

# IPPN Pre-Budget Submission 2016



**Prepared by:**

Irish Primary Principals' Network  
IPPN Support Office  
Glounthaune  
Cork

**Prepared for:**

Minister for Education and Skills  
Department of Education and Skills  
Marlborough Street  
Dublin 1

Minister for Finance  
Department of Finance  
Government Buildings  
Upper Merrion Street  
Dublin 2

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), with a membership of over 6,000 principals and deputy principals, was established in 2000 and has become the recognised professional body for Ireland's primary school leaders.

Earlier this year, IPPN consulted with its membership and received 1,332 responses directly from principals identifying the top Principals' Priorities for Education Budget 2016. The top priorities by volume of response and the top in average ranking order have been combined to form the following eight priorities for the primary education budget for 2016.

1. Minimum of one administration day per week for Teaching Principals.
2. Improve the pupil/teacher ratio.
3. Increase the Capitation Grant.
4. Restore full resource hours.
5. Restore middle management posts.
6. Reduce the threshold for administrative principalship.
7. Revise the staffing schedule for special schools.
8. Dignified step-down facility for principals without loss of seniority/pension.

IPPN is also calling for resources to be provided in the following areas:

9. Children's Emotional Wellbeing.
10. IT and Digital Learning in Schools.

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## 1. MINIMUM OF ONE ADMINISTRATION DAY PER WEEK FOR TEACHING PRINCIPALS

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60% of primary principals are currently teaching full-time in addition to their leadership role. They presently have between 14 and 22 days 'release' time from teaching (depending on the number of classroom teachers) to work on all of the tasks and responsibilities of school leadership. In simple terms, a principal with 178 pupils teaches a class 169 days a year (183 days minus 14 'release' days) whereas a principal with 179 pupils does not teach at all. IPPN propose that a stepped approach is followed for release days as per the following table:

No of pupils enrolled	No. of non teaching/ administrative days per week
178	5
141	4
104	3
67	2
30	1
<i>Minimum of 1 day per week for all teaching principals effective immediately</i>	

The current situation is unsustainable. Numerous IPPN studies (and the DES' own reports) confirm this. Teaching Principals are far more likely to feel stressed, require medical intervention and take early retirement. They have the poorest infrastructure (45% have no personal office space or dedicated storage) and the least ancillary staff support despite the fact that they are teaching full time and desperately need full-time secretarial support.

Teaching Principals across the border in Northern Ireland have a substitute teacher available one day per week (used flexibly to meet the needs of the school). Principals in the Republic need a similar level of substitute cover/release time to address the anomalies in their working conditions compared with non-teaching principals. The level of release time for teaching principals needs to be increased to ensure that all principals have adequate support to carry out their role as leaders of learning. The current situation is educationally inequitable and professionally unsustainable.

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## **2. IMPROVE THE PUPIL/TEACHER RATIO**

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Given the diversity of needs present in classrooms today teachers are increasingly challenged to ensure that every child in their care has equal and appropriate access to a differentiated curriculum. This is why principals have asked for the maximum class size to be prioritised ahead of most other aspects of primary education. Where the class size is manageable, children have more equitable access to education and teachers can lead learning in their classrooms more effectively.

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## **3. INCREASE THE CAPITATION GRANT**

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Schools have been significantly challenged by the cuts to all grants over the past several years, particularly the capitation grant. This has forced schools to fundraise to pay for basic running costs, to curtail support to disadvantaged pupils and to cease maintaining vital infrastructure, such as IT facilities. Restoring the capitation grant to pre-2008 levels would enable schools to start replacing or repairing school facilities and refocus their energies on teaching and learning.

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## **4. RESTORE FULL RESOURCE HOURS**

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The 15% cut in resource hours has disproportionately affected some of the most vulnerable children in primary schools – those with special educational needs – as well as their classmates. Under the proposed new model, the Department of Education and Skills are reinstating some of the resource hours that had been cut. Irrespective of what model is put in place, full resource hours need to be reinstated.

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## **5. RESTORE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT POSTS**

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Principals' work overload is a well-documented issue at this stage, with numerous surveys confirming that the role is unsustainable without an appropriate middle management structure in place. The moratorium on posts of responsibility disproportionately affected schools with senior staff members who retired not being replaced. Many schools have had their entire management team wiped out, with the exception of the Deputy Principal post. Middle Management could have a significant role in the ongoing school self evaluation process, mentoring of new staff and in larger schools manage communications for subsets of the school's student population.

IPPN is calling for an urgent review of Middle Management capacity. This is an opportune time to commence the rebuilding of leadership and management teams in schools.

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## **6. REDUCE THE THRESHOLD FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PRINCIPALSHIP**

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Principals with 178 pupils are managing a staff of approximately 7 teachers, often with an additional complement of Special Needs Assistants, Resource Teachers, Bus Escorts, a part-time secretary, a part-time caretaker and other resources on an ongoing basis. They are expected to lead the school, leadership and learning in the school and its staff while teaching full-time. While a principal with one more pupil (and one more teacher) has none of the teaching responsibilities.

IPPN is calling for the threshold for administrative principalship, where the principal does not have a full-time teaching responsibility, to be reduced considerably to reflect the workload of a school principal. IPPN proposes to reduce the threshold to 145 pupils and/or to include all adults managed by the principal in the calculation, rather than including only class teachers. This will also allow for the increased complexity of special schools.

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## **7. REVISE THE STAFFING SCHEDULE FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

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The Special Schools' Staffing Schedule was last updated in 1993 (the SERC report) and urgently requires attention.

It would appear that there is no account taken of the complexity of need of individuals attending special schools in determining pupil/teacher ratios, including maximum class averages/sizes. Every class in a special school is a multi-disability class. In the severe/profound category of pupils with ASD, the optimum number of pupils per class has been proved from experience to be 4 pupils. These pupils need a calm, quiet environment where staff can implement techniques to manage behaviours. At present the ratio of 6 pupils to one teacher including up to 3 SNAs in the room does not allow for this type of environment. As a result, anxiety levels increase to the point where pupils become so upset/challenging that they cannot access the extent of the educational programmes on offer.

IPPN is calling for a revision of the staffing schedule for special schools and that additional factors specific to special schools are taken in to consideration to maximize class averages/sizes.

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## **8. DIGNIFIED STEP-DOWN FACILITY FOR PRINCIPALS WITHOUT LOSS OF SENIORITY/PENSION**

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Currently, the only option for principals who, for whatever reason, feel that they can no longer give of their best in a leadership role, but who wish to remain in the teaching profession, is to resign and start back at the level of a newly-qualified teacher. In many cases this involves them having to apply for sub work, maternity leave posts and fixed term posts. Due to the scarcity of permanent posts and the operation of the redeployment panel, principals who step down often have very little chance of securing a permanent position.

Principals have requested a scheme to allow principal teachers the option to step down with dignity and to continue in their chosen profession without the pressures and responsibilities of school leadership. This scheme could have the following stipulations:

- a) A principal teacher with a minimum service as a principal (e.g. 7 years) may step down from his/her position as principal.
- b) If there is no vacancy in his/her current school, at the time of stepping down, the principal will be placed on the main redeployment panel.

It would be appropriate for the DES to recognise a former principal's years of leadership service by allowing him/her to retain a portion of the principal's allowance, commensurate with longevity of service as a principal. A further advantage is the increased number of opportunities for aspiring school leaders with enthusiasm and energy to step up to these vacated leadership roles.

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## **9. CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

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A succession of IPPN surveys have uncovered continuing disturbing increases in the levels of depression, anxiety, emotional trauma and neglect amongst primary school-going children. Allied to the increasingly strong influence of social media and cyber bullying, children are being exposed to levels of pressure that they may not have experienced before. Health effects, such as childhood obesity, have associated self-esteem implications and can become very real issues in our schools today.

IPPN is calling for the provision of resources to establish and embed a culture in all schools whereby all children feel safe to express their anxieties and develop emotional resilience to meet the challenges they face as they go through life.

IPPN also advises that provision is made for the appointment of additional NEPS psychologists to support schools. Early detection and prevention of issues affecting emotional wellbeing at primary school age is much more effective and inexpensive than seeking to provide a cure or addressing the same issues further down the track.

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## **10. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS**

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Multi-national and Irish employers are consistently alerting government to the impact on our economy arising from the shortage of science and technology skills. Irish primary education is at least a decade behind virtually all other OECD countries in relation to ICT provision and usage.

IPPN strongly recommends that the provision of a multi-annual budget for ICT in schools is put in place. An integrated ICT-supported curriculum must be put in place to enable Ireland to keep pace with our OECD neighbours and competitors.

A decision needs to be taken to teach a number of subjects e.g. science or maths, through the medium of technology from Junior Infants to Leaving Certificate level. For this to become a reality, government must ensure that all schools have access to high speed broadband and technical support.

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## **CONCLUSION**

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IPPN urges the Department of Finance and the Department of Education and Skills to prioritise primary education in this year's education budget and to carefully consider each recommendation made within this document. These recommendations are from 1,322 principals that carefully considered the challenge of prioritising expenditure within primary education. These priorities, if fully funded, would radically alter the capacity of primary schools and school leaders to deliver their responsibilities, which will ultimately lead to the improvement in education outcomes for all children.