

Breacadh Ré Nua do Scoileanna Beaga

New Horizons for Smaller Schools & Teaching Principalship in Ireland



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Foreword

New Horizons

This has been a very important and worthwhile collaborative research project for IPPN and St. Patrick's College. The project was launched at IPPN Conference 2003. The interim report was very well received at Conference 2004. The final report is being launched at Conference 2005. The sub-committee has had many hours of discussion and debate with teaching principals and with the partners in education in Ireland, North and South, as well as examining the implications of national and international research. We are very grateful to all who assisted with this project and we are especially grateful to all the members of the sub-committee for their many hours of dedicated work. The fruits of this labour have been whittled down to well-considered conclusions and thought-provoking recommendations on the future of smaller schools and teaching principals.

The key questions we addressed were:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of smaller schools and can they survive in their current form?
- Can the role of teaching principal be made attractive professionally and financially?
- What current examples exist of school staff discussing and discovering what can be achieved in co-operation with other schools?
- What has been done in other countries to support smaller schools and teaching principals?
- What initiatives/pilot projects would be suitable for Irish schools and what incentives and supports would be required to ensure their success?

One of our key conclusions was that smaller schools need a variety of alternatives to amalgamation that allows them to meet the needs of their pupils. Examples of current clustering, both nationally and internationally, offer impressive evidence of the benefits that accrue to schools, teachers, pupils, parents and communities. The realisation by many principals and teachers that they are already at stage one or two of the 'Continuum of Collaboration' outlined in Chapter 4 should encourage further exploration of the possibilities that properly supported clustering can offer. Much of this additional work

has been undertaken voluntarily by principals and teachers in the interest of providing the best possible educational opportunities for their pupils. We need to acknowledge and build on this positive development by providing a range of pilot projects to further explore the potential of schools to work collaboratively with each other.

Teaching principals in the 21st century are constantly juggling to find time to be inspirational leaders and teachers while also fulfilling the many legislative, curricular and administrative requirements of their dual role. The current unattractiveness of teaching principalship, evident from the falling rate of applications and the increasing number of teaching principals who are choosing to step down or retire early, remains a key issue for all teachers and partners in education. We have tried in this report to analyse and update you on these issues and to offer solutions proposed to us during consultations with principal teachers at focus groups and in the ‘IPPN Principals’ Survey 2005’(Appendix 2). Let us hope this report will help to bring about significant recommendations from the ‘DES Working Group on the Workload of Teaching Principals and In-school Management’ and result in attractive and well-supported professional and financial initiatives.

Last year at IPPN Conference 2004 we set ourselves the challenge of finding “Irish solutions to this worldwide problem”. Let 2005 be the year when we collectively identify, agree and implement our own creative and innovative solutions that offer ‘new horizons for smaller schools and teaching principalship in Ireland’.

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Executive Summary

The present document marks the end of the second phase of the collaborative work between the IPPN and St. Patrick's College. Last year's report set out the main issues in relation to the development of smaller schools and teaching principalships. It was shown in that report that the average achievement level in smaller schools compares favourably with those in relatively larger schools. Furthermore, such schools present opportunities for innovative teaching strategies and different kinds of learning experiences for pupils. At the same time, we recognised the difficulties associated with smaller schools, particularly professional isolation and lack of adequate resources. With that in mind we presented the results of focus group discussions with principals on the most appropriate ways in which such schools might develop.

This year's report advances the debate with a view to putting forward a proposal for a pilot project involving smaller schools co-operating with each other. Here we present the results of our work during the last year which involved:

- consultation with partners in education and setting the results in the context of policy developments of last decade, particularly as these impinge on the organisation of schools (Chapter 1),
- examining current thinking on the changing role of the teaching principal, taking into account how the recent changes in the role of principal affect those who are both teachers and principals (Chapter 2),
- looking at the international experience of different kinds of arrangements for collaboration between smaller schools with a particular focus on how clustering operates for the benefits of students, teachers and communities (Chapter 3),
- setting out the various examples of clustering arrangements that are to be found in Ireland and which have been shown to work successfully (Chapter 4)
- developing ideas as to what a pilot project based on clustering might look like and setting out guidelines for its operation (Chapter 5).

As is clear from the first chapter, the consensus that developed from our consultative process is that a clustering arrangement between schools offers the best opportunity for development. The review of consultations with the relevant partners in education

indicates an awareness of the need for smaller schools to work together and a readiness to try an innovative approach that builds on the existing informal arrangements. This chapter also traces the evolution of policies regarding smaller schools from the OECD report in 1991, which recognised the benefits of smaller schools and their importance, but still encouraged amalgamations. *The Green Paper on Education* (1992) put forward the idea of closing smaller schools under the critical size (four teachers), but by the time of the National Education Convention in 1994 the debate had moved on. The report of that convention mentions the many positive features of smaller schools and the fact that so many representatives had been critical of policies with regard to school amalgamations. The report of the convention suggested that educational quality and not school size should be the main criterion for rationalisation. This perspective represents a significant shift away from the economic argument which was the main consideration in earlier policy documents. The subsequent *White Paper on Education* (1995) does not contain any suggestion to eliminate smaller schools.

The second chapter is specifically concerned with the role of teaching principals. The historical background is examined with particular reference to the developments over the last two decades that have made the role of the teaching principal such a complex one in contrast to earlier times when it involved minor bureaucratic demands (Appendix 1 provides a useful historical overview of development relevant to the present situation). There is a particular concern about the increasing legal obligations, higher expectations of pedagogical leadership, the management of macro-politics of parents, teachers and board members in addition to full-time teaching duties. Particular emphasis is based on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that are necessary in the current situation. There is a strong recommendation that conditions of teaching principals need to be significantly enhanced in order to take account of their changing role.

The third chapter focuses on the international research on clustering and the benefits that accrue from the arrangement. We examine research undertaken on the clustering of smaller schools in Northern Ireland, the mainland United Kingdom, New Zealand and Queensland, Australia, as well as the results of study visits to smaller schools with various clustering arrangements in Sweden, France and Catalonia. Achieving optimum efficiency of resources expended in education has motivated education authorities to promote schools clustering in some countries. This includes better provisions for special

needs when cluster arrangements were in place. Clustering between schools at different levels has helped transition from primary to post primary. For example, Sweden introduced the clustering of schools, which may include pre-schools and special education units, with the deployment of an administrative principal. Another approach has involved an amalgamation of the boards of management of two or three smaller schools under one single management board in an effort to reduce the administrative and bureaucratic demands on principals.

There are numerous examples where particular models of clustering have been beneficial. In particular, a common theme that emerges is that clustering assists principals with curriculum planning and policy development. Another major positive feature is the reduction in feelings of isolation. Many participating schools also report increased feelings of collegiality, greater teacher confidence and the examination of new and old teaching methodologies. Crucially, it is the pooling of resources and sharing of expertise and methodologies which is seen by many teachers as having an obvious positive impact on the learning outcomes of children. In some cases it was found that, as a result of clustering, there was a general improvement in student learning outcomes. However, in a cautionary note this chapter also shows clustering does not inevitably reduce the workload of the teaching principal. There are important lessons here for the proposed pilot project.

In Chapter 4, we set out exemplars of varied and innovative clustering activities currently in operation in Ireland. A feature of many of these activities has been collaboration with similar schools with shared identities. A considerable skill and knowledge base has been developed in smaller schools through active participation in the process of engaging with others in collaborative activities that have at their core a focus on the individual pupils. Sometimes there is a misperception that clustering is a new concept to Irish education. On the contrary there are many forms of clustering currently in operation. We take the view that clustering arrangements range from simple forms of association and co-operation between schools, through partnership and confederation to a final stage of federation – an issue that will be considered in the final chapter. Our exemplars include school clusters engaging in special projects involving ICT, the scheme for ‘Giving Children an Even Break’, shared secretarial services, North-South projects, learning support clusters, and planning clusters.

The fifth chapter brings together the main themes of this year's and last year's reports and sets out the parameters of a proposed pilot project. The documented exemplars (detailed in Chapter 4) show that smaller schools that/which have actively been involved in collaboration have benefited enormously from such participation. Combining these observations with the wealth of experience, knowledge and skills in the system and the tremendous advantages being brought to the pupils, the schools and the education system itself, a clustering arrangement between smaller schools has great potential for Irish education and indeed for the communities being served by those schools. Based on the research reviewed and the examples put forward, we take the view that a totally new model is not required but rather an adaptation of current policies so that smaller schools can help themselves. We also put forward the strong recommendation that schools themselves would develop the plans for clustering since the research has convincingly shown that the conviction and enthusiasm that schools bring to any clustering arrangement are critical components of success.

We have indicated the criteria for success of such a project. A willingness of participating schools to operate as a cluster is a key factor in ensuring the success of clusters: voluntary clustering is much more likely to result in an effective and sustainable cluster. We also think that training needs to be provided in the facilitating, organising, maintaining and sustaining of clusters. There is a key role for School Development Planning Support, Leadership Development for Schools and Primary Curriculum Support Programme in providing the professional development opportunities for schools operating as a cluster. There will also be a need for supports and incentives with special attention paid to the appointment of a co-ordinator.

We have put forward the guidelines for stages of development of the cluster. The first stage should involve building trust and might involve a process to assist in the identification of priorities to be undertaken by groups of schools. A critical matter should be that each potential cluster would undertake one activity that is achievable in the short term. This period would also see ongoing facilitation and training, particularly for those involved in the steering committee and for the cluster co-ordinator(s). The second phase we have identified as one of 'building commitment'. This would feature long-term aims, sharing agendas and looking at longer-term projects. Roles will be identified for partners

and there will be activities for team building. The third stage will involve sustaining the cluster. Among activities recommended will be greater co-ordination and co-operation, implementation of agreed plans and a focus on ensuring that cluster activities are yielding benefits to children.

While the suggested stages are somewhat arbitrary, we emphasise the importance of the experience of success at each stage before the cluster moves on to the next stage. External support will be crucial in identifying the difficulties that schools may have at a particular stage in the development of the cluster and in then providing appropriate interventions to assist the school in regaining trust in the initiative. We do not underestimate the difficulties in any formal clustering arrangement. What we stress, however, are the potential benefits of combining the positive contributions of smaller schools with the resources and professional development opportunities that were traditionally available only in larger schools.

Chapter 1. A Review of Research and Debate on the Future of Smaller Schools

Below we consider the current status of the research and debate on the future of smaller schools. The advantages and drawbacks are considered briefly and the result of the consultations with teaching principals is summarised. The consultation process undertaken throughout the year is described together with the points of agreement on the way forward. Recent Irish research pertinent to clustering and co-operation between schools is examined.

Last year's publication (Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2004) showed that smaller schools are a major feature of the Irish primary school system. The DES figures indicate that 56% of primary school teachers and principals in Ireland work in smaller schools and that 53% of primary school pupils are taught in these schools (DES, 2003a). Furthermore, 73% of principals in Irish primary schools are teaching principals. Smaller schools with consecutive and/or multi-grade classes are found in most countries throughout the world. The indications are that between 21% and 53% of classes in European countries are multi-grade/consecutive grade classes in smaller schools (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004).

Positive Features of Smaller Schools

As noted in last year's report smaller schools have several positive features and fewer of the drawbacks that were traditionally attributed to them. For example, in the UK it has been shown that curriculum provision in smaller schools is similar to that which emerged in studies of large schools. There are also indications of greater social cohesiveness among children in smaller schools than in larger schools. Frequently, children of different ages work and play together and the differentiation between age groups is not as pronounced as in large schools

Secondly, research on the effects of class size has shown that pupils become more engaged academically and socially when class size is reduced, and this increased engagement in the classroom is likely to lead to increased learning. Teachers tend to find classroom management easier in smaller classes, with fewer behaviour problems

Teachers feel more proactive and less reactive in their approach to managing student behaviour in smaller classes. Veenman (1996) suggests that the multi-grade/consecutive grade setting provides teachers with opportunities to use innovative teaching approaches that are associated with enhanced pupil learning. Therefore, theoretically, with additional support and resources for teachers, the multi-grade/consecutive grade learning setting could be more beneficial for pupils. The study by Mulryan-Kyne (2004) in the Irish context showed that Irish multi-grade teachers reported using many innovative approaches.

Thirdly, while it has been widely believed since the sixties that schools with multi-grade classes have pupils who perform less well than those in other classes (*Investment in Education*, 1966), the findings based on test data since then do not support this. Martin and Kellaghan (1977) examined the relationship between school variables and reading attainment (in Irish and English) in grades 3 and 5 in a national sample of Irish primary schools and found no relationship between school size and achievement. The *1999 National Assessment of Mathematics Achievement* (Shiel & Kelly, 1999), which focused on the mathematics of fourth class children also found no significant differences between the achievement of pupils in single-grade and multi-grade or consecutive grade classes in smaller schools.

Development of Government Policy

Although the OECD report in 1991 recognised the benefits of smaller schools and their importance, it nevertheless encouraged amalgamations aiming at four-teacher primary schools. Following the OECD report (1991) the subsequent Government *Green Paper on Education* (1992) put forward the idea of closing smaller schools under the critical size (four teachers). However by the time of the National Education Convention in 1994 the debate had moved on. The report of that convention mentions the many positive features of smaller schools and the fact that so many representatives had been critical of policies with regard to school amalgamations.

On the other hand it was recognised that some rationalisation was inevitable, but this needed to be done in a planned coherent manner. Mention was made of the disadvantages of smaller schools in terms of curricular provision and the limitations in physical

resources as well as the difficulties in such circumstances of providing remedial teaching. Two other matters are mentioned, one is the professional isolation of teachers and the other is the disproportionate effects which a persistently under-performing teacher would have on the educational careers of the children in such schools.

The report suggested that educational quality and not school size should be the main criterion for rationalisation. This perspective represents a significant shift away from the economic argument which was the main consideration in earlier policy documents. It is particularly interesting that the subsequent *White Paper on Education* (1995) does not contain a suggestion to eliminate smaller schools.

Difficulties of Smaller Schools

While it is the case that smaller schools have the positive features outlined above, it is equally important to note the difficulties and problems encountered in such schools (IPPN, 2004). Teaching in a multi-grade situation involves more planning, preparation, and organisation, than single-grade teaching. Teachers often report not having enough time for the preparation of class materials and for individual attention and remediation. They also talk about the problems associated with teaching several programmes in the same time that is available to single-grade teachers for the teaching of one programme. Findings of a study of two-teacher schools in Ireland (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004) are worth noting. In this study both class teachers and principals cited many positive effects of multi-grade teaching and indicated that they found teaching in this setting satisfying and fulfilling. However, they also said that multi-grade teaching requires more organisation and management than single-grade teaching and resources and support were considered to be inadequate. In the same vein, respondents to an INTO (2003) survey on the teaching of multi-classes welcomed the developing practice of clustering schools together for school planning and in-service days. It was considered “absolutely” and “definitely” a good idea (p. 22).

Principals of smaller schools frequently report that the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms is compromised and that children are losing out due to the dual role of administration and teaching. Problems being experienced by principals of smaller schools in trying to perform their dual role of teaching and administration were also expressed in a recent survey conducted by the IPPN (IPPN Principals’ Survey 2005, Appendix 2) The

workload of principals was thought to be very difficult because of the need to deal with both administration and teaching tasks.

Finally there are indications that smaller schools especially those in rural areas have traditionally received a lower level of service than larger schools, in relation to access to remedial and psychological services and to library facilities. The fact that funding was provided on the basis of enrolment figures left smaller schools at a disadvantage compared with large schools.

Innovations and Job Satisfaction

There are two major reasons why working in professional isolation can be problematic. The first of these has to do with innovations. There is now considerable evidence that curricular and other innovations do not occur as a result of an individual teacher being made aware of the need for change. Rather, the social context of change and especially the learning community of teachers are of major significance for adopting change. The review by Richardson & Placier (2001) of influences on teacher change shows that organisational, as opposed to individual factors, have the most far-reaching influences on reform implementation. That review concluded that implementations that rely on individual effort result in low levels of actual implementation (sometimes as low as 15%).

On the other hand, 'learning communities' of teachers have a major influence on the implementation of innovations. The review (Richardson & Placier, 2001) concluded that the interaction between colleagues and the role of teacher leaders is a critical feature in the implementation of school change. The implication is that where teachers are isolated (as in smaller schools) it is relatively difficult to bring about the changes in school norms and behaviour that are critical to innovation.

Another important consideration has to do with job satisfaction. Many of the determinants of teachers' job satisfaction seem to be intrinsic, i.e. the feedback resulting from children's progress. However, another important source of satisfaction is peer affirmation (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). In other words, an important motivating factor for teachers is not only the realisation of doing a good job but also the affirmation by peers that this is the case. Again the absence of an immediate peer group in smaller schools precludes the possibility of this happening.

Results of Focus Group Discussions with Principals

Following the setting up of a committee comprising of IPPN members and staff of St. Patrick's College, a number of focus group meetings were held in several counties during the winter of 2003. About 50 principals attended these meetings, representing two to nine-teacher schools. The focus groups examined the main advantages and drawbacks of:

- The present situation
- Amalgamation of smaller schools
- Clustering of schools
- Hub schools
- Federation of schools

The results can be summarised as follows. Firstly, some advantages of the present situation were acknowledged including independence and a sense of smaller schools doing a good job. On the other hand, there are real difficulties combining administrative work with teaching and while the administrative time that was made available to principals was welcomed, there were difficulties including the non-availability of suitable substitute cover and the anxiety experienced by teaching principals based on their fear that some children might be losing out.

Secondly, the vast majority of the principals in the focus groups were against the idea of amalgamation. Among the issues raised were the cost to the community and the loss of identity that results. However, while this was the case there was some support for the view that there is an optimum size for a smaller school. Specifically four-teacher schools were thought to confer particular advantages in terms of organisation.

Thirdly, there was only modest support for the concept of hub schools. Two difficulties were mentioned. The first was that there would be time-tabling problems in ensuring that the activities of the schools feeding into the 'hub' could be managed. More significantly, many people were concerned that there could be negative effects on smaller schools, which could in turn lead to a problem with the morale of people working in those schools.

Fourthly, there were some quite positive reactions to the concept of clustering. Many pointed out that informal arrangements for clustering of schools are already in place. In addition, various participants could identify a number of pilot projects, some of which have enjoyed considerable success. Many of the participants were especially enthusiastic about the ways in which administrative release days might link with clustering. However, there was some wariness about clustering because of the desire to take into account the needs of individual schools. Personality issues were mentioned.

Finally, the idea of the federation of schools was not well received, although it was agreed that there were some positive features to the idea. A major problem was the relationship between the administrative principal in a federation and the existing 'principals' in the schools. The issue of the loss of independence of smaller schools was also mentioned together with differences in ethos and traditions. It was also thought that having one board of management in a federation would be unwieldy and ineffective.

INTO Discussion Paper on Smaller Schools

The INTO discussion paper '*The Future of Small Schools*' lists the benefits of clustering and coordination. They include the possibility of employing ancillary staff on a permanent basis, the possibility of appointing an administrative principal to a cluster of schools and the value of retaining individual schools in communities.

Some disadvantages are also mentioned including the possible loss of independence of smaller schools, the loss of promotional opportunities for teachers, and the danger of increasing the principals' workload. Obviously, a major issue in clustering is how the actual cluster is formed and precisely what clustering means in any given situation.

Consultation and Research in 2004

Since the publication of the initial report in February 2004, the committee of IPPN and St. Patrick's College have met on a number of occasions. During these meetings particular attention has been given to how the ideas presented above might be advanced. During these meetings we have met with teachers who have a particular interest in the

development of smaller schools and who have had experiences of developments that could provide guidelines for the future.

A number of considerations have been especially influential in this discussion. Firstly we have been influenced by the findings from the focus groups (findings discussed above) and also by workshops held during the IPPN 2004 conference, that some form of clustering is likely to be the most promising line of development. Not only was it the case that principals were already at least vaguely aware of this kind of arrangement but it has a flexibility that allows for development and allows variations across different groups of schools.

A second consideration that guided our discussion was that the available research does not indicate that any single model is especially superior but rather that a great deal depends on the expectations of the participants and the enthusiasm with which the model is embraced. Related to this is the finding that having a person prepared to ‘drive’ the project is a major consideration.

Thirdly we were influenced by pilot work in Northern Ireland by Sheelagh McGrogan (1996). This work has several implications, including the need to change school culture to a culture of mutual support, in which teachers would visit other schools to witness good practice and staff would develop the skills and attitudes necessary for successful cluster group participation. We note her finding that ice-breaking activities and team building is a necessary prerequisite to the formal work of clusters.

Report of Commission on School Accommodation

The Commission on School Accommodation (2002) has also addressed matters relating the development of smaller schools. The committee had a meeting with the permanent members of that commission including the executive chairperson. Interestingly, the commission set out as an important condition of proactive planning the need for the DES to use its role in the distribution of capital funding in a way that minimises duplication among adjacent schools. It suggests that an application for funding that adds capacity “should involve consideration of the impact on neighbouring schools” (p. 26).

The commission also makes specific recommendations for rural areas which are of particular relevance here. It suggests that where there is more than one school in a parish, consideration should be given to establishing one board of management for more than one school. “Pilot projects that experiment with appropriate models of management and/or clustering of smaller rural schools should be encouraged and supported” (C.3.1, p. 101).

There is also a specific recommendation with regard to clustering. It is suggested that cluster grouping of schools should be aligned by the DES so that each school belongs to only one cluster for the various shared activities like special needs and learning support teaching, psychological services, school development planning and professional development programmes. The commission also recommends that the cluster group should meet at least once a year to address matters like school planning, exchange of educational ideas, entry to second level and mutual support mechanisms (p. 101).

Meeting with Social Partners

An informal focus group discussion took place in October 2004. Represented were the Teaching Council, School Development Planning Initiative -Primary, Leadership Development for Schools, the National Parents Council (Primary), Department of Education and Science, Church of Ireland Boards of Management, Educate Together, the Irish Primary Principals’ Network and St. Patrick’s College. There were later meetings with representatives of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association (CPSMA) and Gaelscoileanna.

While it is not possible to summarise all of the ideas emerging during these discussions, it is interesting to note that there was consensus on a number of very important ideas. Perhaps the most relevant of these is the shared belief that this is an important issue and that there is a need to plan the future of smaller schools in a way that recognises the contribution they are making but also the problems and difficulties that such schools are experiencing.

A second point is that while there was agreement on the need for a pilot study, it was also agreed that such a study would need to take into account existing relationships and build

on these. There must not be a 'one size fits all' remedy since there is no 'best solution' but rather whatever teachers and communities believe will work is a major factor. In the foreseeable future, smaller schools will remain and there is a need to build links between them to overcome the isolation that has been talked about.

The need to address in advance the perceived obstacles to any clustering arrangement was also agreed. As well as the importance of independence which has been mentioned above, it was stressed that in many cases, schools are 'markers' of communities. In other words, where a school is in some way diminished there is a perceived loss to that community. Another important point was that careful consideration would need to be given to the composition of clusters. In some cases the 'obvious' schools for clustering may have a history of rivalry based on competition for numbers in a declining roll situation. In other cases (e.g. Church of Ireland schools) the cluster would involve schools that were geographically far apart.

Another point that was stressed was the need to approach the issue from a teaching and learning perspective. In other words, the criterion for success and for decisions on what kind of cluster to form and how it should work must be based on the greater likelihood of enhancing children's learning.

A number of lessons have been learned from the relatively few instances where formal clustering has happened. It would seem that clustering does not automatically lessen teachers' workload and the arrangements, if they are to operate successfully, need considerable energy and commitment as well as administrative back-up.

Another point had to do with the multiple bases on which clusters are formed at the moment. They are not made on any one basis but sometimes on the basis of size and in geographical terms. However, the point was made that clusters of large, medium and smaller schools could work. It was also suggested that clusters could operate on other bases including hospital schools, special schools, and schools under other/different patronage since geographical proximity may not always suit the requirements of the schools wishing to cluster.

Other points covered in the discussions included current proposals submitted by the INTO, the resources that will be needed for clustering and the need for regional supports. Under current arrangements, were ten schools to cluster, this would warrant about 180 days substitute cover which is roughly equivalent to a full-time teaching post. The INTO proposal is that this situation should be used to employ a trained substitute who would rotate between the ten schools in question. This INTO proposal has gained agreement in principle from the DES and there seems to be no reason why it should not get further support. Another point raised was that in any pilot project involving clustering, the schools should be offered the same incentives as would obtain in an amalgamation situation.

The view was expressed that any clustering proposal would need some local mechanism to maintain momentum. Regional education boards had been proposed at the National Convention (1994). However, these were not considered in the *White Paper on Education* (1995). Nonetheless, it is interesting that the DES is currently developing ten regional offices in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of how regional offices might have operated.

Gaeltacht Schools

Research shows that there were 143 primary schools in officially designated Gaeltacht areas in 2003/2004. 69% of these are 1-3 teacher schools, which is almost double the ratio that applies to the rest of Ireland. (Appendix 3). There are few if any schools in Gaeltacht areas with an administrative principal.

In common with these smaller schools throughout Ireland, Gaeltacht schools enjoy the social and other benefits as outlined in the Interim Report 2004. They are experiencing difficulty teaching the full curriculum in multi-class situations and are finding it difficult to fill teaching principal posts. Additional difficulties for Gaeltacht schools include teaching children whose first language is very often English and who have limited knowledge of Irish. The lack of suitable resources in Irish is another issue, as are the lack of services and supports available and the difficulty in accessing them especially through Irish.

The high number of 1-3 teacher schools and the declining pupil numbers in these schools mean that amalgamation is a very real consideration for many Gaeltacht schools.

The idea of forming clusters amongst some Gaeltacht schools in order to break the professional isolation, share resources, expertise and good practice, organise activities and events for the children, could be an attractive alternative for smaller Gaeltacht schools. Our discussions and research leads us to believe that a pilot project based in a Gaeltacht area deserves serious consideration.

Gaelscoileanna

There are 152 gaelscoileanna throughout Ireland, 123 of which are in the south. Most of the gaelscoileanna have administrative principals. Those that have teaching principals usually acquire the necessary pupil and/or staff numbers to appoint an administrative principal within ten years of being opened.

Many of the same difficulties and challenges that apply to Gaeltacht schools are also applicable to gaelscoileanna. There is a strong network of support services provided by the gaelscoileanna organisation. Gaelscoileanna generally co-operate and support each other in both formal and informal clusters. They often cluster for pupil based activities designed to promote and develop interest in Irish language and culture. Some schools are also involved in clusters for the provision of special education teachers and other available resources.

In common with many other smaller schools gaelscoileanna often have difficulties attracting applications for teaching principalship especially when this involves the additional challenge of starting a new school and building it up.

Recent Research in Ireland

More and more teachers have been drawn to further study in the past ten years, a period which has seen the proliferation of Masters in Education programmes and other post graduate studies offered by Irish universities. Frequently the research dimension of such study programmes focuses on an aspect or aspects of the daily work of the students

themselves. As such it is real world, action research. The research outlined here has been done by teaching principals trying ‘to get a handle on’, to better understand and therefore conquer the gargantuan task which is teaching principalship today. The individual research findings synthesised for this report mirror the learning outcomes of the focus groups research, in that current educational policy influences the research work. In most of the studies chosen for inclusion here, national educational policy is evaluated for its relevance to the situation of the smaller school with a teaching principal.

In 1994 Fergus Keegan undertook a study about amalgamation of Irish primary schools. Keegan’s work is interesting because he underlines the differing realities of different kinds of smaller schools. These are still very real today. His quote from the then current Report on the Education Convention, 1994, is prophetic. “Essentially, whatever may be the pattern of amalgamations for the future; there will always be some smaller schools in the country, given the distribution of population and the need to serve minority religious groups (p. 35).” His recommendations include the putting in place of “a framework which will bring schools together, facilitating the amalgamation of some and failing that, ensuring much more co-operation and sharing of resources.” Strategies recommended to achieve this could be in the form of a single principal teacher for a group of schools, or shared management and shared staff for a number of schools. Ten years later these proposals are ripe for fruition in some type of formal clustering arrangement appropriate to the school communities involved.

Three further studies all deal with people trying to make sense of their world of work at an individual level, that of the principal teacher. In 1999, Hanrahan undertook a comprehensive study of the teaching principal role in relation to policy and practice. Principals examined their workload against the ‘Responsibilities and Duties of Principal Teachers and Teachers in Charge of National Schools’, *DES Circular 16/73*, kept work diaries for one week, undertook in-depth interviews and participated in a focus group to corroborate the results of the research. She found among the twelve principals whose work she researched a feeling of their “own culpability” because of the consistent way in which they were forced by circumstances to undertake tasks (e.g. money related tasks) at the expense of those which they considered of much greater importance (i.e. teaching). This resonates with the feelings of ‘guilt’ about interrupted class time expressed by teaching principals at focus group discussions (IPPN, 2004). Her recommendations for

dedicated release time for principals, secretarial and caretaker support staff have been implemented to some degree in 2004 and yet the task of teaching principal is more challenging than ever.

Corcoran (2000) looked at principals in convent primary schools. She conducted nine semi-structured interviews with principals past and present, six women (three of them nuns) and three men. One administrative woman principal had chosen to return to the classroom. In the same way as it has been said that it takes a village to rear a child so, she found, it takes a community to run a school. While there are huge commonalities in the principalship role across school types, “the community aspect of school leadership, as practised by the nuns” contrasted with the school leadership experiences of lay principals. She found that “the community aspect mediated for the nuns the worst trappings of, or at least the lonelier, and more alienating aspects for females, of what were essentially male models of leadership” Perhaps some model of formal school clustering will offer the same benefits of community to teaching principals who feel lonely and overworked in their school leadership role.

The finding that religious principals often moved in and out of principalship after a fixed time of five/eight years raised an issue which was addressed in ‘*Why are Some Principals Handing Back the Keys?*’ (Ryan, 2003). His work was with both administrative and teaching principals and his findings and proposed solutions resonate with the theme of this report. Together with job-sharing, extra release days, a panel of trained substitutes and the principal allowed to take the learning support/resource class, he suggests an administrator/manager/principal to manage a cluster of smaller schools.

Two important intra-school studies were undertaken, each of which highlights the human relations model of leadership, requiring high emotional intelligence which is needed for schools. Firstly, a study was undertaken in Co Longford, (Brady, 1999). Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, chairpersons of boards of management and parents in eighteen schools in Co Longford. Only one person per school was interviewed. Brady found that collaboration and collegiality exists among staff members in the majority of schools but levels vary from school to school. She reiterated the pivotal role of the principal in developing collaboration and collegiality, the relative absence of real input into rural schools by boards of management and the finding that a partnership role with

parents has not yet been developed to full potential in any school. This study is especially interesting in that it articulates the real demands which words like ‘collaboration’ and ‘collegiality’ actually make on the people concerned, especially the teaching principal. These words are often used but hard to practise.

A second study of intra-school collaboration centres on implementation of the School Development Planning Initiative, Primary in certain schools in the north -east of Ireland (Rocks, 2003). This was a mixed methods study, where forty four schools were surveyed by questionnaire. Respondents included teaching principals, class teachers, a primary schools inspector and a school development planning facilitator. Two principals and two class teachers were subsequently interviewed. Indications from this study are that there are “many inhibitors” to the process of SDP. Development opportunities are relatively scarce in smaller schools and Rocks found an over representation of organisational as against curricular policies.

These six studies seem in different ways to indicate that because of time constraints and the pressure of a near full teaching load, the principals and staff of smaller schools rely on a more hierarchical organisational structure. They are driven by expedience to develop organisational policies over collaboration about how to enhance teaching and learning in their schools. This situation is replicated again and again in smaller schools operating in an insular fashion while existing in close proximity to others dealing with quite similar problems. Only one study actually pointed to another way of doing things.

An evaluation of an exciting inter-schools initiative was written by Flood (2002). *The Knocknagrave-Edenmore-Glaslough Partnership Consortium, 1998-2001*, where three schools collaborated to apply for funding from the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, may be of help in devising the shape of inter-schools projects to come.

Representation on the consortium involved principals from three schools, a teacher representative from each school and a parent and board of management representative from each school. The learning outcomes from this flagship enterprise included a number of children in each school benefiting from intensive literacy support, children experiencing social and educational opportunities beyond school and locality and career evenings organised by parents offering alternative career paths for children of all abilities. In all, the consortium was educationally worthwhile for the children in participating schools.

Conclusions

This discussion of the current status of the debate on smaller schools shows that there has been a considerable level of consultation on the issues of how smaller schools can experience the advantages of bigger schools while retaining the sense of local community that is central to the importance of such schools. It is also clear that we in Ireland already have a considerable amount of experience of different kinds of clusters and a basis on which future planning can be built.

Many of the issues considered here are developed in later chapters in this report, including the international research on clustering, the problems experienced by teaching principals and examples of collaboration between smaller schools. The final section in this report brings together our thinking on future developments.

Chapter 2. Towards an Improvement in the Conditions of Teaching Principals in the 21st Century

Changing Perceptions on the Status of Teaching Principals in Ireland

The position of a teacher acting as a school principal is long established. While some may remember when even large schools had teaching principals, such a position is now the preserve of 73% of principals who fulfil this dual role in schools with less than 180 pupils (Appendix 5). The position of teaching principal was described by Clancy (1986) as essentially a teaching one with ‘minor bureaucratic and administrative responsibilities’. The position was highly regarded by primary teachers. Traditionally a vacant position attracted many applications and generated considerable debate locally as to who might be the successful candidate.

Teachers’ perception of the teaching principalship has changed considerably. Since the publication of the *White Paper on Education* in 1995 coupled with increases in public expenditure on education, there has been a deluge of change and reform. While these impact on everyone in the primary school, the burden on the teaching principal with near full teaching duties is immense. The 1999 *Report on the Primary School Principal* stated:

“Primary principals, particularly teaching principals, because of increases in management and administrative functions, cannot devote sufficient concentrated effort to leadership functions which have increased in importance due to the rapidity of change, changing mores and demands for curriculum innovation” (p.85-86)

As early as 1995, the INTO reported on the diminishing number of applicants for teaching principalships leading in some instances to positions not being filled (*Tuarascáil*, 1995). Research undertaken by IPPN reveals that in the year 1996, the average number of applicants for the post of principal was 5.4. This had fallen to 2.9 in 2004. While statistical information does not exist, anecdotal evidence indicates that the trend of principals ‘handing back the keys’ is firmly established. INTO research among teachers claims that a significant minority are not interested in applying for principalships, (INTO 1999).

There is an onus on organisations representing teaching principals and smaller schools generally to address these worrying trends. One approach in the attempt to offer solutions to the problem is to analyse the concept of motivation as it may apply to the reluctance of teachers to apply for teaching principalships and indeed to the tendency of principals to resign their positions. Handy's (1993) five 'motivational assumptions' are considered (cited in *Educational Leadership and Learning*, 2000 p.57-58). These are presented below with comment on how they may be relevant in the current context. Recommendations are offered for positive action, which may improve the conditions for principals.

Exploration of Handy's Motivation Assumptions

1. Rational-Economic Remuneration Assumption ('the allowance does not make it worthwhile')

This assumption implies that reward or economic benefit is considered by people as a key factor in influencing them to take up a particular position. It may be suggested that pay for teaching principals is poor. In 1996, allowances paid to deputy-principals were increased. Many smaller schools were allowed appoint a special duties teacher for the first time. Bearing in mind the additional workload associated with the teaching principal, it is not financially attractive for such personnel to apply for principalships. Allowances paid to senior post-holders such as the 'assistant principal' in larger schools are higher than those paid to teaching principals, and indeed to some administrative principals, effectively meaning that it is not economically worthwhile for such teachers to leave large schools to apply for teaching principalships. (Appendix 4)

The *Report on the Primary School Principal* (1999) did not examine the issue of pay. INTO (1999) research found that the allowance paid to teaching principals is viewed by teachers as being inadequate. In 2001, the government initiated the benchmarking process to examine pay scales throughout the public sector. The main points of the INTO (2001) submission were:

- a general increase of 20% in the allowances paid to principals to reposition the scale from 20,000 to 40,000 punts (25,394 to 50,789 euro)

- payment for principals and deputy-principals at primary level according to second-level counterparts
- removal of the first three points of the post-primary payment structure
- the creation of a new "challenging post" allowance
- a 20% increase in all promoted posts
- adjustment to the 10 year maximum of scale allowance to 10% of the maximum point
- application of a special 'challenging post' allowance based on 5% of the maximum of the common basic scale to posts formally identified as such.
- application of the post-primary part-time teacher's hourly rates to participation in board of management, approved extra-curricular activities and professional development in-service courses outside of standard working hours.

None of these objectives was achieved. Ryan (2003) reported that principals were surprised that the initial benchmarking awards did not confer on principals, increases above those offered to teachers.

<i>Recommendation</i>

<p><i>Pay / remuneration of teaching principals needs to be addressed urgently within the benchmarking process to reflect the responsibilities commensurate with the role. This may involve addressing the anomalies between primary and secondary principals' pay scales but also the anomalies between various positions within the primary sector which carry allowances. Consideration should also be given to payment of principal's salary and allowance on the basis of the number of permanent teaching and ancillary staff in the school.</i></p>
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2. Social Assumptions ('it's a lonely job')

Psychologists offer the view that people are social beings, gaining their basic identity and meaning through social rather than work relationships. If this is applicable to the teaching context, then rearing a family, reducing one's golf handicap or managing a small-scale enterprise may well be more 'socially' attractive. 'Family commitments' were cited as the second most common reason cited by female teachers for not applying for principalships in the INTO (1999) research. While women account for approximately 80% of the teaching workforce at primary level, they make up less than 50% of the number of principals. Accepting that the role of principal teacher is different, remaining in the position of teacher may be more satisfying from a social point of view rather than pursuing the often isolated position of principalship.

Recommendation

There needs to be increased funding for principals' support groups, inter-school exchanges, clustering of schools which focus on both social and professional development of teaching principals, especially of those in rurally isolated smaller schools.

3. Self-Actualizing Belief ('the novelty of being principal wears off after a while ... it doesn't get you anywhere')

Motivation may stem from a person's ambition to achieve something worthwhile (intrinsic motivation) or it may stem from a belief that one achievement may be beneficial in achieving a more highly sought personal or professional objective (extrinsic motivation).

a) Intrinsic Motivation: This may be a very significant explanation as to why teachers apply for teaching principalships. An examination of a number of 'successful' principals by Dunford (*Times Educational Supplement*, 2000) found that many such principals were imbued with the ideals of 'I can make a difference to this school' or 'I can make this place better'. However considering that principals are obliged and often mandated to perform in certain ways in the light of legislative change, principals may

not have the same level of flexibility to effect improvement as they may have had in former years. Some research indicates that principals are most effective in years 4 to 7. Consequently it is doubtful whether the idea of ‘making a difference’ or initial intrinsic motivation can sustain a lifetime as a teaching principal.

<i>Recommendations</i>
<p><i>1. Further progress needs to be made in implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Primary School Principal (1999) which advocated that ‘an easily accessible and structured programme of in- career development be put in place and made available to all principals, on an on-going basis’.</i></p> <p><i>2. A professional development programme which aims to encourage teachers to apply for principalship should be put in place.</i></p> <p><i>3. Progress needs to be made on the implementation of recommendations of the 1995 White Paper (p.153), which proposed that principals would have the option of standing down from the position after a seven year period.</i></p> <p><i>4. Consideration should also be given to the recommendation in the 1992 Green Paper (p. 19) that principals would be appointed on fixed term contracts(such as 7 years) rather than permanently, to encourage mobility and career development.</i></p>

b) Extrinsic Motivation: Essentially this refers to the extent to which an individual is motivated to assume a particular position as a ‘stepping stone’ to career advancement. It is debatable whether taking on a teaching principalship is perceived by many teachers as necessarily improving a teacher's chances of being promoted to an administrative principalship, to the inspectorate, to a college of education lectureship or a position in support agencies. Appointment procedures for administrative principalships do not require candidates to have experience of being a principal of a smaller school.

The difficulty of filling teaching principalships, which are in the main located in rural areas, may be exacerbated by better career opportunities for teachers in larger schools. This in turn may reduce significantly the pool of possible applicants for teaching

principalships. It may be worthwhile to mention Leithwood's (1992) analysis of a teacher career cycle. There are five stages in this typology. Initially there is the 'career launch' of a teacher fuelled by the 'enthusiasm' of the newly qualified. Then there is the 'stabilization' stage, driven by a teacher feeling at ease with his or her responsibilities. The third stage is termed 'diversification' where the teacher is encouraged by new challenges and concerns. This is followed by teachers reaching a 'professional plateau' before 'retirement preparation'.

It is the third stage 'diversification' that is of relevance here. In a large school, teachers may have a wider range of options to specialise. These may include learning support, special needs, home-school-community liaison, RTT or curriculum specialist teachers in areas such as IT, music or physical education. The teacher assumes a position, which recognises past experience but essentially requires a narrower yet more specialised work focus. In contrast, a teaching principalship does not sit comfortably in Leithwood's 'diversification' stage. Rather than representing a different and narrowing role, a teaching principal's role is extremely diffuse in nature. It involves a pedagogical function (front line responsibility for a class of pupils, often a multi-grade class) in addition to considerable managerial/leadership functions at school level, not to mention in many instances, the expectation of parish or community involvement.

Recommendations

- 1. There needs to be an examination of career structure at present for teachers and principals. Principals should be eligible to take up positions as resource/learning support teachers where such positions are based in their schools.*
- 2. Changes need to be introduced in the appointment procedures for administrative principalships. Procedures should require applicants to have managed smaller schools*
- 3. Changes need to be introduced in the appointment procedures for deputy principalships and assistant principalships of all schools. Appointment should be based on open competition, i.e., not confined to staff members of a particular school.*

4. Complex Assumptions ('the job isn't what it used to be')

This assumption refers to the varying and at times numerous motives of people to do something. The degree of motivation often depends on personal assessment of how far situations satisfy needs at a given moment. Status is often mentioned here. The status surrounding the position of teaching principal was considerable in the past particularly in rural areas. The erosion of the standing of public service employment by the media, the economics of better paid employment and the lack of dignity associated with the position may be some of the factors which account for this decline.

5. Psychological Assessment ('the job is too difficult')

This refers to a perception of a particular job: 'is it an attractive position?' Teaching principalships suffer greatly in this regard. This may be due to ever increasing legal obligations, higher expectations of pedagogical leadership, the management of macro-politics of parents, teachers, board members in schools, in addition to full-time teaching duties.

The *HayGroup Report* (2003) concluded that:

"there is a strong perception throughout the ranks of principals generally that the role has become extremely difficult if not impossible to deliver on effectively. This perception appears to derive from a lack of clarity around the role and lack of time and resources" (p.35).

The perception that the job is too difficult may also indirectly point to a perception of a lack of support for the principal. This may be surprising when the Department of Education and Science and its agencies have invested considerable resources in recent times. The Department's in-career development unit has funded courses, lectures and conferences organised by the INTO, the IPPN and various education centres. A specific professional development programme, Leadership Development for Schools (LDS), has been established. School Development Planning Service established in 1999 affords principals specific training in school planning strategies. Schools have been afforded staff days to undertake school planning and curriculum development. This is a new departure for many smaller schools. A number of release days from the classroom / teaching duties have been provided to teaching principals depending on school size since 1999/2000.

Each school gets a grant towards the cost of secretarial and caretaker assistance. However research by the INTO (2003) and by the IPPN (2005) indicates that such supports are not considered to be adequate.

Research on Irish principals' perception of support from boards of management is scarce. The *HayGroup Report* (2003, p.35) stated that "the working relationships between individual principals and boards tend to be extremely varied, dependent on local circumstances and individual capabilities". Wilson and McPake (2000) research on Scottish principals found that management boards were poorly rated in terms of support offered. Basing his study on primary principals who had recently resigned, Ryan (2003) found that there was the belief that board of management responsibilities were invariably left to the principal, thereby increasing principals' workload. Many respondents called for changes to the operation of boards of management.

Recommendations

1. *Professional development to be made available at local level to ensure that all boards of management members make a meaningful contribution to the operation of schools locally.*
2. *Responsibility for the maintenance and up-keep of school buildings should be transferred to maintenance boards organised at regional level.*
3. *The appointment of qualified full-time secretaries on a clustered basis. Such secretaries should be trained and remunerated at a level similar to clerical assistants employed in public health boards*
4. *Greater funding for existing support services such as School Development Planning, Primary Curriculum Support, Leadership Development for Schools programme and in-career development generally. Schools should be allocated a specific grant which would allow them to organise school-based in-service as opposed to availing of school focussed in-service.*
5. *The number of release days for teaching principals needs to be extended. There needs to be an examination as to how these days should be organised more effectively with a view to the appointment of relief teachers to serve 4 to 5 principals in a particular area on a weekly rota basis.*
6. *Consideration needs to be given to the appointment of specialist teachers in such areas as IT, drama, music or physical education on a permanent clustered school basis to relieve teaching principals on a weekly basis, as is the case in Finland and some educational districts in England and Wales.*
7. *Easily accessible professional development programmes should be made available in order that in-school management teams can reduce workload for principals.*

Chapter 3. The Clustering of Smaller Schools - What can we learn from the International Context?

Introduction

When researching the problems associated with the smaller school and the teaching principal, one of the most striking things to note is that we in Ireland are not alone in our concern. This chapter will examine one popularly quoted prescription to the problem, the clustering of smaller schools for support and development. To this end, the chapter will examine research undertaken on the clustering of smaller schools in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Queensland, Australia. It will also refer to research reports submitted by members of the IPPN sub-committee who visited smaller schools within various clustering arrangements in Sweden, France and Catalonia, Spain during January, 2004.

The Origins of Clustering

Making Smaller Schools Better

At one stage there was the prevalent belief that smaller schools could not provide an effective education which resulted in the closure and amalgamations of smaller schools especially in areas of declining enrolments (rural areas and inner city communities). In the 1980s and 1990s, this notion was re-evaluated. (Hargreaves *et al*, 1996, regarding the UK; Veenman, 1996 regarding the Netherlands; Education Review Office, 1999, regarding New Zealand). Research has shown that when smaller schools came together to organise or ‘cluster’, they could invariably improve the quality of education provided to school communities.

Facilitating Professional and Personal Development Opportunities

At the heart of most clustering arrangements is the provision of better professional development opportunities for teachers in smaller schools. Clustering arrangements have facilitated teachers working collaboratively and sharing best practice. In the process this has improved the quality of curriculum provided in smaller schools, many of which are located in geographically isolated and economically deprived areas.

For example, the clustering of smaller schools in Catalonia, Spain, first began when teachers met to plan school activities and to take initiatives to end their sense of professional isolation (IPPN, 2004, p.18). A system of clustering promoted by local authorities in France in the late 1990s had similar intentions but went further in aiming to keep rural communities alive and to prevent depopulation in isolated regions. (IPPN, 2004, p.13). Vulliamy and Webb (1995) claimed that teachers in smaller schools in England found that clusters were of major support in the formulation of curriculum statements and in coming to terms to with recent curricular reform.

While some clustering arrangements facilitate informal professional in-service, other clustering arrangements have been used as a conduit for formal ‘school focused’ in-service, e.g. Ireland, United Kingdom. Indeed, the work of cluster co-ordinators appointed by many “rurally located” educational authorities in England and Wales was not confined specifically to working with teachers or principals but often included the organisation of activities for pupils so as to maximise peer contact.

Maximising Educational Resources

Achieving optimum efficiency of resources expended in education has also motivated education authorities to promote schools clustering. A number of examples may be cited. Norwich *et al* (1994) found that resources expended on special needs could be better utilised when cluster arrangements were in place. Various municipalities in Sweden introduced the clustering of schools, which may include pre-schools and special education units, with the deployment of an administrative principal. This is often referred to as the ‘federation’ model (IPPN, 2004, p.18). In Queensland, Australia, smaller

schools were clustered to utilise the equipment and building resources of the local secondary school. This model has been described as the ‘hub’ model.

Education authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland have used clustering in an effort to ensure a smoother transition of pupils from primary schools to secondary schools. Rural schools (‘feeder’ schools) have been clustered with the local secondary school. In these instances, clusters developed to embrace a wider remit, involving the enrichment of the curriculum at both levels (refer Wilson and McPake, (1998) regarding Scotland; McGrogan, (1996) regarding Northern Ireland).

Supporting ‘Self-Managing’ Schools

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the widespread adoption of the ‘self-managing’ school model in many countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It has been a feature in Ireland for many years in the absence of regional educational authorities. These changes were considered to have created problems for smaller schools and particularly for teaching principals. Various approaches have been adopted.

One approach has been for the amalgamation of the boards of management of two or three smaller schools under one single management board (White and Collins, 2003, regarding the development of 'cluster boards' in New Zealand; Report of Study Visit, 1998 regarding the UK). The Queensland Educational Authority encouraged the clustering of smaller schools and teaching principals in an effort to reduce the ‘administrative and bureaucratic demands on principals’ while also ‘improving service delivery’ (*Queensland Government Report*, 2001, p.2). Similarly, a clustering project in Namibia sought to ‘facilitate administration and to pool resources from several smaller schools’ (Ditmar *et al*, 2002, p.1).

The Dynamics of Clustering

The main points raised above indicate that the origins of clustering arrangements have varied depending on the needs of the education sector in a particular country or area. Most emanate from concern for the provision of services at school level, for smoother

transition between school sectors, while some have focused on supporting particular school personnel, such as pupils, teachers, principals or governors. Another important point is that some clustering arrangements have been imposed from 'on high' such as clustering arrangements created by some educational authorities in England and Wales. It is the municipality or regional government which determines the schools which cluster in the Swedish federation model. Other clustering arrangements have developed when school personnel came together at local or 'grass roots' level, generally with the assistance of some incentive provided by the local educational authority or central government (IPPN, 2004; *Queensland Government Report*, 2001). Reporting on Wales, Potter and Williams (1994, p. 151) found that cluster groups 'develop their own identities and these relate to structures, processes and persons.' Obviously, the rationale for setting up a particular cluster grouping has a strong effect on its later development and function.

The Effects of Clustering on Teaching Principals

When one considers clustering and the teaching principal some common themes emerge:

Support for Planning

There are numerous examples where particular models of clustering have been beneficial to the teaching principal. In particular, a common theme that emerges is that clustering assists principals with curriculum planning and policy development. For example, a principal involved in a clustering project in Northern Ireland in 1994 remarked:

"We found it very helpful to share responsibilities for drawing up a scheme of work in English. We all worked together on the scheme and, at the end, James in one of the cluster schools took responsibility for pulling the Key Stage 2 scheme together."
(McGrogan, 1996, p.44).

Similarly, in a Welsh study undertaken in 1998, Wilson and Mc Pake found that 61% of head teachers used clustering to operate joint schemes and joint policies. Along with facilitating planning, some studies have shown that clustering can also have a positive impact on the teaching principal.

Reduced Isolation

A frequently cited benefit of clustering relates to the removal of feelings of isolation among teaching principals. This benefit appears to span many time zones. A study visit to France noted that all principals "were in no doubt that collaborating with each other was very beneficial to them as principals" (IPPN, 2004, p.16). An even stronger statistic emerges in relation to teaching principal's experiences of collaboration in Scotland. Wilson and McPake, 1998, found that 91% of head teachers used clusters to develop informal links among their schools.

Increase in Workload

Firstly it is important to note that in some countries, the implementation of the clustering model has not reduced the principal's workload. For example in France and Queensland, Australia, principals noted that the clustering model resulted in extra work. This extra workload related to organisational and planning responsibilities which clustering demanded. For example in a pilot project on 'hub clustering' aimed at reducing the administrative burden on teaching principals' in Queensland, one teaching principal commented:

"making the project work consumed an inordinate amount of time, which has been hard to justify given the project's outcome of reducing the teaching principal's workload" (Queensland Govt Report, 2001, p.17).

Similarly, in France, a study visit undertaken in 2004 noted that the clustering model in place was not intended "to reduce the workload of the teaching principal. In fact it increases it" (IPPN, 2004, p.16). It is very important to bear in mind that the role of the teaching principal can vary from country to country. Obviously, this will then have a very significant effect on how they perceive the success of the cluster.

Different Practices

Perhaps the most interesting feature of clustering on the international stage is that although many countries share common clustering characteristics, there are also many countries, which have different clustering arrangements. These differences are often very

noticeable at the level of the principal. For example, projects in Northern Ireland, Wales and Queensland examined clustering with an 'in -situ' principal - the principal continued teaching and retained many of his / her leadership responsibilities. For these principals, involving themselves in the clustering project also provided them with extra support as principals, but did not release them from their teaching duties, or grossly change the mantle of responsibility they bore before engaging in clustering.

However, if we look at clustering in Sweden or Spain, a different model of the principal emerges. In Sweden, a particular cluster of smaller schools has a 'helicopter principal'. The principal does not engage in teaching, but rather oversees the schools in his/her area - visiting and responding to the particular needs of each school as appropriate. Each school has a devolved management structure which operates on a team basis. Catalonia, Spain also has a somewhat similar system. In a particular region a 'principal of principals' is elected and co-ordinates the running of the cluster with the support of two other teachers while still retaining some teaching duties.

Aside from differences in the nature of the role of the teaching principal, some countries differed in the 'extras' or 'sweeteners' they offered schools who were considering becoming involved in clustering. In France, involvement in clustering also meant that "schools get some extra financial help" (IPPN, 2004, p.14). In Queensland, this extra help fell into the category of increased service provision. In Catalonia, teachers who take on co-ordination roles were awarded credits which improved their employment mobility. Thus we can see that there are a wide number of variations on how a cluster can form and also how a cluster can function. The next question to ask is whether these cluster groupings are of benefit to the school as a whole.

The Effects of Clustering at School Level

When one considers clustering and the smaller school a number of themes emerge:

Educationally Beneficial

Almost without exception, teachers and principals are quick to point out that clustering "improves best practice" (*Queensland, Govt Report, 2001, p. 54*) and it leads to pupils being "offered a more interesting and challenging curriculum". The most frequently cited reasons for this improvement in service provision, are the increased teacher collaboration and professional engagement which clustering brings.

In particular, because smaller schools "lack the breadth and range of expertise which is available in most large schools, they must pool resources" (McGrogan, 1996, p.57). It is this pooling of resources and sharing of expertise and methodologies which is seen by many teachers to have an obvious positive impact on the learning outcomes of children. Indeed, in one model of clustering, in Queensland, it was found that as a result of 'co-operative clustering', "there has been a general improvement in student outcomes in most Key Learning Areas" (*Queensland Govt Report, 2001, p. 27*).

Furthermore, not only has clustering been lauded for its ability to facilitate the sharing of best practice among teachers, it has on some occasions been praised for its ability to increase teacher confidence. In both Queensland and Northern Ireland, teacher confidence in their own talents and strengths grew as a result of the discussions they had with teaching colleagues. This was particularly the case when teachers of the same grade level met to discuss curriculum delivery and protocol. This confidence also extended to the school staff as a team. In Catalonia, it was found that ZERs (clusters of smaller schools) "have advanced more pedagogically than large schools because of sharing, teamwork and smaller classes" (IPPN, 2004, p.19).

Development of Teamwork

In the large majority of countries where clustering was either piloted as a project or indeed implemented as policy, the development of teamwork among school staff was noted by teaching principals. For example in Queensland, a study undertaken by the Department of Education which compared different models of clustering, found that

across all styles of clustering, its collaborative nature "opened up possibilities for greater collegiality and a smarter and more efficient way of working together" (*Queensland Govt Report*, 2001, p.15).

Similarly, a study visit to Sweden in 2004, noted that "issues of professional development, team building, curriculum and co-ordination of school services are afforded greater priority than in the Irish context" (IPPN, 2004, p.21). In Catalonia it was found that operating ZERs "involves a lot of extra meetings but teachers and principals were in general agreement that the effort was very worthwhile for pupils and staff."

Summary

Although the reasons why countries embark on a clustering project or a policy may differ, and although the nature of these clusters can also differ, the results of clustering share many common benefits. In particular, the increased feelings of collegiality, the greater teacher confidence and the examination of new and old teaching methodologies all serve to strongly highlight its potential for the teacher in the smaller school. Similarly, but with less of a degree of enthusiasm, teaching principals cite the collegial and professional support which clustering brings, as being very helpful to their role. However, it has been pointed out in some studies that clustering does not inevitably reduce the workload of the teaching principal.

Chapter 4. Clustering in Action in the Irish Context

Smaller schools have been subject to considerable educational research and an amount of educational policy discourse. The particular difficulties faced by smaller schools and teaching principals have been discussed elsewhere in this report. Many such schools themselves have engaged in varied and innovative activities and practices to provide their pupils with a rich and effective education. A feature of many of these activities has been collaboration of similar schools with shared identities.

In spite of all the research and policy it appears to have gone almost unnoticed in Irish education that a considerable skill and knowledge base has been developed in smaller schools through active participation in the process of engaging with others in collaborative activities that have at their core a focus on the individual pupils. Following the publication of the interim report one of the initial responses seemed to indicate the misperception that clustering was a new concept to Irish education. On the contrary there are many forms of clustering currently in operation such as learning support clusters; resource teacher clusters, breaking the cycle clusters, Comenius projects, North-South projects, SIP projects and many more.

Models of clustering were outlined in the interim report (IPPN 2004). Figure 1; The Continuum of Collaboration, serves to illustrate the practical examples of clustering activities which have been successfully undertaken in an Irish context.

The exemplars that follow are included to illustrate the range and richness of collaboration, which is happening in smaller schools across the country. There is a wealth of expertise, skill and knowledge in the successful organisation of collaborative activity that should be respected and encouraged and supported on a more formal basis.

Continuum of Collaboration

Clustering of Smaller Schools					
	Level 1: Association	Level 2: Co-operation	Level 3: Partnership	Level 4: Confederation	Level 5: Federation
<i>Format</i>	Functional Contact	Focused or Themed Contact	Strategic Collaboration	'Corporate Identity with Autonomy'	Merger of Schools
<i>Description</i>	Informal exchanges/discussions between principals and teachers to discuss issues of common concern.	Principals and teachers meeting and collaborating on management issues, joint policy documents and schemes of work.	Undertaking activities such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of teachers with specific expertise • Shared delegation • Shared resources • Opportunities for pupils to work on joint activities/projects. 	Formal structure with a joint committee formed from the boards of management with responsibility for cluster co-ordination and making recommendations to encourage co-operation. The schools maintain their individual status. Recommendations may include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommending joint staffing • Agreeing job descriptions for new staff in partner schools • Interviewing and appointing staff to be used jointly • Recommending a portion of budget to be shared by the cluster schools 	A federation school occurs when a new school is created with a single board of management with one principal from a number of existing schools. These schools continue to function catering for their respective catchment areas in their existing premises. A number of schools are organised as one school and decisions are taken for the federation rather than the individual schools within it.
<i>Characteristics</i>					
<i>Existing examples</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDPS clusters • Joint Curriculum Planning Days • Cluster policy for Learning Support • Principals release day clusters • Clustering for religious/sports occasions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared ancillary staff • 'SIP' type projects • Socrates/Comenius projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Completion Programme • Giving Children an Even Break (where 'co-coordinator' has been appointed). 	

* Adapted from COOPERS and LYBRAND (1996) *Safety in Numbers: Small Schools and Collaborative Arrangements*. London: Coopers & Lybrand and from GALTON, M. (1993) *Managing Education in Small Primary Schools*. ASPE Paper No 4, Stoke-on-Trent: ASPE Trentham Books Ltd.

Exemplar 1: Clustering for ICT Projects

The Schools Integration Project (SIP) was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science as part of the Schools 2000 IT initiative. Many of the projects undertaken for the initiative comprised of school clusters engaging in special projects involving ICT. Project reports attribute the success of the projects to the initiative of the participant teachers and the support and facilitation offered through the National Centre for Technology in Education.

Comments in the project reports note the opportunity provided to schools to collaborate in a meaningful and educationally valuable way. One notable positive impact of some of the projects has been the increased inter-schools co-operation and the development of meaningful inter-school activities to support teaching and learning.

Two projects in particular showcase the potential of clustering among smaller primary schools:

- ‘Startech – Learning Together’ project involved a cluster of schools in West Cork which explored the possibilities offered by video-conferencing for the work of remote primary schools.
- ‘The Field Fences of Sligo’ project involved eight smaller rural schools in Co. Sligo and a second level school in Sligo town. This project was followed up by a subsequent project involving 12 Co Sligo primary schools engaged in studying Sligo’s coastline.

Further information:

‘Sharing Innovative Practice: The NCTE’s School Integration Project (2002)’, NCTE.

<http://homepage.eircom.net/~sip43/index.htm?itn.htm~main>

<http://www.sligoseashore.com/html/index.htm>

Exemplar 2: Giving Children an Even Break

Giving Children an Even Break by Tackling Disadvantage is a scheme introduced by the Department of Education and Science in 2001 to tackle educational disadvantage in Irish primary schools. In rural areas, schools with the highest concentrations of pupils at risk of educational failure were allocated a teacher/coordinator. Qualifying schools were organised into clusters of four or five schools and the role of the co-ordinator was to work with teachers, pupils and parents.

The following is a description of how one cluster of rural schools utilised the co-ordinator post provided under the scheme.

Initial Set-Up Phase or Review

- Meeting with all principals to outline the purpose of the position.
- Individual meetings between the co-ordinator, the principal of the base school and all staff in the cluster to determine the needs of the schools as perceived by the teachers.

Questions posed to the staff:

“What do the children in this school not get that the children in a large school would?” Or
“What curricular activities or extra curricular activities would you provide for these children if you could?”

Other communication exercises were:

- attendance by the teacher co-ordinator at one board of management meeting in each school in the cluster to explain the initiative
- a standard letter to the parents in all the schools outlining the purpose of the position
- timetable devised on pro rata basis for each school
- half day a week flexible, for planning or receiving visitors, parents etc.

Schools' Needs

One of the overall shared needs of the schools was the issue of capacity i.e. the smaller schools in the cluster had too few children to maximise their children's potentials in sports, arts, especially music, social skills and esteem building, ICT and extra curricular events such as chess, quizzes etc.

Some Activities Undertaken

- Email set up between all schools in the cluster, for children to have email pen friends
- Email link established between schools and inner city schools in UK (urban-rural connection)
- Sport: mini leagues in basketball, football and other sports involving inter-schools teams
- Shared newsletter - production of this involved certain specific pupils
- Communal Confirmation programme including profiles of all candidates-again involvement with some specific pupils and use of digital camera
- Communal concert and céilí also generated some funds for schools
- Learning support in maths with pupils in two schools
- Implementation of programme (devised by local social services 'Clarecare') to facilitate transfer of sixth class pupils to local secondary schools
- Annual staff day for all staff in the cluster
- Team meeting held with local key people, gardaí, social worker, GP, community worker, public health nurse etc. with a view to developing supports for parents/guardians
- Parenting course to follow

Other Opportunities

- Organising visitors and educational trips that are more viable within the cluster
- Availing of the INTO Heritage Scheme as a cluster
- Each school doing resource audit and more use made of cluster wide resources e.g. one school has community hall which all schools use; one school has computer room which all schools access
- Compile a list of local human resources that could be of use to the schools.
- Local links e.g. with Disadvantage Unit of Mary Immaculate.

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Exemplar 3: Shared Secretarial Service

In Circular 01/03 (Ancillary Services Grant) the DES suggested the possibility of neighbouring smaller schools clustering to employ a person or persons who could undertake secretarial, caretaking or other ancillary work on behalf of all schools in the cluster.

Schools have implemented this proposal in a variety of ways.

- In some clusters one board of management has acted as employer and has billed the cluster schools for the shared services of the employee.
- Education Centres have acted as employer for the provision of caretaking and/or secretarial services to clusters of schools.
- Each school in the cluster has acted as employer to employ personnel under the Ancillary Services Grant for a fixed number of days/hours per week allowing the employee to work a full week albeit in different schools.

Exemplar 4: North-South Projects

There are numerous possibilities for developing collaborative partnerships between schools north and south of the border. One successful project based on a cluster of six smaller rural schools is described here.

Aughnacloy Truagh European Studies Schools Project (ATESSP)

A cluster of six schools was formed involving the three schools in Aughnacloy and the three in Truagh so as to involve both communities as completely as possible. The cluster principle was highlighted in that it guaranteed each school its own ethos and identity but they would agree to cooperate in certain defined areas. The proposal to cluster also identified the use of ICT and particularly video conferencing to facilitate the ongoing joint exchanges above on a more regular basis through technology. Included also was a proposal to make the ICT equipment available to parents and the wider community so as to introduce the ‘information society’ to an area where there were no computers in the schools and little knowledge of technology.

The need was clearly seen to extend the range of learning opportunities that were being developed with Dungannon College and Monaghan V.E.C. It was very clear that opportunities for learning had to be very local to encourage people to avail of the service and to provide accreditation for courses. The need for personnel to develop a joint curriculum and secondly the community aspect of the project was clearly seen and part time project officers were also applied for. While this application was being developed and processed by the EU SSPPR over a year, ongoing contacts were being developed between the principals and staff of the six schools, the boards of governors, boards of management and parents committees and the two development associations. Further information on the project is available on the project website at <http://www.atessp.ie/ict.html>.

Exemplar 5: Learning Support Cluster

The learning support guidelines were published and issued to schools in 2001. Schools sharing a learning support teacher were invited to attend the information seminars on the guidelines as a cluster and were given an opportunity to begin planning together for learning support as a cluster. One learning support teacher outlined the follow up to the initial information seminar.

The schools initiated planning on a cluster policy for learning support at the seminar. There was considerable disagreement between the principals as to how the guidelines should be implemented as clearly some schools wanted to retain the status quo. It was agreed that there should be a further meeting of the principals following consultations with staff. This meeting became a whole cluster meeting with all teaching staff attending. As preparation for this meeting each school brought standardised test results and preferred criteria for accessing learning support across the cluster. Following much debate it was eventually agreed that the criteria for learning support should be based on the cluster needs as opposed to individual school needs and the agreed criteria would be applied evenly across the cluster. A formula was also worked out to ensure that each school had timetabled access to the learning support teacher for two instructional terms. Following the initial trial year, the principals and learning support teacher met to review the policy. The cluster policy is now agreed between all schools. In practical terms this means that all of the schools are using common standardised assessments and these assessments are administered during an agreed time framework each year. A review meeting is held at the end of each year at which the principals and learning support teacher attend.

Exemplar 6: Planning Cluster

The three schools involved in the cluster had a history of cooperating together for games and music. At the information seminar for School Development Planning in 2000, the SDP team had proposed clusters for the purposes of the first SDP day. The three principals requested that they be allowed to cluster for this day. In advance of the first SDP planning day, the principals met with the facilitator and jointly agreed an agenda. At the conclusion of the planning day, it was agreed by all that the day had been a tremendous success and that the schools should organise similar days in future. It was decided to approach the Education Centre and request that the participating schools be clustered together for all further in-service days.

In advance of the first school based planning day, the three principals met and planned an agenda for the day. Each of the schools did advance preparation and each of the principals agreed to facilitate a section of the planning day. This format again proved to be very successful, though it was difficult to complete all that was required in the time allowed. It was tentatively suggested that the schools could organise their own summer course to allow time to make progress on planning. The Education Centre and the SDP facilitator were approached with a view to investigating how this might be arranged. The only difficulty appeared to be a concern that not all the teachers were willing to give their summer course week to engage in school planning. In the end all of the staff attended the course and all agreed that the concept should be continued for the foreseeable future.

There was never a cluster plan as such but the following were the main points:

- The principals met and worked out an agenda for all school based planning days.
- On the day, each principal facilitated part of the day.
- Each school engaged in agreed activities as preparation for the planning days and undertook to follow up on agreed reporting as a result of the day.
- The schools were clustered for all in-service days by the education centre
- The schools came together for a summer course for which the agenda was agreed by the staff of the three schools.
- Policy development was shared among the schools with each school agreeing to draft a section of the policy which was then forwarded to and adapted by the other schools.

Exemplar 7: Florencecourt- Belleek Primary Federation

In 2002, the West Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland initiated a pilot scheme whereby they invited the teaching principal of Florencecourt primary to also take on the role of principal in Belleek primary and become an administrative principal of both schools. Florencecourt has one hundred and forty children (including a neighbouring nursery school) and Belleek is a two teacher school. The schools are thirty miles apart and the principal on average spends three days in one and two in another but this arrangement is flexible. One of the teachers in Belleek has a post of responsibility which involves taking charge when the principal is in the other school.

Each school remains unique but school staff come together to discuss development planning. Both schools have shared ideas about pastoral care and both are involved in the health promotion initiative. The governors of both schools have met. Belleek primary has been upgraded inside and out to match the physical standard of the other school. The schools have a joint 'willow' project which is hoped to involve parents from both schools and this involves joint trips to Crom Castle. At the moment both schools use email to keep in contact but a video conferencing facility is planned. An outside co-ordinator accessed funding from different agencies leaving the principal time to oversee projects.

For the scheme to work there has to be an effective teacher to oversee the running of each school in the absence of the principal. There has to be good liaison between these two teachers and the principal. Planning is addressed from a short term, medium term and long term perspective. Parents are kept informed through a monthly newsletter and parents' information evenings.

On a personal level, the principal of the federation reports that she is now more confident and positive, proactive rather than reactive and that she is making a positive contribution to improving the quality of learning and teaching in both schools.

Her report concludes that:

"This is an innovative project in a rapidly changing education system and governors need to be persuaded that if two or three smaller schools are interested in moving forward, each school is not relinquishing its uniqueness but rather guaranteeing its future."

Exemplar 8: Schools Working Together

This cluster arrangement came out of a need for ideas, information, support and a reduction of the principal's workload. There was a very obvious need also to find a teacher to cover both principal's release days and part-time resource hours in both schools.

There are two schools in the cluster. School A is a nine-teacher school and school B is a four-teacher school. Currently both schools share a teacher for part time resource hours, principals' release days and for sick leave. The schools have thirteen and a half hours of resource teaching available to them. The teacher works four days a week between both schools doing resource hours, the fifth day she is available to both schools for principals release days. It is very effective. Both schools are flexible and the teacher is also available to either school to cover sick leave of other staff members, this is usually to a maximum of three days, as the resource teacher has to make the time up with the resource children.

Aside from clustering for principal's release days and resource hours both principals liaise for various different activities. At the moment this is purely on an administration level i.e. information from department, form filling, ideas for fund raising. Both schools share teaching resources and ideas with each other.

Exemplar 9: School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme (DES, 2003b) is especially worthy of note. The essence of the initiative is that both primary and post-primary schools (serving disadvantaged communities) operate as a network and draw up a plan for in-school and out-of-school services for children at risk.

A number of significant features of this scheme are worth mentioning:

- it involves both primary and post-primary schools
- the number of schools in each cluster is quite large, up to eleven in many cases
- there is a major incentive for clustering activities in the sense that there is not only the appointment of an organiser but the provision of other resources

There are eighty eight such clusters in operation and there is considerable satisfaction with progress so far.

Exemplar 10: Other Examples of Clustering Practices

- Principals come together for principal release days to focus on certain policy areas. This means they can share good practice, have additional contact with other principals and are happy to have a similar code of practice among a group of schools.
- Some smaller schools (2 and 3 teacher) are this year coming together for staff meetings and are organising curriculum co-ordinators in the cluster.
- Schools are coming together for sports day.
- Some schools are coming together and sharing the costs of arranging talks for parents on RSE and other topics.
- In one cluster, the staff meet at the beginning of the year and agree their links e.g. tunes for the tin-whistle, songs, Irish poems etc. They teach them and then both schools come together and do certain pieces together and then each school teaches the other something new. They find it very refreshing for both pupils and teachers and it makes the learning relevant.

Chapter 5. Exploring Possibilities for a Pilot Project involving a Comprehensive Clustering Strategy

As noted in other chapters of this report, clustering of smaller schools is a common practice in several countries. Furthermore from the exemplars in Chapter 4, it is evident that several programmes involving the DES and other agencies have been actively involved in the promotion, support and dissemination of clustering activities in Ireland. In addition:

- Financial support has been provided for projects under SIP, Comenius and North-South initiatives.
- Support, through the form of facilitation has been provided for school development planning initiatives
- Ongoing support and expertise has been provided through agencies such as Léargas, NCTE etc.
- Opportunities for clustering have been advocated regularly in DES circulars. Section 7 of Circular 01/03 on Ancillary Services Grant states:

“In certain areas it may be that schools would wish to cluster with other schools in their locality and use the grant money received by all those schools to employ a person or persons who could undertake secretarial, caretaking or other ancillary work on behalf of all schools in the cluster. The Department would have no difficulty with schools adopting such an approach and it is a matter for schools, in consultations with neighbouring schools, to decide if such a policy is feasible in their own particular circumstances.”

Unfortunately a situation has now arisen whereby there is active support for the concept of clustering schools but the disjointed way of providing that support undermines the whole concept of clustering and collaboration. Schools can presently be a member of several different clusters simultaneously, many of which are merely imposed on the schools for organisational expediency resulting in contrived collegiality, lack of awareness of what the cluster is meant to achieve and lack of skills to enable the cluster to achieve its potential. This makes it difficult to maximise the potential benefits for the pupils/teachers/school. The experience of some schools is to find themselves in different clusters for many different services. As noted in section 1 of this report *The Commission on School Accommodation*

(2002) has recognised this situation and recommended that “each school should belong to only one cluster for all cluster activity”

The dissatisfaction at primary level with the current disjointed arrangements for clustering was clearly expressed at the launch of the Interim Report at the 2004 IPPN conference. At the workgroup session, some delegates responded negatively towards the concept of clustering and expressed their disillusionment with their experiences of clustering to date.

The documented exemplars in Chapter 4 show that smaller schools actively involved in collaborative activities have benefited enormously from their participation. These examples have shown that such collaborative activities go some way towards meeting the identified needs of smaller schools. Combining these observations with the wealth of experience, knowledge and skills in the system and the tremendous advantages being brought to the pupils, the schools and the education system itself, it seems short-sighted not to promote collaboration among smaller schools as a key policy plank by all stakeholders in Irish education. Based on the research reviewed and the exemplars put forward, we take the view that a new model is not required but rather an adaptation of current policies so that smaller schools can help themselves.

Based on the evidence available the following seem necessary for the success of a project:

- Willingness of participating schools to operate as a cluster is a key factor in ensuring success. Prescribed clustering is unlikely to meet the needs of smaller schools. Optional or voluntary clustering is much more likely to result in an effective and sustainable cluster.
- Supports and incentives are required to ensure success. Operating a cluster effectively involves a lot of extra work and responsibility for principals, teachers, boards of management and parents. In order to sustain the cluster there must be agreed incentives and supports available during the period of the pilot project. Consideration must be given to providing the following:
 - Financial assistance by way of a grant to the cluster for agreed cluster activities.
 - Agreement on a cluster co-ordinator possibly provided as an extra post of responsibility. This could be a principal, deputy principal or teacher. An

appropriate allowance and agreed expenses for the position should be provided in addition to current salary.

- Professional development support provided by School Development Planning Support, LDS and Primary Curriculum Support Programme.
- Increased time for schools operating as clusters for cluster meetings. e.g. extra planning days.
- An enhanced allowance of release days for the teaching principals involved.
- An agreed budget for substitution cover, preferably with a dedicated substitute teacher available to the cluster or clusters.

Smaller schools have traditionally demonstrated their capacity to succeed despite disadvantages and lack of resources. There is now an opportunity to enable smaller schools to help themselves by officially endorsing the value of collaborative activities and promoting and supporting smaller schools in their efforts. In the context of the principles outlined above it is important that the fullest possible consideration be given to facilitating pilot projects for clusters of smaller schools especially those in isolated rural areas that are interested and willing to explore the possibilities of working together as a cluster.

Pilot Project Proposal

Our proposal is that the DES makes a fund available for collaborative, clustering activities and that schools apply for grants from this fund. Clusters of schools could make proposals that would be judged on independent criteria as in the case of the Schools Completion Programmes. It would be important that each submission has a development component from basic activities in year one to more comprehensive clustering activities in subsequent years. A fundamental principle would be that assistance, financial and professional, would increase in line with the broader range of collaborative activities undertaken. This model would allow schools themselves to:

- define the needs that could be met through the clustering/collaborative activity
- plan initiatives/projects that could meet those needs
- receive support from School Development Planning in ensuring that the plan was workable
- apply for the identified resources to see the plan through.

The attraction of increased funding in subsequent years would be an incentive to build capacity within clusters.

A variety of models should be piloted

A uniform approach will not encourage school leaders, teachers, boards of management, parents and children to take ownership of the process. The proposals suggested here are presented with a view towards illustrating what may be possible. If anything is to be learned from the existing practices it is that successful clusters have succeeded in identifying and prioritising their own needs, and engaging in collaborative clustering activities to meet those needs. To give the pilot projects the greatest chance of success the starting point must be the shared needs of the participant schools. The thrust of the pilot projects should be in the provision of supports, resources and facilitation to sustain the cluster and ensure that maximum benefits can be attained.

With these considerations in mind, the following proposal sketches a suggested pilot project:

Suggested Pilot Project for a Cluster of Smaller Rural Schools

Cluster Purpose (Rationale for clustering)

To co-operate on a variety of initiatives which will enable the participating schools to meet identified needs of their pupils, schools and communities.

Cluster Vision

The involvement of all stakeholders in cluster activities is to be an intrinsic feature of the work of individual schools, while still allowing each of the individual schools to retain their autonomy.

Requirements of Participating Schools

- Similarity of size, profile and geographical appropriateness
- Evidence of willingness to work together
- Common ground in terms of professionalism and willingness to share the burden

- Leader in each school who values the cluster and understands the potential to achieve common objectives
- Clearly outlined purpose with a clear vision for the for the clustering arrangement
- Clear plan that can be followed in early years to facilitate development of competence, and strengthening the commitment that this is worth pursuing

Cluster Structure and Co-ordination

As noted above, a post of cluster co-ordinator must be made available to the cluster. The appointed teacher would have responsibility for the management and co-ordination of cluster activities. (Precedent for this role exists in the teachers who have been appointed under Giving Children an Even Break and School Completion Programme). In addition the cluster co-ordinator would provide substitute cover for release days for the participating principals. (Precedent for this role exists in the teachers who have been appointed under the supply panel project). It is envisaged that substitution cover of a stated maximum number of days per year would be available for teachers who engage in the promotion of cluster activities.

A steering committee would be established which might comprise of one representative from the staff of each school, one representative from board of management of each school, cluster co-ordinator and external liaison/support person. This steering committee would meet on a monthly basis. Teachers could be allowed extra personal vacation day(s) for the time given to attendance at out of school cluster meetings.

Time would be given on the agenda of the staff and board of management meetings of each school to discuss the cluster activities and the cluster co-ordinator could be invited to attend and make a report.

A four-year cluster plan to be drawn up which will be reviewed/revised on an annual basis by all of the stakeholders. Steering committee will draw up cluster plan based on a needs analysis, which could be conducted by the cluster co-ordinator. Consensus on the draft plan will be negotiated with each of the stakeholders in the participating schools.

Suggestions for Cluster Activities

A fundamental principle of the pilot project is that there are a number of possible kinds of clustering to take into account the needs of different models and the necessity that schools would 'buy into' the project. However, the following might comprise some of the important activities:

- Organisational planning
- Curricular planning
- Class planning
- Sharing of expertise
- Sharing of resources
- Specific projects e.g. joint curricular projects, class linkages, class exchanges, website development
- Shared duties for posts of responsibility across cluster e.g. special education needs co-ordinator, ICT co-ordinator etc.
- Joint board of management meetings
- Joint parents' organisation meetings
- Cross cluster initiatives such as Green Schools
- Curriculum co-ordinators in the cluster
- Coming together for sports day – co-operative activities for pupils
- Facilitating teachers at the same class level to work together particularly in the area of curricular innovation e.g. to action plan for the implementation of paired reading

Maintaining and Supporting the Cluster (Incentives/Supports)

Arrangements should be made to ensure:

- Appointment of additional teacher to act as cluster co-ordinator
- Training in cluster organisation and management
- Development of a cluster plan
- External support is available for the duration of the pilot project to provide training, facilitation, guidance and support. Given the nature of planning and development involved for the participating schools, SDPS could be invited to provide this support. Support could gradually be withdrawn as the cluster becomes self-perpetuating.

- Organisation of social activities
- Substitution within the cluster for principals' release days, for release days for teachers organising cluster activities and for post holders who agree to undertake their posts of responsibility across the cluster
- Annual grant to the individual schools in the cluster to support cluster initiatives
- Schools in the pilot project be allowed extra personal vacation days in lieu of time given to out-of-school in cluster activities/meetings

Developing the Pilot Project

Prior to the launch of the project, there will be a need to provide information to schools in the form of a brochure and in addition to hold meetings on a regional basis, so that schools can familiarise themselves with the ideas. The clusters should set achievable targets in early years so that capacity can be built up over time. These targets should enable the participating principals, teachers, pupils, parents and other stakeholders (boards of management) to experience success so that their commitment becomes assured from an early stage. The targets should involve all stakeholders from the outset.

The following stages provide a guide as to how the projects might develop.

Stage / Year One (Building Trust)

- School review strategy exercises such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to assist in the identification of priorities to be undertaken by the schools involved.
- Each group of schools to undertake one cluster project that is achievable in the short term.
- Ongoing facilitation and training particularly for those involved in the steering committee and cluster co-ordinator(s). Training to focus on good practice in how clustering works. Facilitation to be provided to each project to guide and develop the project process and product.

Stage / Year Two (Building Commitment)

- Long term aims and purpose agreed by all.
- Shared agenda of activities for the year. Looking also at longer-term projects.

- Identified roles for all partners with development of accountability procedures i.e. accountability to the cluster.
- Relationship building through team building activities
- Communication and public relations within and without the cluster.
- Focused training and facilitation – perhaps based both on practical projects to be developed by the cluster and on project management, communication etc.

Stage / Year Three (Sustaining the Cluster)

- Self-identified facilitation and training needs
- Greater co-ordination and co-operation
- Implementation of plans. Focus on ensuring that involvement in cluster activities is yielding benefits where it matters – in the classroom.
- Participants ‘thinking cluster’

Stage / Year Four (Renewing the Cluster)

- Reviewing progress
- Accommodating change
- Realising new opportunities
- External support available if required

Stages outlined are arbitrary; schools may spend much shorter or longer at any stage. What is probably important is that the cluster has to experience success at each stage before it moves on to the next stage. Participating schools experiencing difficulties at any stage may not see sufficient benefit or purpose in the initiative and withdraw from the cluster. The role of external support systems will be crucial in identifying the difficulties that schools may have at any particular stage in the development of the cluster and in then providing appropriate interventions to assist schools in regaining trust in the initiative.

Conclusion

The ideas put forward above are guided by research from Ireland and abroad, our experience of existing clustering arrangements and our consultation with educational partners and stakeholders, as described in other parts of this report. This proposal has also been influenced by relevant suggestions from the partners in education as well as by our research with focus groups of principals throughout the country and the outcome of workshops and focus groups at the IPPN conference (February 2004) and the IPPN/NAHT cross border conference (November 2004).

At this historic first ever IPPN/NAHT cross border conference a talk was given by Mr. Billy Tate on cross border networking and co-operation. He traced the course of his involvement and the many difficulties overcome in operating an ‘open cluster’ of schools while he was principal of Aughnacloy primary school. His ability along with many others to build up friendship and trust amongst teachers, children and parents in divided communities in Northern Ireland was hugely impressive. His words were informative, inspiring and very relevant to the current proposals in this report:

“We stopped being followers and became leaders and drivers of change”

“Never ask anyone to do more than they can handle”

“Allow them time to come on board”

“Put a time frame on it and build on the personnel and resources in the cluster”

“You may fail but next time fail better”

We too, in co-operation with the partners in education, can become “leaders and drivers of change” as we seek out new horizons for smaller schools and teaching principals in the 21st century.

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Appendix 1

Milestones in the Development of the Principal's Role

Background

The development of the notion of principalship as being something other than 'primus inter pares' probably has its origins in the mid eighties. It was about this time that groups of principals began to meet in response to growing pressure and dissatisfaction arising from the increasing demands of the job. It followed the growth of new suburbs, particularly in Dublin, with a consequent new school-going population, the development of new schools and an increase in the number of 'lay', as distinct from religious, principals. Over the next decade there followed a sequence of events that further highlighted the role of the principal as instructional leader and day- to-day manager of his/her school.

The following charts some of the milestones that have guided us to where we are today:

1990

• Report of the Primary Education Review Body

Areas encompassed by this review included the structures of primary education, demographic trends and their implications, the quality of primary education and school organisation:

“As the internal affairs of the school become more complex and as its external links and commitments expand, the principal teacher will come under more and more pressure if he/she has to deal unaided with all school affairs.” (p. 43).

It was also recognised in the report that teaching principals “are not in a position to devote time to many of the specific responsibilities assigned to them” (p. 44).

The report also acknowledged that not all principalships should be ‘for life’:

“For a variety of reasons, a principal teacher may desire to relinquish the principalship and revert to the position of assistant teacher...In such situations, two real difficulties arise: loss of income and loss of security of employment in his/her own school. We recommend, therefore, that in these circumstances the reversion to assistant teacher status should not mean loss of tenure in his/her own school.” (p. 46).

1991

• **The Role of the Principal – A Review.**

This study was carried out by the INTO. It dealt with, among other topics, the changing nature of the role, the strains and pressures arising from the demands of the job and the lack of a job description.

The Report had twelve recommendations:

- *“There is an urgent need to provide opportunities for principal teachers to update their knowledge and skills and to familiarise themselves with contemporary developments in the field of education. Properly structured in-service courses should be established urgently with a view to enhancing the professional development of principal teachers, with particular emphasis on leadership skills, curriculum development techniques, classroom technology, school planning procedures, communication systems and the delegation of duties and responsibilities to members of staff.*
- *Discussion should be initiated by the INTO at national level with the appropriate authorities with a view to determining the most suitable duties which might be delegated, with adequate support, to vice-principal teachers.*
- *Any proposal to redefine or expand the role of the principal teacher should only be introduced by agreement between the interests concerned. All future curricular innovations in primary schools should be preceded by the provision of appropriate in-service education and training.*

- *The point in the staffing schedules at which an administrative principal teacher is appointed should be reduced to a level similar to that which currently pertains in Northern Ireland (189 pupils).*
- *Principal teachers with full-time teaching duties should be relieved of such duties for set periods each month (particularly at the beginning and at the end of the school year) to enable them to undertake their non-teaching and administrative duties. Substitute cover should be provided for this purpose.*
- *All principal teachers currently in the system should be given the opportunity to participate in intensive courses of in-service education and training. Newly appointed principal teachers should be appointed as 'principal teacher designates' for some months prior to taking up their full-time duties. In this way principal teachers would be free to attend appropriate in-service courses and to acquire the necessary leadership and administrative skills to organise the activities of their respective schools.*
- *Panels of supply teachers should be established to provide cover for all teacher absences.*
- *School caretakers and secretaries should be appointed on an individual or shared basis to cater for the needs of all schools both urban and rural. Immediate arrangements should be made to provide these facilities in schools where there are principal teachers with full-time teaching duties.*
- *Funding of national schools should be of a sufficient level to ensure that local fund-raising activities are no longer necessary.*
- *All principal teachers should be entitled to the provision of office accommodation. They should also have access at all times to an appropriate telephone service.*
- *The allowances, which are paid to principal teachers, should be increased substantially in order to compensate them for the additional duties which have been imposed upon them during the past twenty years.*
- *All school going children, irrespective of age, should be entitled to an equal points rating for staffing, allowances and capitation purposes" (p. 71-72).*

1992

- **Education for a Changing World: The Green Paper on Education.**

The principal is seen here as occupying a pivotal role in the school with numerous responsibilities, amongst which are: determining the aims of the school, managing staff and fostering good relations within the school and with a community dimension:

“It is proposed to enhance the role of principal, reflecting the nature of this position as the central executive function” (p. 19).

With regard to rural schools the report stated:

“The creation of school units of four teachers or more in rural areas would facilitate the provision of remedial and other specialist services in those schools and the development of backup and support services for their teachers.” (p. 93).

With regard to appointments for principalship the report recommended:

“To encourage mobility and career development, principals would be appointed on fixed term contracts (such as 7 years) rather than permanently. These contracts could be renewed.” (p. 19)

1994

- **First Principals’ Conference held in Cork**

This was organised by Cork Primary Principals’ Network and was the first of three ground breaking conferences held in Cork before they were moved to Dublin and Galway.

- **Report on the National Education Convention**

Chapter six of this report was concerned with school rationalisation:

“The Green Paper identified a number of reasons why smaller primary and post-primary schools are becoming less viable and, therefore, amalgamations become more necessary. These underlying trends or pressures are very likely to intensify over the coming decade.” (p. 34).

The Report also states:

“There is not... an argument for amalgamating smaller schools into larger units unless the education provided is going to be more effective for the majority of pupils affected.” (p.35).

Chapter seven dealt with the internal management of schools:

Research has identified a strong relationship between positive school leadership and institutional effectiveness, and describes the successful principal as providing skilled instructional leadership. (p. 42).

However, the reality in schools was spelled out:

Instructional leadership, according to the participants, was the most neglected aspect of the principal’s work. Pressure of time, with the urgent taking precedence over the important, and insufficient back-up support services, were cited as the main reasons for this neglect. (p.43).

- **Principals' Forum (INTO)**

Established under rule 24 of the organisation's rules and constitution, the Forum was designed to meet the particular needs of principal teachers and to ensure that the views and concerns of principals had a clear focus and means of expression within the organisation.

1995

- **Charting Our Education Future: The White Paper on Education**

The role of the principal was dealt with on pages 151 to 154. The White Paper mentioned induction programmes, mentoring, in-career development, establishment of formal networks, the serving of a probationary period and a seven year term of office for newly appointed administrative principals. With regard to networking, the paper states:

"In addition... a further objective will be to establish formal networks of principals. The aim of these networks will be to provide mutual support, to promote the transfer of good practice among schools and to identify continuing training trends." (p. 152)

The report devotes six lines to issues relating specifically principals of smaller schools:

"Principals of small schools who have full-time teaching duties have particular needs which will be taken into account. Some of these needs will be met by means of specially designed in-career development courses for such principals. The networks of principals referred to above will also be useful in helping principals in small schools to develop school planning processes and management procedures which suit their particular circumstances." (p. 152)

- **First Consultative Principals' Conference (INTO Forum)**

Among the topics discussed were:

- the necessity to draw up a job description for principals which would encompass instructional leadership
- the arbitrary imposition of extra duties and responsibilities on principal teachers
- the low level of allowances attaching to promoted posts

- **INTO Seminar for principals of one- teacher schools**

- **INTO Survey**

This INTO survey stated that a principal works, on average, 74 days overtime

1997

- **First INTO Biennial Conference for Principals**

It was stated at the conference that:

“Through commitment and a desire to work with and learn from their colleagues, as educational leaders and trade union members, principals can help to shape the continuous educational changes that economic and social developments require of our schools.” (Catherine Byrne, INTO)

• **The Education Act**

Section 22 (1) deals with the functions of the principal and teachers:

“The Principal of a recognised school and the teachers in a recognised school, under the direction of the Principal, shall have responsibility, in accordance with this Act, for the instruction provided to students in the school and shall contribute generally, to the education and personal development of students in that school.” (p. 23)

Section 23 (2) deals with the Principal:

(a) “The Principal shall be responsible for the day to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and be accountable to the board for that management.

(b) provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school

(c) be responsible for the creation together with the board, parents...and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among students and which promotes professional development.

(d) set objectives for the school and monitor the achievement of those objectives

(e) encourage the involvement of parents of students in the school and the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school”. (p. 24)

This Act *“emphasises the learning, developmental, consultative and leadership aspects of the role.”* (HayGroup Report, p. 9).

1999

• **Formation of Irish Primary Principals' Network**

The Irish Primary Principals Network was set up following the primary principals' conference in February 1999 in Dublin to provide dedicated professional representation and guidance along with practical supports and resources for principals relevant to the uniqueness of the role.

• **New Revised Primary School Curriculum**

This was officially launched by Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin in 1999. The Primary Curriculum Support Programme was initiated *“to mediate the primary school curriculum for teachers towards enabling them to implement it in their schools.”*

• **School Development Planning Initiative**

The school development was established with effect from the first of September 1999. The purpose of the initiative was:

“to stimulate and strengthen a culture of collaborative development and planning with a view to promoting school improvement and effectiveness”. (Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Micheál Martin, May 1999)

• **Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary School Principal**

The key recommendations of this report were:

- *“The group recommends that professional development courses should be provided for all post holders, including the deputy principal, with a view to enabling schools to forge effective middle management structures.*
- *The group further recommends that the changing role of the principal and the manner in which new middle management structures are being approached and*

implemented in schools be the subject of systematic inquiry to inform policy and professional development programmes particularly for principals and middle management personnel (p. 100).

- *The group recommends that funding be made available so that all schools have access to adequate caretaking and secretarial supports. While detailed implementation of this proposal should be a priority in the negotiations in the appropriate forum, the group further recommends that the method of funding of these supports should be reviewed (p. 101).*
- *The group recommends that teaching principals be released from teaching duties to enable them to discharge the leadership and management functions of the role and to help ensure that children receive their full entitlement of teaching time. Such designated release time should be calculated on the basis of a number of days per year leading to a number of days per month, relative to the size of the school, and having regard to the circumstances of the school and to the evolving demands on the role of the Principal and the needs of the children for continuity in teaching. The detailed implementation of this proposal, including the replacement structure and the duration and distribution of the release time, should be addressed as a priority each year in the annual staff negotiations over the next five years and/or as appropriate in other relevant fora.*
- *The group recommends that the appointment figure for administrative principals should be reduced from the present figure of 8 mainstream class teachers, or equivalent 229 pupils, to a principal and 6 mainstream class teachers (180 pupils), with account taken of reductions in the schedule in the future. The detailed implementation of this proposal should be addressed as a priority each year in the annual staff negotiations over the next five years and/or as appropriate in other relevant fora. In the context of these negotiations the group recommends that consideration be given to a small number of schools who have at least nine teachers (both mainstream class teachers and ex-quota teachers) but whose enrolment is not sufficient to merit an administrative principal. The group recommends that these schools should be targeted for appointment of administrative principals (p.102).*

- *The group recommends that a structured and easily accessible programme of induction training be centrally coordinated and provided for newly appointed principals.*
- *The group recommends that a structured and easily accessible programme of in-career development be put in place and made available to all principals on an ongoing basis.*
- *The group recommends that, although selection procedures are outside the scope of this report, aspiring principals be facilitated to acquire qualifications relevant to the management of schools (p.103).*
- *The group recommends that the accommodation schedule be immediately updated to reflect the needs of modern schools.*
- *The group further recommends that adequate ancillary accommodation, including a properly equipped principal's office, be provided in all new schools, as a part of major refurbishments, and as soon as practicable in all schools.*
- *In the view of all the foregoing, the group recommends that, following consultation with the partners, Circular 16/73 should be replaced.*
- *The group recommends that all the issues arising if a principal opts to relinquish his/her post within a particular school be investigated in consultation with the partners in education.*
- *The group recommends that professional development courses should be provided for all post holders, including the deputy principal, with a view to enabling schools to forge effective middle management structures” (p.105).*

2000

- **Release Time for Teaching Principals**

This was granted by the Department of Education and Science and was a very welcome development for teaching principals.

- **Official Launch of the Irish Primary Principals' Network**

IPPN was officially launched in Dublin Castle by Minister for Education and Science Dr. Michael Woods on February 10th 2000.

- **Amalgamation of First Level Schools – Report of the Commission on School Accommodation.**

Some relevant conclusions from this report are:

“Amalgamation of schools has major implications for the school communities concerned. The objective of an amalgamation is to provide an enhanced educational environment for the pupils with an efficient supply of resources.” (p. 7).

“The location and size of first level schools are integrated with the history of parishes, gaeltacht areas, and the dispersion of minority groups.” (p. 21).

- **The Value of Leadership? (IPPN)**

This document was a response to the INTO's written submission to the public service benchmarking body and outlined in detail all aspects of the principal's role. It demanded an increase in allowances commensurate with the increasing responsibilities attaching to the post of principal.

- **Leadership Development for Schools**

LDS was established to develop a comprehensive school management/leadership programme of training and development for all those involved in school management.

2002

- **Report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body**

This granted an increase of 13% from point one to point ten of the principals' allowance scale. Bands 11 and 12 were granted an increase of 14%, bands 13 and 14 were granted an increase of 16%, while the final three bands were increased by 17.6%. "The higher level of increase in allowances for principal reflects the higher level of responsibility associated with larger schools" (p.112). Bands 12 to17 do not apply to primary principals. (Appendix 4).

- **Planning School Provision Three Praxes: Report of the Commission on School Accommodation.**

The terms of reference specified that the Commission would provide detailed information on the current and projected positions in relation to school provision. The Technical Working Group of the Commission conducted studies in selected parts of Mayo, the only rural area considered.

Some relevant quotes from the report are:

"An upward trend is expected (from 2002) for the next fifteen years." (p. 19).

"In rural areas the role of the first level school in the community can be very significant in terms of providing a focus for the community; providing a local identity for children; making a contribution to rural sustainability and regeneration." (p. 75)

“In recent years, demands on schools in Ireland have increased significantly. Expectations of the educational endeavour have multiplied; legal, bureaucratic and pastoral requirements have all increased, placing a great deal of pressure on those who work in schools. Smaller schools are subject to similar expectations and requirements as larger schools.” (p. 75)

“Rural areas with small schools may at times lack the number of personnel needed for active membership of a school board of management. In such instances, consideration should be given to establishing one board of management for more than one school. Pilot projects that experiment with appropriate models of management and/or clustering for small rural schools should be encouraged and supported. At present, some first level schools are having difficulty with the mechanisms of clustering because they belong to several different clusters for different activities. Clustering of small schools should be a support mechanism, allowing small schools to build a support network with other nearby schools.” (p. 77)

School Development Planning Initiative – National Progress Report 2002

This report stated:

“Consideration should be given to increasing the uses and effectiveness of clusters through expanding the range of activities involved. Such expansion might include the sharing of secretarial expertise, resources and other supports via clusters. A sharing of principals’ administrative time/workload and ways of addressing teaching and learning could also be explored through clustering of appropriate personnel” (p. 47)

- **Defining the Role of the Primary Principal in Ireland, HayGroup Report**

This report concluded that there are seven key elements to the role:

- Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Resource Management
- Human Resource Management
- Policy Formation
- Administration and
- External Relationships. (p. 2)

The report emphasised:

“In particular the role of teaching principals faces significant challenges. Our analysis of the role of teaching principal would lead us to agree with a perception articulated by many in this category that the “official” definition of principalship is based primarily on the role of the administrative principal and that there is insufficient recognition of the reality of the combined teaching and leadership roles.” (p.13)

“We have formed the view that it is not possible for a teaching principal to deliver on the expectations of the role, both in terms of teaching and administration/management, without exceeding the agreed working hours on a consistent and ongoing basis... we are of the view that there needs to be either official recognition of the difficulties of the teaching principal in a formal way or an in depth analysis of the feasibility of greater forms of co-operation between schools that might include formal clustering, collaboration, or creating federations of smaller schools.” (p.14)

As a result of this report, IPPN aligned with St. Patrick's College and established a combined working group to study the issue of smaller schools and teaching principalship in Ireland. The aims of the working group were: to provide an overview of the difficulties and challenges faced by smaller schools and teaching principals in Ireland and abroad; to identify and collate examples of best practice; to identify sustainable governance, management and operational structures for smaller schools; to present a research document as a basis for discussion with the education partners for future planning in relation to smaller schools and teaching principalship.

2004

- **The Future of Smaller Schools and Teaching Principalship in Ireland**

This interim report was produced by the joint IPPN/St Patrick's College research sub-committee for the 2004 IPPN conference.

- **Department of Education and Science Circular 02/04: Seniority of primary teachers.**

Section 6.1 states:

“A principal teacher can only relinquish a post provided there is a permanent vacancy in the school. Where a principal teacher relinquishes the post of principal s/he becomes the most junior teacher in the school. Previous service given as a principal in the school does not count for seniority purposes.”

- **A Joint North/South Conference: ‘Putting our Heads Together’**

This historic first ever cross border conference for primary principals and partners in education was organised by IPPN/ NAHT (NI) in November 2004 to discuss:

- the future of smaller schools and teaching principalship
- special education issues
- cross border networking and co-operation

Appendix 2. IPPN National Principals' Survey – 2005

Preliminary Findings

IPPN's national survey of primary school principals has provided a wealth of quantitative and qualitative information together with a very real picture of the professional life of the principal in 2005. What is clear is that school, as a microcosm of society, has changed utterly in recent years. This change has come about primarily as a result of legislative development, curricular reform and societal change. The principal teacher, as instructional leader, is now required to lead and manage all aspects of a complex school community. Unfortunately, the structures and supports, essential for the principal to effectively fulfil such a demanding role, fall seriously short of what is required in a modern primary education system.

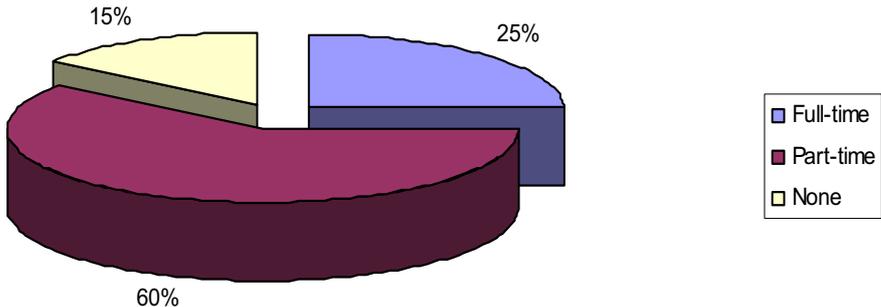
Professionalism and dedication drive principals to make up the shortfall on a daily basis by working longer, harder and constantly assuming additional responsibilities. This survey highlights the enormous personal sacrifice being made by principals due to work overload and inadequate support structures. Choosing to become a principal once carried the reasonable expectation of job satisfaction. For many this professional entitlement has been replaced by the challenge of 'surviving' the week unscathed. Feelings of powerlessness fuel growing levels of frustration as workload increases. Damaging stress levels, hypertension, constant fatigue and feelings of isolation, are affecting the personal, family and professional lives of principals.

The survey identifies clearly the impact of 'overloaded' principals on the school community. With 73% of principals doubling up as mainstream class teachers, principals acknowledge that the quality of teaching and learning in their own classroom often falls short of desired standards because of the increasing simultaneous demands arising from their dual role. Discerning parents often express their awareness of this fact. Principals refer to the ever present feeling of guilt. Staff relations and morale suffer because the principal lacks time for supporting, listening and communicating with teachers. A teaching principal cannot be expected to adequately affirm colleagues, mentor young teachers and provide essential instructional leadership for staff. Whole school approaches to SEN and managing challenging behaviour are but two examples where teaching principals are professionally

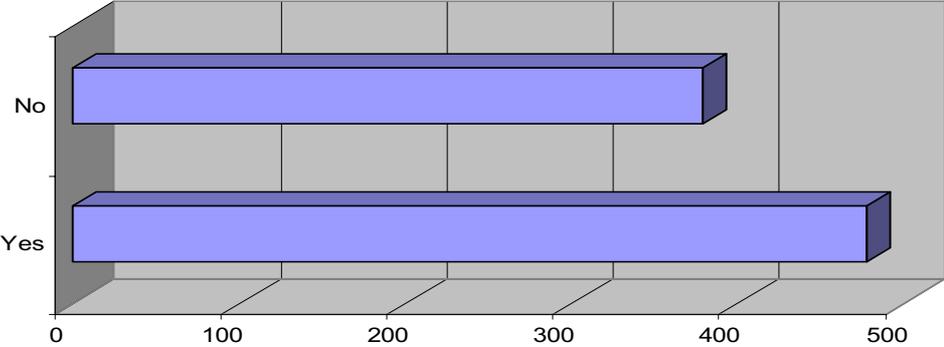
compromised due to their own teaching commitments. There are no winners under this regime.

The underlying theme coming from principals in this survey is that the issue of principals' workload cannot be ignored any longer. Other improvements in education cannot be realised if the leadership role suffers from overload. The consequential benefits of enabling principals to refocus their role on the leading and influencing of teaching and learning would be inestimable. The principals who responded to this survey have put forward practical workable suggestions for change under three essential headings. It is to be hoped that the other partners in education will keep faith with them at this crucial time for primary education.

What level of secretarial support do you have?



Do you have a Principal's Office?

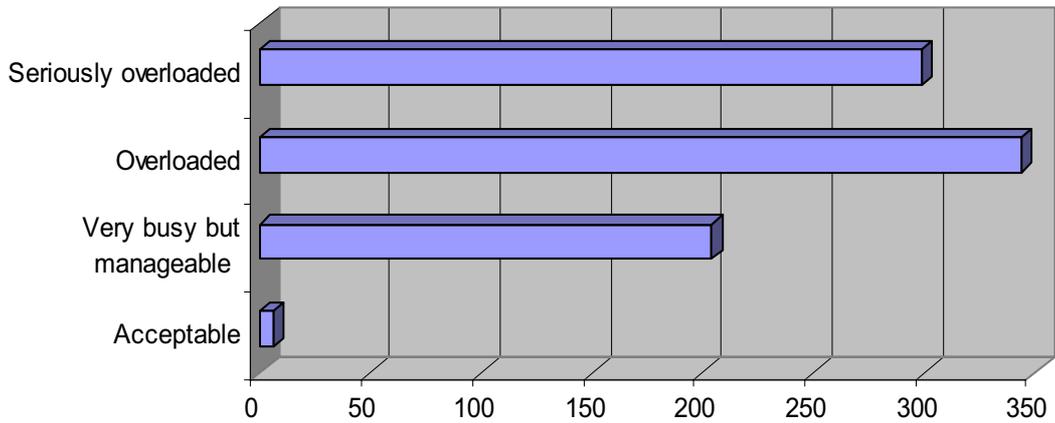


Principals' Workload

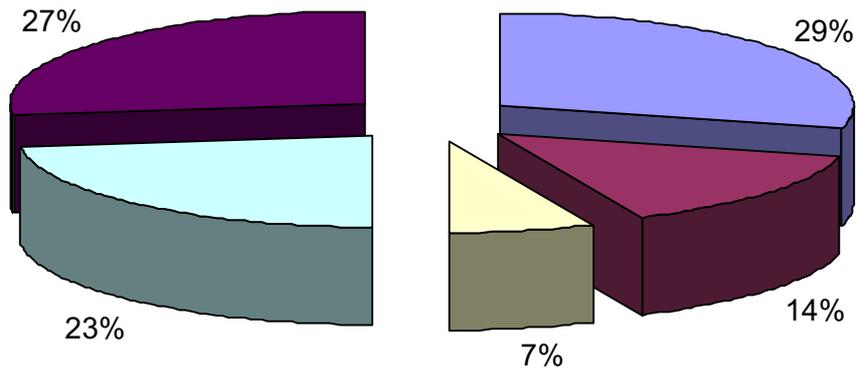
Priority actions identified in IPPN survey :

- The reduction of the point at which administrative principal is appointed from 180 to 150 pupils.
- All ancillary staff that are accountable to/managed by the principal to be recognised for appointment of administrative principals and remuneration of all principals.
- Inviting small schools to 'opt in' to collaborative schools clusters and federations.
- That teaching principals would be entitled to a minimum of one release day per week.
- Deputy principals in schools of 16 teachers or more to be released from teaching duties.
- Teaching principals to be able to undertake resource/learning support teaching roles.
- When new DES circulars are issued, where additional workload is implied for principals, the necessary human resources (teacher non contact hours) to be allocated accordingly.
- The management of special education needs to be delegated to the deputy principal or to assistant- principal, where relevant.
- The DES and other relevant agencies to provide dedicated, authoritative e-mail query lines for principals seeking information or interpretation of circulars, policy documents and procedures.
- Principals to be appointed on a seven/ten year contract as per *Green Paper*, 1992.
- Current serving principals to be offered 'step down' facility without loss of seniority, salary allowance and related pension benefits. As in the case of early retirement, a quota of places to be allocated following assessment of annual applications.
- Every principal to have access to full time secretarial support. Teaching principals have the greatest need of all for secretarial support. Secretaries to be paid directly by the DES as in the case of the SNA. Position of school secretary should be of similar status to that of SNA. Substitute cover should be available to cover for secretary's absences through illness, etc.

How would you consider your current workload?

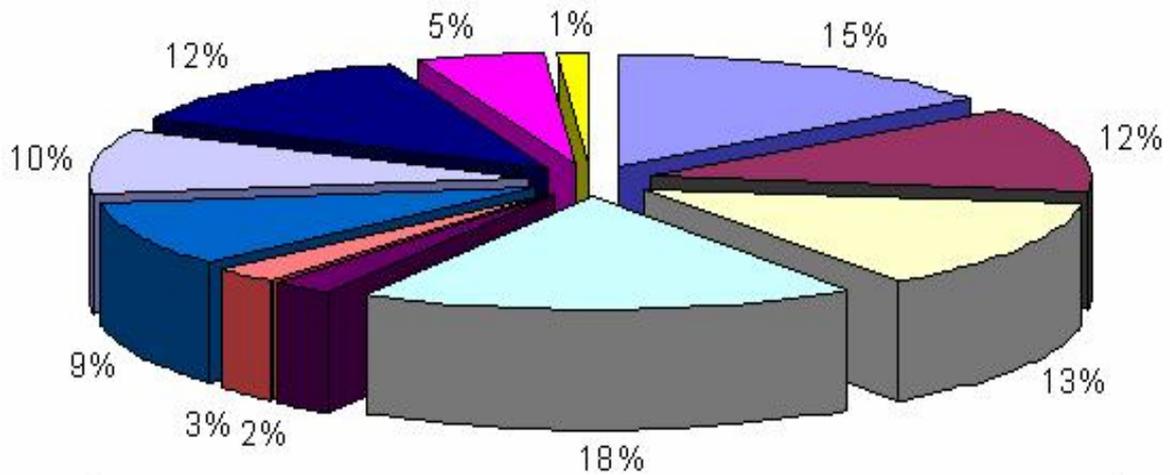


Strategies to reduce the workload of Administrative Principals.



- Releasing Deputy Principals from class teaching duties
- Additional secretarial support
- Additional caretaker support
- Release time for In-school management team
- Appointment of professional school governor/manager for all non educational management functions & responsibilities

Strategies to reduce the workload of Teaching Principals



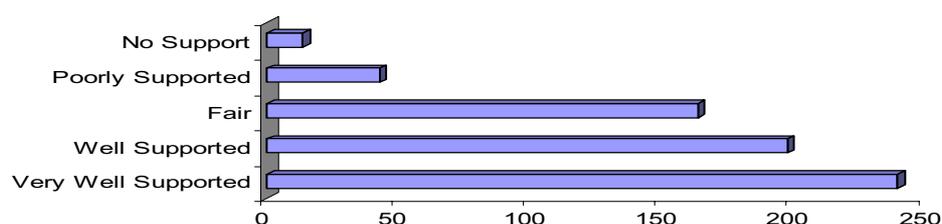
- Reduce threshold for appointing administrative principals
- TPs to have option of Special Education Teaching Duties
- Increase the number of Principal Release Days
- One permanent supply teacher per 180 children to release TPs on a rotational basis within a defined cluster of schools
- Appointment of Deputy Principal to 2 Teacher Schools
- Amalgamation of Small Schools
- Federation of Small Schools ie. 1 Permanent Admin Principal & 1 BoM for a 2/3 small schools totalling 120 - 180 pupils
- Appointment of professional school Governor/manager for all non-educational management functions & responsibilities
- Additional secretarial support
- Additional caretaker support
- Other

In-School Management (ISM)

Priority actions identified in IPPN survey:

- The duties undertaken by all post holders to be reviewed annually in the context of the ever changing needs of a school.
- That the underlying philosophy of ISM would be one of teamwork, together with flexibility and accountability with a co-sharing of responsibility amongst the leadership team.
- Each post holder would be required by circular to furnish the board of management with a written report once per term outlining the work carried out.
- ISM duties and meetings held of the ISM Team to be undertaken outside of class contact time or, in the case of infant teachers, outside preparation time.
- ISM appointment procedures should be streamlined with particular reference to shortening the timeframe for permanent appointments, acting appointments and appeals.
- Posts should contain a variety of duties across the management spectrum, but most importantly should be seen as a management/promoted post position requiring greater input in all areas of school life – curricular, management and general day to day organisation.
- As well as specified area of responsibility, each ISM member to be available for, and involved in, managing the unpredictable day to day organisational issues.
- The post of deputy principal to be advertised externally as well as internally. This would lead to greater encouragement for teachers to apply for deputy principalship as a career stepping stone.
- Exemplars of good practice to be used as a guide for ISM role development as an alternative to dependence on overly prescriptive circulars.
- Criteria for appointing ISM posts to focus on a) the record of the applicant's competence and effectiveness as a teacher and b) the applicant's disposition and contribution to positive staff relationships and the greater good of the school community. Length of service/seniority should not be a criterion. The post of principal is awarded on merit. Other ISM posts should be filled on the same basis.

Please assess how well your Special Duties Teacher(s) support(s) you in the day-to-day management of the school



School Governance

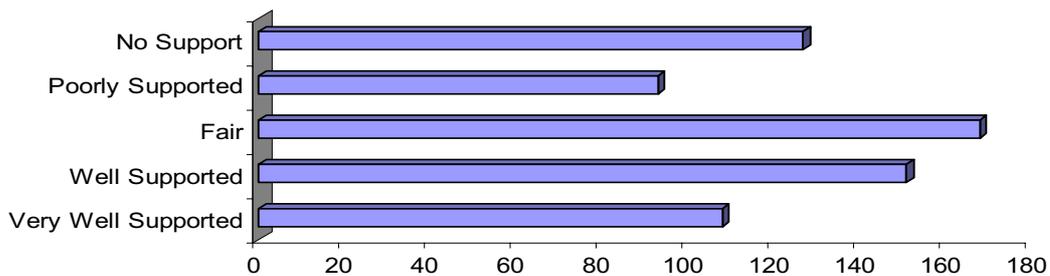
Essential practices to alleviate principals' workload.

- Each member of the board of management to have specific tasks and responsibilities which they undertake to carry out between board meetings. Refer to CPSMA / IPPN publication *Boards of Management - a Framework for Good Practice*
- The board should meet once a month, to share information on progress, deal with required decisions and assess the ongoing needs of the school.

Longer term issues for effective school governance.

- In the case of individual large schools or collaborative clusters of small schools, the appointment of a paid administrator/governor will be essential for the effective administrative needs of 21st century schools. This will become essential not just due to falling levels of volunteerism but more importantly; fewer people are willing to carry out a voluntary, untrained role with such a high level of legal responsibilities.
- The establishment of a paid, trained and accountable administrator or governor would enable the principal to focus on his/her instructional leadership role, thus enabling she/he to concentrate on the core business of the school – high quality teaching and learning.

Please assess how well your Board of Management supports you as Principal in carrying out its responsibilities



Appendix 3

TÁBLA 1: Líon na mBunscoileanna sa Ghaeltacht agus sa stát de réir líon na n-oidí

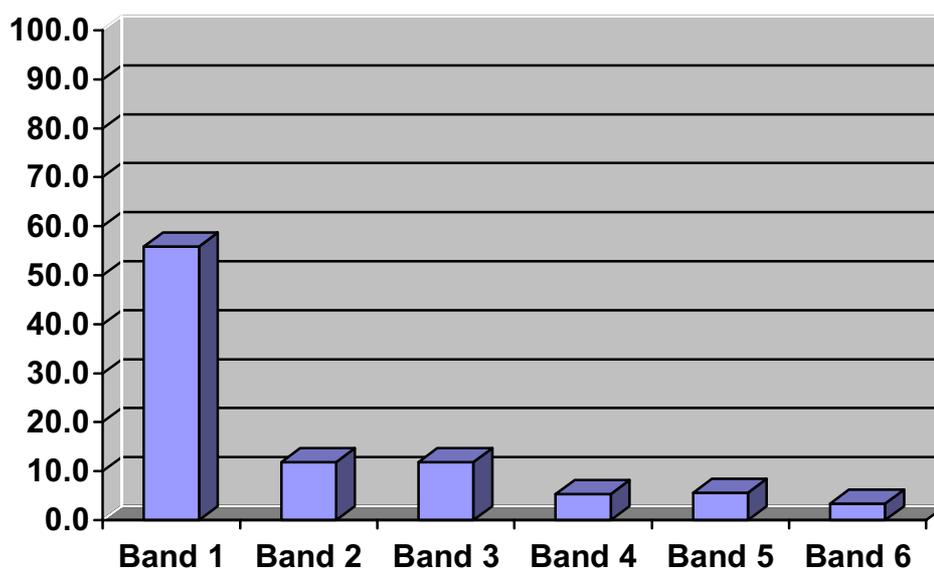
FOINSE: An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Contae	Scoil aon Oide	Scoil dhá Oide	Trí Oide	4-7 Oide	8-11 Oide	11 + Oide
Bunscoileanna Gaeltachta N = 143	2%	44%	22%	27%	5%	0
Bunscoileanna na Tíre N = 3157	1%	20%	16%	33%	12%	18%

Appendix 4

Current Allowance Bands for Principals

Allowance Bands 1 – 6 for Primary Principals:



55.9% of primary principals are on band one of the allowance schedule. A further 11.9 are on band two. All are teaching principals.

Band three: 11.9% of primary principals

Band four: 5.3% of primary principals

Band five: 5.6% of primary principals

Band six: 3.4% of primary principals

94% of primary principals hold allowances within the first six bands.

Allowance Bands for Primary Principals:

Band Number	Staff Number	Euro Allowance
1	1-5	8166
2	6-7	9150
3	8-11	10,734
4	12-13	12,596
5	14-16	14,653
6	17-19	16,739
7	20-23	18,758
8	24-26	20,798
9	27-30	22,304
10	31-35	23,854
11	36+	26,034

Allowance figures accurate from December 2004

Ancillary staff not counted for staffing purposes

Ratio of Applicants per Vacant Principalship

Year	No. of Applicants	No. of Vacancies	Ratio of A : V
1996*	921	170	5.5 : 1
1998*	1027	226	4.5 : 1
2000*	799	204	3.9 : 1
2002**	542	154	3.5 : 1
2004**	710	245	2.9 : 1

* DES Statistics – Discontinued since 2000

** IPPN New Principals Survey

Appendix 5

Number and percentage of mainstream schools in school year 2002 - 2003

Full time teaching staff	Number of schools	Percentage*
1	21	0.6
2	590	19.0
3	456	14.4
4	372	11.7
5	324	10.2
6	231	7.3
7	146	4.6
8	93	2.9
9	73	2.3
10	112	3.5
11	102	3.2
12	86	2.7
13	83	2.6
14	64	2.0
15	65	2.0
16	52	1.6
17	44	1.3
18	39	1.2
19	29	0.9
20+	173	5.4

Total number of mainstream schools: 3155 (Central statistics Office 2002-2003)

