



**PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION**

**TO THE**

**MINISTER FOR FINANCE**

**PRESENTED BY:**

**IRISH PRIMARY PRINCIPALS' NETWORK**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<u>Page</u>
1.1. OVERALL EDUCATION SPEND.....	1
1.2. SCHOOL OPERATIONAL COSTS – CAPITATION GRANTS.....	1
1.3. CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN SCHOOLS BUILDINGS.....	1
1.4. SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP.....	2
1.5. ADMINISTRATIVE & TEACHING PRINCIPALS .....	2
1.6. PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE RELEASE DAYS.....	2
1.7. ANCILLARY SERVICES GRANT .....	2
1.8. PRIMARY PUPIL DATA BASE .....	3
1.9. EXEMPTION FROM VAT .....	3
1.10. PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES TO SCHOOLS.....	3
1.11. INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY.....	3
1.12. REVIEW OF SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS .....	4
1.13. AUTISM UNITS .....	4
1.14. TEACHER APPOINTMENTS .....	4
1.15. CONCLUSION .....	4

## **1.1. Overall Education Spend**

The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) is acutely aware of the current budgetary situation and the extreme pressure on Public Finances. Nevertheless, in order to safeguard our hard won economic gains, and in recognition of the contribution made by education to these gains, under no circumstances should the commitment to increase the investment in Education be reduced in any way. IPPN asks the Minister for Finance to increase investment in Education despite the economic downturn as a deliberate strategy to protecting the future of Irish society and our economic competitiveness. The existing €9.3b (2008) has proven to be inadequate to sustain a rapidly expanding primary education sector. Planning additional capacity for the known increase in the primary student population can only be achieved by increasing the education budget.

## **1.2. School Operational Costs – Capitation Grants**

Many schools are fundraising to meet their daily running costs. IPPN surveys indicate that 90% of schools engage in fundraising. Reflecting that reality, IPPN calls for

- a) A realistic increase in the level of Capitation to Primary Schools. As a minimum, these grants must be brought up to the levels granted to Post Primary Schools
- b) Consideration to be given to a totally new structure of funding schools which accurately reflects the socio-economic background of not just the school but the children enrolled in the school. The current payment of the Annual Capitation Grant which is in two yearly instalments should be changed immediately in favour of monthly payments to address severe cash flow problems in schools.

## **1.3. Capital Investment in Schools Buildings**

IPPN recommends that the Minister for Finance undertakes:

- a) A measured level of borrowing to maintain the plan *School Building Programme*. This is essential to cater for the known expansion of primary school enrolments a trend which will continue for the foreseeable future based on CSO predictions. Borrowing for capital investment will benefit in several ways:
  - i. Save high rental costs on pre-fabricated buildings
  - ii. Stimulate the ailing construction sector
  - iii. Meet our constitutional obligation to provide for primary education
  - iv. Comply with OECD recommendations re. Ireland's Educational System
- b) To introduce an 'SSIA' type attractive pension fund to:
  - i. Create a ring-fenced capital fund to finance the school building programme
  - ii. Encourage the much needed uptake on pensions amongst under 40's
- c) To introduce legislation requiring developer contributions to the capital fund for the school building programme directly (rather than through Local Authority). The contribution is to be defined based on an agreed percentage of the projective market value of all residual properties.

## **1.4. Supporting School Leadership**

The Government must, as a priority, reaffirm its commitment to supporting school leadership as a key strategy towards school improvement and pupil learning. The importance of the Principal as the leader of learning in the school environment must not be put at risk by reducing the financial support to organisations and agencies dedicated to this task. Consequently, IPPN asks the Minister of Finance to ensure that the DES continues its investment in formal professional development for Principals - *Leadership Development for Schools* (LDS) and investment in the practical/holistic support for Principals - *Irish Primary Principals' Network* (IPPN).

## **1.5. Administrative & Teaching Principals**

All international research and best practice points towards the importance of effective school leadership for school improvements and pupil learning. Ireland is unique in its high proportion (70%) of small schools with Teaching Principals. IPPN asks the Minister for Finance to immediately engage with the Department of Education & Science in exploring alternative school leadership models. Such models may include 'Federations' or 'Clusters' of schools reaching a critical mass of 100 pupils where upon 2 or more schools with combined enrolment of 100 pupils would be lead and managed by an Administrative Principal.

## **1.6. Principal Administrative Release Days**

Teaching Principals currently can avail of a number of release days to fulfil administrative duties. Over 70% of all Principals are engaged in a class teaching role. In order to adequately fulfil this dual role, there is an urgent need to expand the present pilot project, whereby a fully qualified teacher is allocated to a cluster of small schools, thus enabling the Teaching Principal to be released from the classroom for an extended period of time to engage in administrative functions. Alternatively, the provision of an Administrative Principal to a cluster of small schools should be trialled on a pilot basis. IPPN has already completed some preliminary work on this issue and is satisfied as to its viability.

## **1.7. Ancillary Services Grant**

The Ancillary Services Grant in its current form should be discontinued and replaced by a scheme that provides for the central payment of Ancillary staff by the Department of Education and Science. Schools with over 100 pupils should be staffed with a full-time secretary and caretaker. Clusters of schools with a combined enrolment of 100 pupils should be enabled to the same level of secretarial and caretaker support on a shared basis. As an interim measure the current Ancillary Services Grant is inadequate and should be doubled immediately.

## **1.8. Primary Pupil Data Base**

IPPN has been calling for the establishment of a Primary Pupil Data Base as a matter of urgency since 2002. This facility could track children from Infant entry until transition to Second Level and beyond. A Primary Pupil Database is an essential infrastructure to bring about the efficient allocation of resources, eliminate duplication and streamline antiquated practices within the DES and in schools. Such a database exists at Post Primary level. Had the initiative commenced at Primary level the residual benefit would have automatically evolved into second level. We are alone in OECD countries in not having such a planning and tracking system.

## **1.9. Exemption from VAT**

All primary schools should be zero VAT rated from the beginning of the new financial year. This measure would have the immediate effect of boosting school finances significantly by removing the requirement to pay VAT on all utilities and supplies. It is illogical that schools should be forced to pay VAT when they are:

- a) Not for profit organisations
- b) Paying taxation to the State with funds provided by the state
- c) Paying additional taxation to the State with funds raised voluntarily by parents which is coming from 'taxed income'

## **1.10. Psychological Services to Schools**

IPPN calls on the Minister of Finance to remain resolute in its commitments to children with special education needs. As a priority, this requires the expansion of the Psychological Service to schools in the forthcoming Budget. The service currently falls 30% short of requirements. Funds must also be ring-fenced to ensure the EPSN Act is fully implemented within the agreed timeframe.

## **1.11. Information & Communication Technology**

There has been no funding to support ICT in schools since 2002. IPPN regards the immediate allocation of the promised €252m as a priority to enable schools to provide for hardware and software needs. In the UK, Prime Minister Gordon Brown has committed to spending €1,460 per pupil by 2011 for the integration of ICT into the curriculum, a recognition of how important other jurisdictions consider the role of ICT to be in the overall everyday educational context. It is of serious concern to IPPN that the Irish Education System is falling rapidly behind internationally in the use of ICT. This will have serious consequences for our international competitiveness in the medium term future.

## **1.12. Review of Special Needs Assistants**

The review of Special Needs Assistants currently in the Education System must not be used as a money saving exercise at the expense of the most vulnerable children in society. Only schools where there is clearly an excess of such personnel relative to the number of children requiring assistance should be targeted for a reduction in resources.

## **1.13. Autism Units**

IPPN calls for funding to be made available so that

- a) All Principals of schools, no matter how small, with an Autism attached, should have administrative status. This is essential to enable the safe and proper management of such vital special needs facilities
- b) The annual grant to schools for pupils with autism should be increased to €3,000 per pupil to reflect the resource hungry nature of Autism provision.

## **1.14. Teacher Appointments**

Funding Provision should be made in the forthcoming Budget so that schools can immediately make additional appointments of qualified personnel when enrolments warrant additionality without the current practice having to wait until the next school year to make such appointments. Any additional costs would be offset by the reciprocal practice that where pupil numbers go below a retention threshold, the teacher is re-deployed immediately rather than the current practice where (s)he remains on staff for a further year.

## **1.15. Conclusion**

IPPN believes that the Department of Finance should investigate alternative models of education funding e.g. State of Victoria, Australia and New Zealand. IPPN contends our current model for education funding, while it appears to be fair, it is such a crude and blunt instrument that it is wasteful particularly in its inability to target resources to address actual need. IPPN believes that with a more equitable and transparent system of education funding, the DES could then devolve responsibility to schools enabling them to have greater control and the utilisation of available resources