their roles were sustainable, survey respondents were asked to rate the sustainability of their current job role on a scale of 1-10. Figure 19 demonstrates that only 1.2% of school leaders rated their current job role as completely sustainable (10 out of 10). 64% of school leaders rated the sustainability of their current role as a 4 out 10 or less and over a quarter (27.9%) rated their role as a 1 or 2 out of 10.



**Figure 19. Irish primary school leaders' perceptions about the sustainability of the school leadership job role (%)**

## Primary school leaders' work environments: job demands

Job demands are defined as the organisational, social, physical or psychological, dimensions of work that require ongoing physical, cognitive and emotional effort. Irish school leaders were asked about their experiences of five major job demands: quantitative demands, work pace, cognitive demands, emotional demands and demands for hiding emotions (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Survey measures of school leaders' job demands**

**Quantitative Demands** reflect the amount of work an individual experiences relative to their ability to complete that work. They can be assessed as an incongruity between the number of tasks and the time available to perform the tasks in a satisfactory manner.

**Work Pace** assesses the speed at which tasks must be performed. It is a measure of the intensity of work.

**Cognitive Demands** assesses demands involving the cognitive abilities of school leaders. The relationship between Cognitive Demands and wellbeing is complex. Facing new tasks or overcoming new challenges triggers strain but because it involves task variation or learning, it can also increase job satisfaction and facilitate personal development.

**Emotional Demands** assesses when school leaders must deal with or are confronted with other people's feelings at work or placed in emotionally demanding situations. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., colleagues, superiors or subordinates).

**Demands for Hiding Emotions** assesses when an employee must conceal their own feelings at work from other people. Other people comprise both people not employed at the workplace (e.g., parents and students) and people employed at the workplace (e.g., colleagues, superiors, or subordinates). The scale shows the amount of time individuals spend in surface acting (pretending an emotion that is not felt) or down-regulating (hiding) felt emotions.



Irish primary school leaders reported frequently to very frequently experiencing all five job demands. They reported 'sometimes' experiencing more work than they could manage (quantitative demands), they frequently worked at a fast pace and very frequently engaged in cognitively challenging work. Primary school leaders also reported that they regularly dealt with emotionally challenging situations (emotional demands) and very frequently having to manage their own emotional response to situations (demands for hiding emotions). Irish school leaders experienced each job demand significantly more frequently than the healthy working population and they experienced more work than they could manage (quantitative demands) and work pace more frequently than New Zealand primary school leaders (see Figure 20).

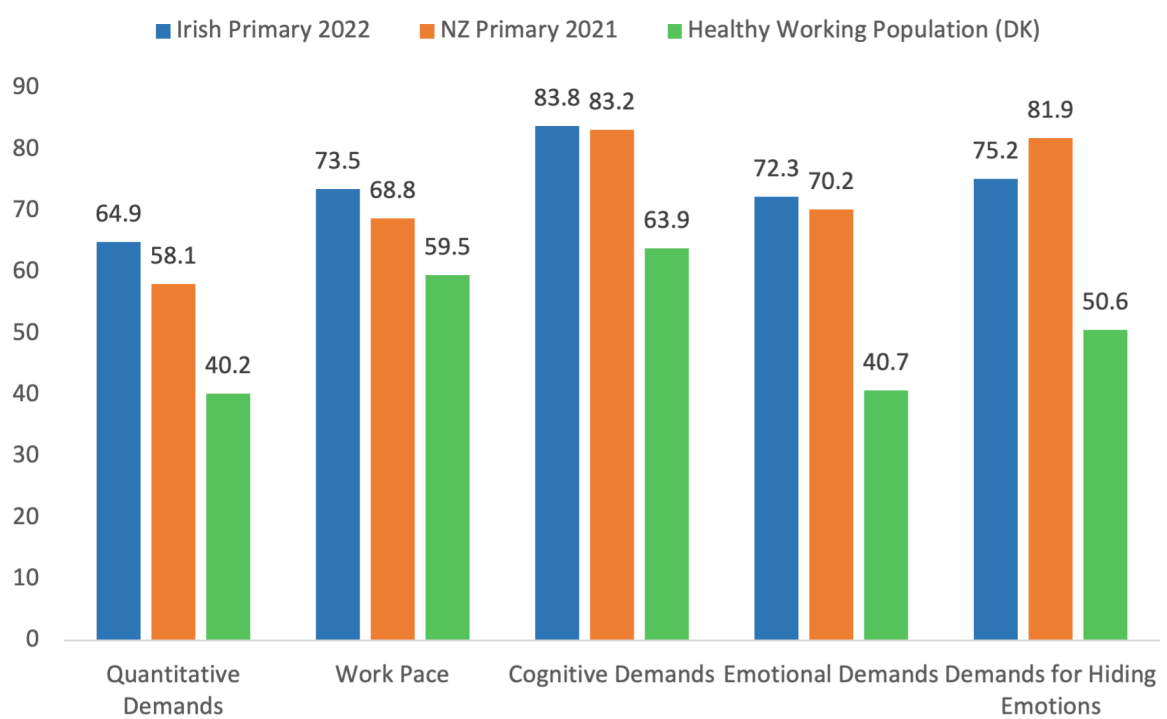


Figure 20. Job demands for Irish primary school leaders, New Zealand primary school leaders and a 'healthy working population' (means out of 100)

### Primary school leaders' work environments: job resources

Job resources are the aspects of school leaders' work that enable them to achieve work goals, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Workplace resources are the physical and social resources available in the workplace setting. They may include strong work relationships, clear leadership and trust, among many other factors.

### Job resources: the organisation of school leaders' work

This section of the report begins with an analysis of how school leaders' work is planned, organised and managed within schools. The analysis focuses on four dimensions of school leaders' work: school leader autonomy or influence, opportunities for development, work variation and meaning at work. School contexts characterised by high levels of autonomy, opportunities to develop knowledge and skills and a strong sense of meaning may support school leader health and wellbeing (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Survey measures of work organisation and job contents**

<p><b>Influence at work</b> assesses the degree of control or influence that school leaders have over their work role, tasks and activities</p>
<p><b>Possibilities for Development</b> assesses the opportunities for school leaders to develop and apply their personal and professional knowledge/skills in their work</p>
<p><b>Variation of work</b> assesses the extent that school leaders' tasks and activities are varied</p>
<p><b>Meaning of Work</b> assesses the meaning that school leaders find in their work</p>

Figure 21 demonstrates that on average Irish school leaders report 'sometimes' being able to exercise influence (autonomy) over their work and they frequently experience opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. Their work is 'sometimes' varied and they very frequently find work meaningful. Compared to New Zealand primary school leaders, Irish primary school leaders report experiencing lower levels of influence/autonomy, opportunities for development and work variation, and similar levels of meaning at work. Irish primary school leaders' scores on these dimensions are higher than average the scores for 'a healthy working population'.

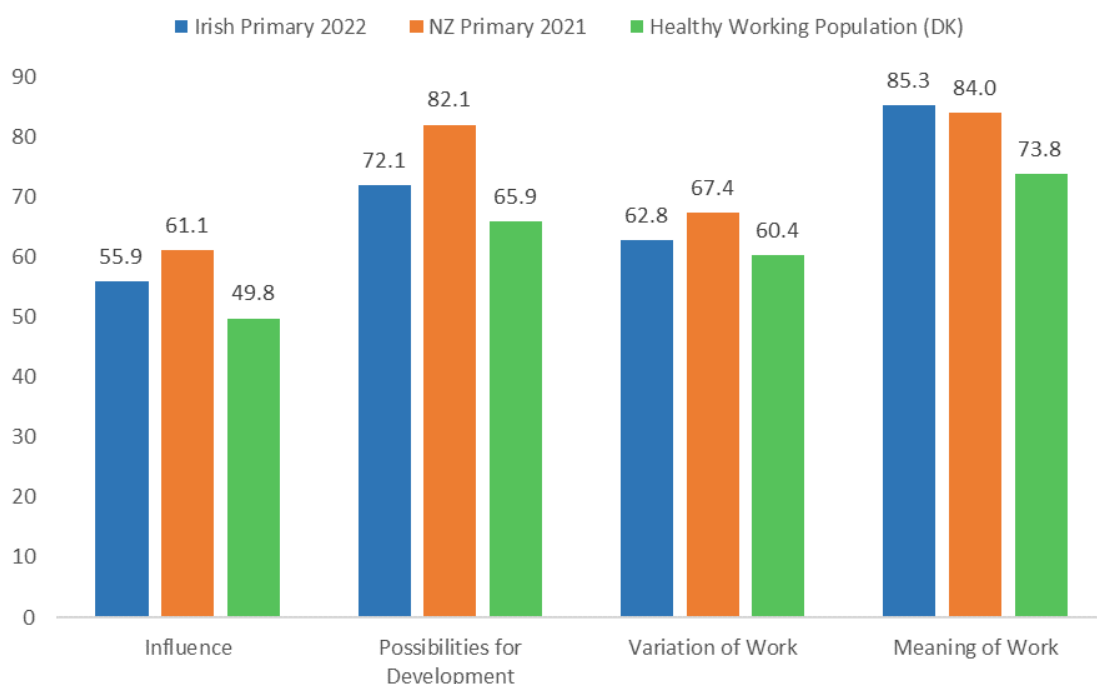


Figure 21. Measures of work organisation and job contents for Irish primary school leaders, New Zealand primary school leaders and a 'healthy working population' (means out of 100)

## Job resources

In the remainder of this section, we analyse different job resources that school leaders may have available to them. We analyse Irish school leaders' perceptions about the quality of their leaders, the relationships they have with colleagues, the levels of trust between staff members, the sense of togetherness between staff members and justice in their workplaces (see Table 6).

Table 6. Survey measures of job resources

**Quality of Leadership** assesses the leadership quality of school leaders' superiors.

**Social Support from Colleagues Inside and Outside of School** assesses the extent to which school leaders can obtain support from colleagues if they need it.

**Sense Community at Work** assesses whether there is a feeling of being part of the group of employees at the workplace (e.g., if employee's relations are good and if they work well together).

**Trust Regarding Management (Vertical Trust)** assesses whether employees can trust management and vice versa. Vertical trust can be observed in the communication between the management and the employees.

**Mutual Trust between Employees (Horizontal Trust)** assesses whether employees can trust each other in daily work or not. Trust can be observed in the communication in the workplace, e.g., if one freely can express attitudes and feelings without fear of negative reactions.

**Justice** assesses whether workers are treated fairly or not.

Figure 22 demonstrates that on average Irish primary school leaders report that they work in school environments that are characterised by collaborative relationships, high levels of trust and justice. However, school leaders report experiencing quality leadership 'to some extent' and that social support from colleagues is only 'sometimes' available.

Irish primary school leaders experienced lower levels of quality leadership than New Zealand primary school leaders and a healthy working population. Their reported levels of social support from colleagues, sense of community at work and trust in management were comparable to primary school principals in New Zealand. On average, Irish school leaders reported levels of mutual trust between colleagues and organisational justice were greater than the healthy working population but lower than New Zealand primary school leaders.

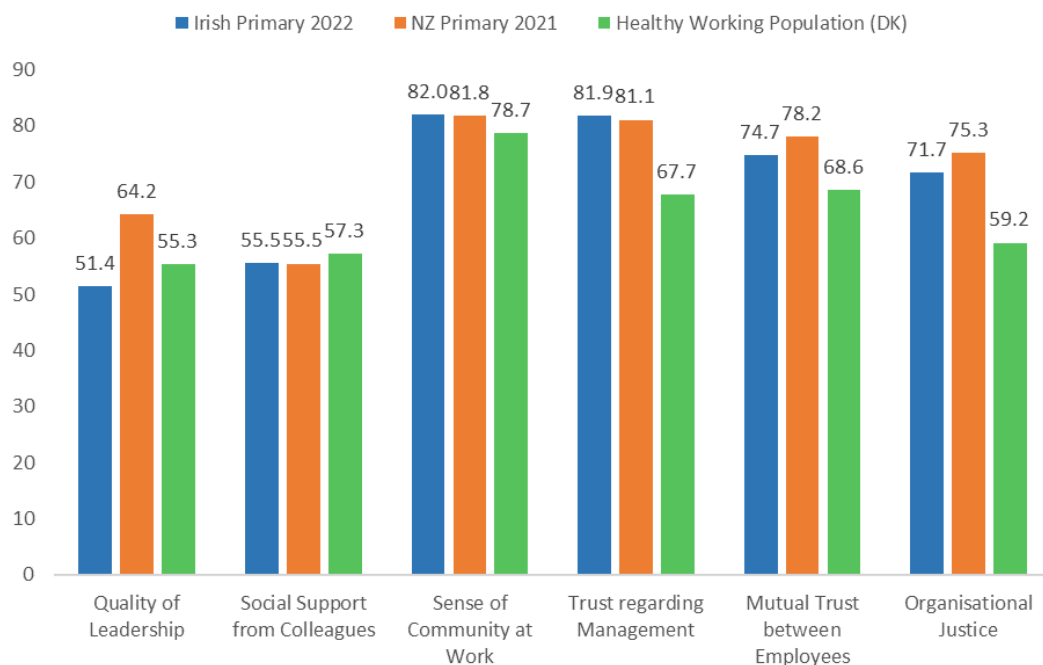
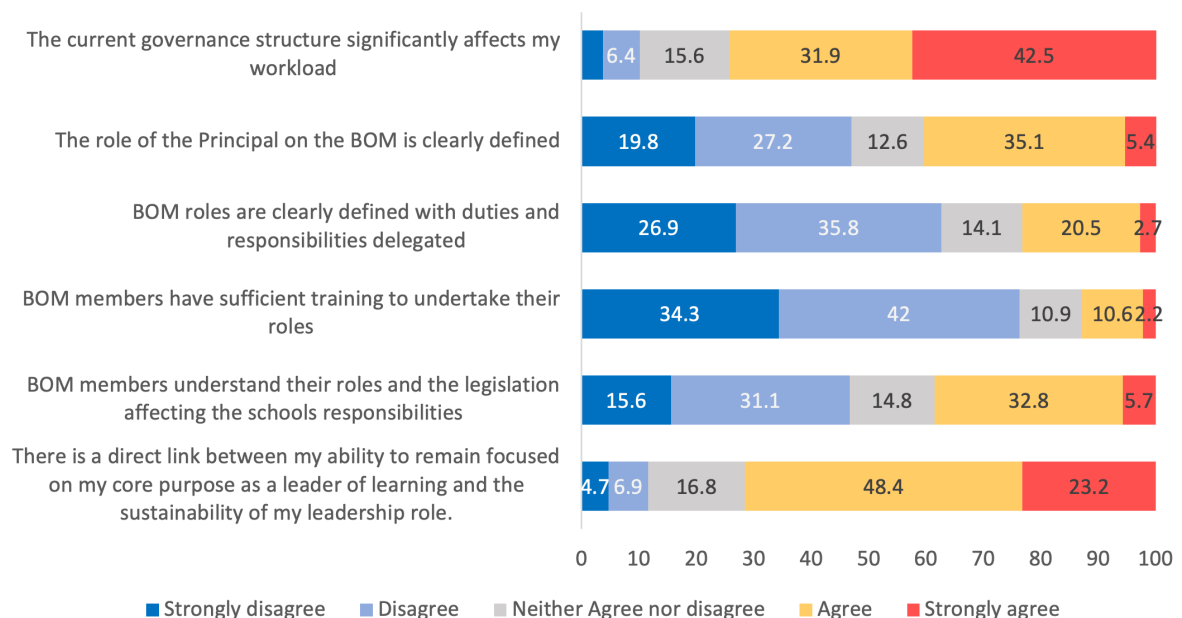


Figure 22. Irish primary school leaders' job resources compared to New Zealand primary school leaders and a 'healthy working population' (means out of 100)

### School leaders' perceptions of the quality of leadership in Irish primary schools

Irish primary school leaders' perceptions of the quality of leadership in their schools are shaped by their relationships with other school leaders and the school board. Under Irish law, most school principals are accountable to the Board of Management (BOM). The BOM are responsible for managing the school for the benefit students and ensuring that students experience an 'appropriate' education. They appoint a school principal, who is accountable to the board, to manage daily activities in the school. There is some evidence that BOMs do not always operate as intended and may increase school leaders' workloads (Stynes, McNamara & O'Hara, 2018).

In the survey, primary school leaders were asked about their experiences of governance and BOMs in their schools (see Figure 23). Almost three quarters of survey respondents (74.4%) indicated 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the governance structure in their school significantly affected their workload. In terms of the role of the school board, almost half of the respondents (47%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that the role of the principal on the BOM was clearly defined, 62.7% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that BOM roles were clearly defined, and 46.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed that BOMs understood their roles and the role-related legislation. Over three quarters of the survey sample (76.3%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that BOM members had sufficient training to perform their roles, and 71.6% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that there was a direct link between their ability to focus on the core purpose as a leader and the sustainability of their role.



**Figure 23. Irish primary school leaders' perceptions of school governance and BOMs (%)**

## Primary school leaders' sources of support

As indicated in Figure 24, 77% of school leaders reported that their partner was a source of support. Professional relationships inside school (67%), professional relationships outside school (59%), friends (57%) were sources of support for the majority of respondents. Approximately half of survey respondents (49%) indicated that their family member was a source of support.

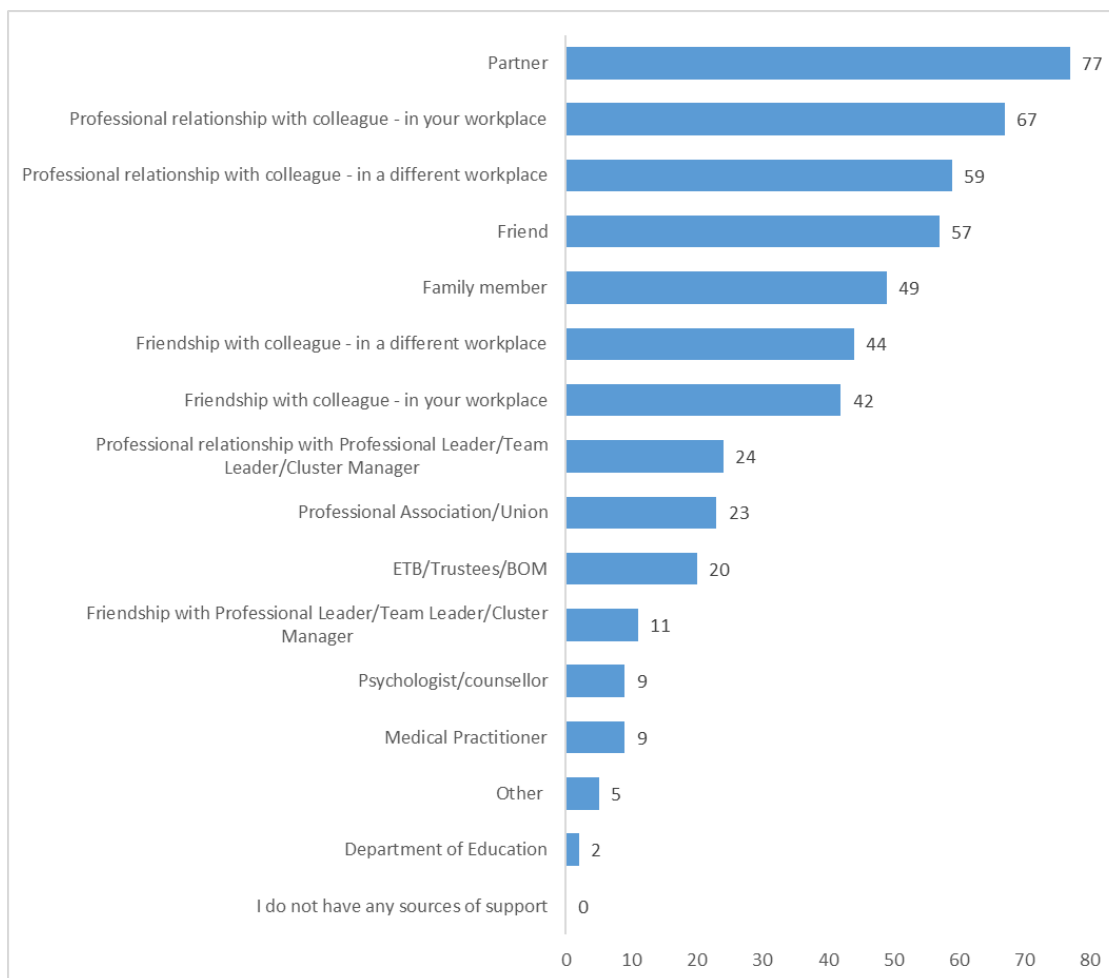


Figure 24. Primary school leaders' sources of support (%)

## School leaders' Sources of Stress

In the survey, primary school leaders were asked to rate major sources of stress at work on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the least amount of stress and 10 is the greatest amount of stress. School leaders rated 'sheer quantity of work' as the biggest source with an average score of almost 9 out of 10 (8.8). Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, teacher shortages, resourcing needs, government initiatives and expectations from the employer were also reported as key sources of stress for school leaders (see Figure 25).

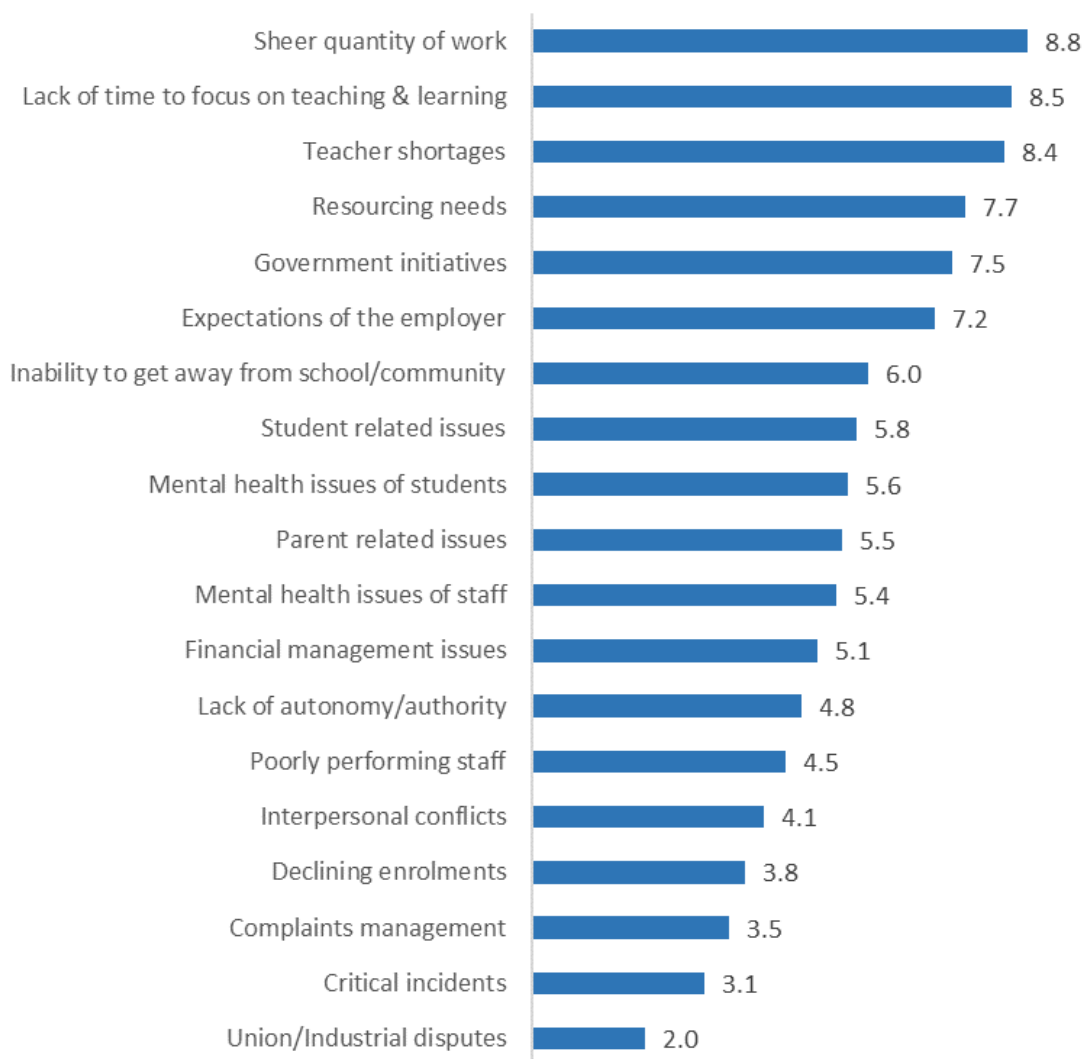


Figure 25. Irish primary school leaders' sources of stress (out of 10)

## Work environment and mental health

This section of the report concludes with an analysis of the dimensions of the (psychosocial) work environment that are most associated with key aspects of school leaders' mental health. The analysis focuses on the key dimensions of the work environment that are most associated with stress and burnout for school leaders.

### The relationship between the work environment and school leader burnout

Figure 26 is a correlation heat map that demonstrates the factors that are most associated with burnout among school leaders. Work-life conflict strongly associated with school leader burnout. This means that school leaders who reported high levels of work-life conflict were highly likely to report experiencing high levels of burnout. Quantitative demands (amount of work) is moderately associated with burnout. This means that school leaders who reported heavy workloads were somewhat more likely to report experiencing high levels of burnout. There were also weak but statistically significant relationships between four other factors (emotional demands, work pace, cognitive demands and demands for hiding emotions) and burnout.

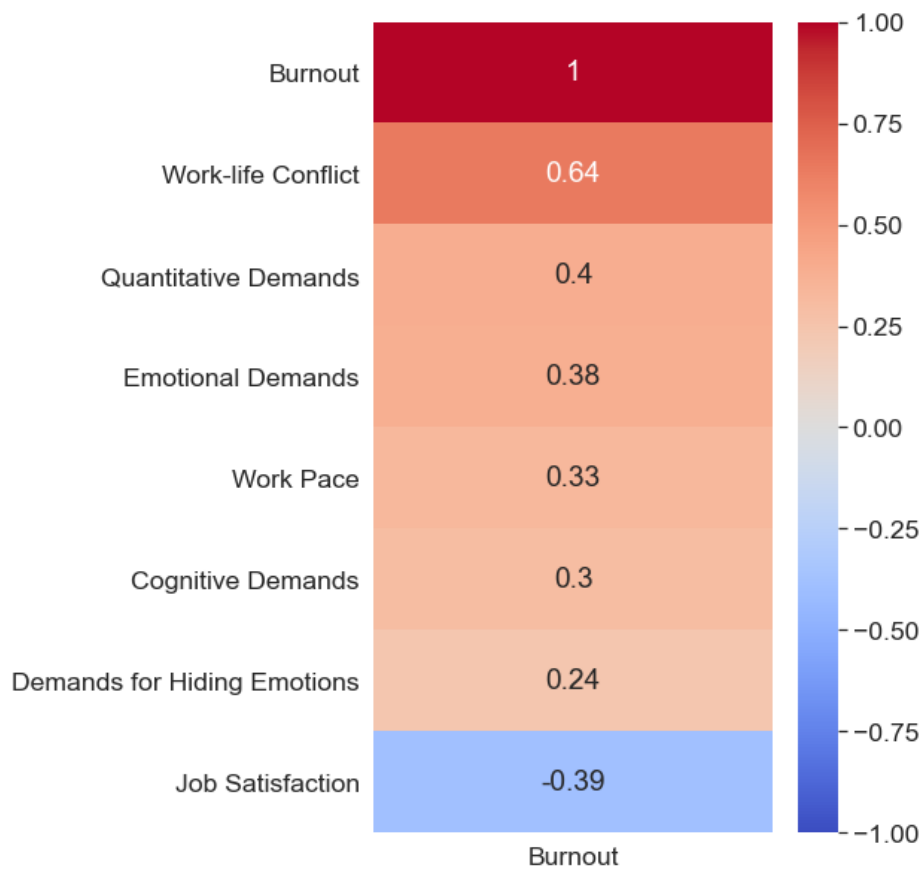


Figure 26. Correlation between key aspects of the work environment and burnout among Irish primary school leaders

### The relationship between the work environment and school leaders' stress

The analysis of the factors associated with school leaders' stress are presented in Figure 27. As with the results for school leaders' burnout, work-life conflict was strongly associated with school leaders' stress, meaning that school leaders who reported high levels of work-life conflict were highly likely to report high levels of stress. The factor 'Emotional demands' (amount of work) was moderately associated with burnout. Weak but statistically significant relationships were also apparent for four other factors (quantitative demands, cognitive demands, demands for hiding emotions and work pace) and burnout.





Figure 27. Correlation between key aspects of the work environment and primary school leaders stress

**Summary: school leaders' work and health**

On average, Irish primary school leaders reported working in challenging work environments that were characterised by complex job roles, high job demands, some degree of leadership autonomy and moderate levels of good leadership. School leaders reported that they spent their time at work engaged in a variety of work activities. Many school leaders reported spending too much time on administration inside and outside of school and too little time on curriculum planning, student interactions, leadership and management in the school and the management of staff performance.

On average, school leaders reported that they experienced significant job demands, including regularly experiencing both more work than they could manage (quantitative demands) and having to work at a fast pace (work pace). On average, they experienced both quantitative demands and work pace more frequently than New Zealand primary school leaders and a healthy working population. Irish school leaders also reported facing considerable cognitive and emotional demands at work.

On average, Irish school leaders reported having some influence/control over their work but their average level of control was lower than that of New Zealand school leaders. They also reported that they only sometimes experienced high quality leadership and social support from colleagues. Although the analysis indicates that Irish primary school leaders work in challenging environments, they reported high levels of social capital, including highly collaborative relationships, high levels of trust and a strong sense of justice among staff members.

Overall, there is a need for all stakeholders to make school leadership work roles and responsibilities more manageable. School leaders reported 'sheer quantity of work', 'a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning' and 'teacher shortages' as the top three major sources of stress. The analysis determined that there was a strong association between school leaders who felt that work had a significant impact on their home lives and experiences of both high burnout and high stress. The key job demands were also associated with both stress and burnout. Urgent action is required to ensure school leaders have the support, time and resources to fulfil the obligations of the role.

## 7 Offensive Behaviours against school leaders

In the survey, the term 'offensive behaviours' is used to describe aggressive or violent behaviours towards school leaders at work. This term has a similar meaning to 'workplace violence' or 'occupational violence and aggression'. In Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority states:

*[workplace violence] occurs where people, in the course of their employment, are aggressively verbally abused, threatened or physically assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, wellbeing and health (2007, p. 1)*

In this section of the report, we analyse primary school leaders' experiences of three offensive behaviours during the last 12 months: threats of violence, physical violence and bullying.

Table 7. Measures of offensive behaviours

**Threats of Violence** assesses the exposure to the threats of physical violence in the workplace.

**Physical Violence** is exposure to physical violence in the workplace.

**Bullying** refers to the repeated exposure to unpleasant or degrading treatment at work.

### Irish school leaders' experiences of offensive behaviours

During the last 12 months at work, approximately 21% of Irish primary school leaders experienced bullying at work, 14.5% experienced cyber bullying and same proportion experienced threats of violence. Around 11% experienced physical violence (see Figure 28).

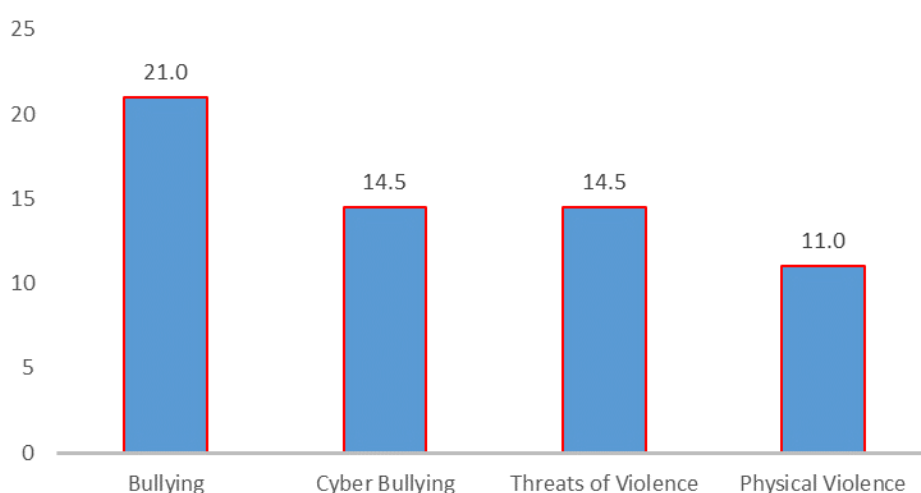


Figure 28. Irish school leaders' experiences of offensive behaviours (%)

### Offensive behaviours: school leader gender

Figure 29 demonstrates that the proportion of female school leaders who reported experiencing each of the four behaviours was greater than the proportion of male leaders reporting these behaviours. Compared to male school leaders, a much larger proportion of female reported experiencing bullying, threats of violence and physical violence during the last 12 months at work.

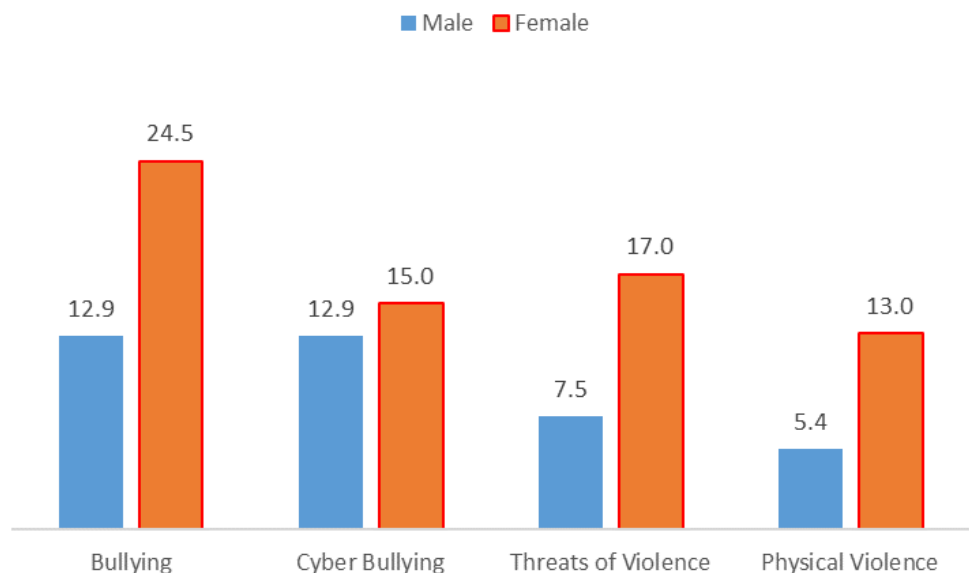


Figure 29. Offensive behaviours according to school leaders’ gender

### Offensive behaviours: job role

The proportion of principals reporting cyber bullying and threats of violence was greater than the proportion of deputy leaders reporting those behaviours (see Figure 30). In contrast, the proportion of deputy principals experiencing bullying and physical violence was higher than the proportion of principals experiencing these behaviours.

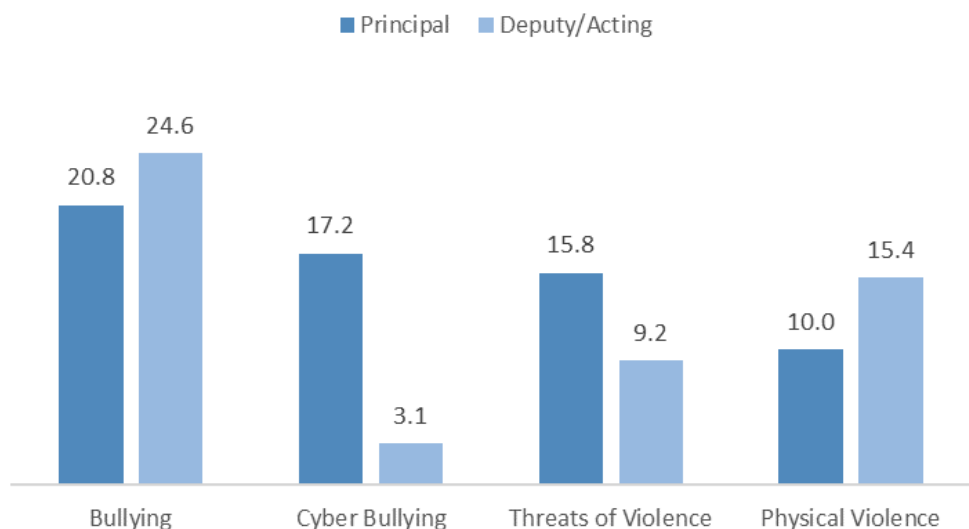
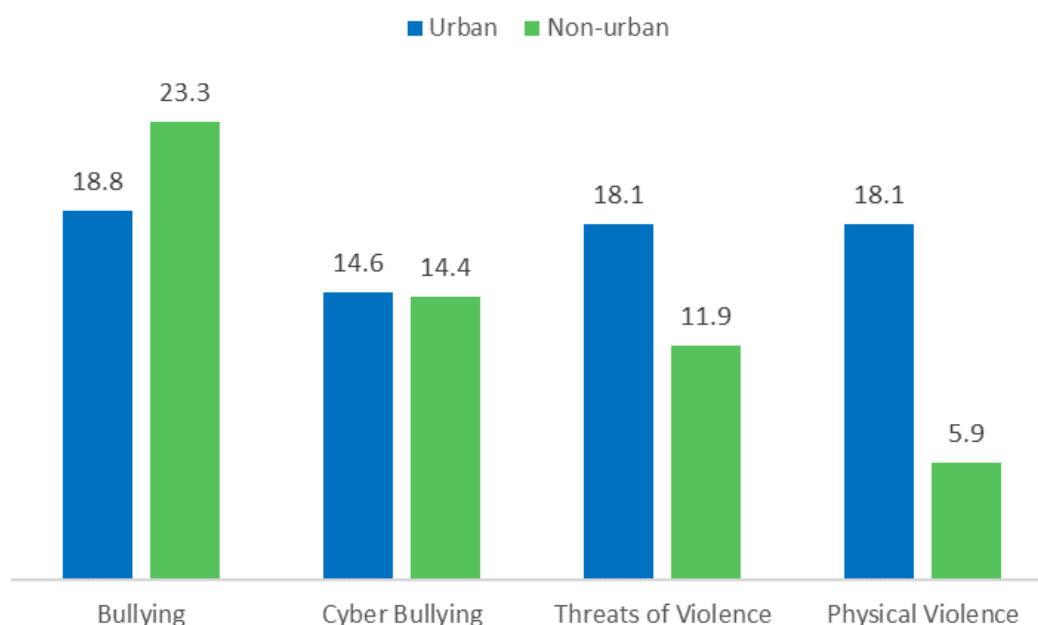


Figure 30. Offensive behaviours by primary school leader role

## Offensive behaviours in relation to school location

The proportion of school leaders that reported physical violence and threats of violence in the last 12 months is greater in urban primary schools than non-urban settings. However, the proportion of leaders reporting bullying is higher in primary schools in non-urban areas than those urban areas (see Figure 31).



**Figure 31. Offensive behaviours by primary school location**

## Summary

The results demonstrate that a significant proportion of Irish primary school leaders experience bullying, cyberbullying, threats of violence and physical violence at work. The results indicate that female school leaders are more likely to experience each type of offensive behaviour than their male colleagues. There were also important differences according to job role and school location. Incidents of offensive behaviour can have serious consequences for school leaders and school systems. For example, school leaders that are victims may be more likely to require leave, consider leaving the profession and/or struggle to manage the demands of the role. All stakeholders need to understand the extent of offensive behaviours against primary school leaders and develop policies, strategies and procedures to promote healthy, safe school communities.

## 8 Recommendations

The results of the survey indicate that many Irish primary school leaders experience negative health and wellbeing outcomes. A high proportion of leaders report they are stressed and burnout, and that work is negatively impacting on their personal lives. Heavy workloads, high demands, the complexity of the leadership role and teacher shortages are leaving many school leaders with little time to focus on the aspects of the role that are important to them, such as teaching and learning and curriculum development. Despite the challenges of the role, many school leaders find great meaning in their work and work in schools with high levels of trust, community and sense of justice. High levels of social capital in school are associated with improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Irish school leaders (Beausaert et al., 2021).

Based on the findings of this analysis, the authors offer several key recommendations to promote the health and wellbeing of school leaders and provide them with the conditions they need to succeed in the role.

### **1. Promote the health, safety and sustainability of the school system**

All stakeholders should promote the health, safety and sustainability of the school system. Policymakers, professional associations, systems administrators should consult with school leaders and engage in system reviews to consider whether existing policies, procedures and practices are inclusive and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of students, school staff and the wider school community. To make the school leadership role more manageable, there is an urgent need to review the role and functioning of Boards of Management.

### **2. Review and redesign school leaders' work**

This report presents compelling evidence that many Irish primary school leaders are struggling with complex job roles and competing job demands. Policymakers and systems administrators should engage with school leaders to identify the workload challenges that they face and provide support to enable leaders to spend time on the activities that matter most. For example, based on the results from this survey, policymakers need to provide additional resources to reduce the amount of time school leaders spend on internal and external administration. This may mean increasing the size of the school leadership team or recruiting additional administrative staff members.

### **3. Enhance the in-school social support available for school leaders**

Although school leaders work in school with high levels of trust, justice and collaboration, school leaders report only moderate levels of social support from colleagues. Policymakers should engage in efforts to foster relationships between school leaders and staff members in schools. To develop strong, positive in-school relationships, policymakers and systems administrators should set aside time for staff members to engage in social interaction with colleagues and activities to build supportive, professional relationships

### **4. Provide direct, individualised support to school leaders**

There is evidence that direct problem- and emotionally-focused support can have a positive impact on employee mental health and wellbeing (Beddoe, Davys & Adamson, 2014). Policymakers and systems administrators should provide school leaders who are in need of support with regular access to an experienced support professional. Depending on their needs, this could mean access to a qualified psychologist or to experienced principal mentor. School leaders should be involved in the design of interventions and interventions should be evaluated to ensure that they are effective.

### **5. Provide professional development opportunities**

Policymakers and systems administrators should ensure that school leaders have adequate and relevant information, training, instruction or supervision about their work from a suitably qualified school leadership professional. Online or in-person professional development should provide school leaders with opportunities to learn about:

- the job role and the work that primary school leaders are required to carry out
- the psychosocial and physical risks associated with the work
- leadership strategies for promoting healthy, safe and sustainable workplaces
- systems, policies and procedures to promote healthy workplaces and respond to issues
- information about support services and resources

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# 10 Appendix

## Participant care

Each participant received an interactive, user specific report of their survey responses benchmarked against responses of their peers and members of the general population upon their completion of the survey. Returning participants were also provided with a comparison of their 2021 results against their results from previous years.

The survey included the assessment of three “red flag” risk indicators: Self-harm; Quality of Life; and Occupational Health. The red flag indicators are calculated as follows:

- Self-harm – a participant response of “sometimes”, “often” or “all the time” to the question “Do you ever feel like hurting yourself?”
- Quality of Life – when aggregate scores on quality of life items fell two standard deviations below the mean for the school leader population.
- Occupational Health – when the composite psychosocial risk score fell into the high or very high-risk groups.

The report of any individual or combination of the three triggers resulted in the participant receiving a red flag notification, informing them of the indicator(s). The notification also included links to Employee Assistance Programs and local support services.

## The survey

The survey captured three types of information drawn from existing robust and widely used instruments.

1. Comprehensive school demographic items drawn from:
  - a. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS; Williams, et al., 2007).
  - b. Program for International Student Assessment (PISA; Thomson, et al., 2011).
  - c. International Confederation of Principals surveys were used to capture differences in occupational health and safety (OH&S) associated with the diversity of school settings and types.
2. Personal demographic and historical information.
3. School leaders’ quality of life and psychosocial coping were investigated by employing two widely used measures:
  - The Assessment of Quality of Life – 8D (AQoL-8D; Richardson, et al., 2009; Richardson, Iezzi & Maxwell, 2014).
  - The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire-II (COPSOQ-II; Pejtersen, et al., 2010).

Other measures used in the survey include:

- a. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT: Babour et al., 2001), developed for the World Health Organization.
- b. Passion (Trepanier, Fernet, Austin, Forest & Vallerand, 2014; Vallerand, 2015).
- c. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS: Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988).
- d. Basic Psychological Needs at Work Scale (BPNWS: Deci & Ryan, 2004; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016).
- e. 'Life Events'.
- f. COVID-19 related questions were added.

The combination of items from these instruments allows for a comprehensive analysis of variation in both occupational health, safety, and wellbeing, as a function of geolocation, school type, sector differences and the personal attributes of the school leaders themselves.

Our survey instrument relies heavily on the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ-II). This questionnaire is regarded as the “gold standard” in occupational health and safety self-report measures. It has been translated into more than 25 languages and is filled out by hundreds of thousands of workers each year. The structure of the COPSOQ-II consists of higher order domains and contributing subdomains/scales. These have been found to be very robust and stable measures, by both ourselves (Dicke et al., 2018) and others (Burr, Albertsen, Rugulies, & Hannerz, 2010; Kiss, De Meester, Kruse, Chavee, & Braeckman, 2013; Thorsen & Bjorner, 2010). All COPSOQ domain scores are transformed to 0-100 aiding comparisons across domains.

To maintain the participant anonymity, aggregate data is reported at demographic grouping levels. Some subgroups were unable to be reported due to insufficient sample size. Reporting results of subgroups of insufficient size may not provide a true reflection of the subgroup; and risk identifying primary school leaders if reported by the small subgroup. As some participants only partially completed the survey, some of the participant numbers for domains and subscales may vary. Subgroup distributions will be reported as a percentage of the data sample size.



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