

## JOC meeting 29<sup>th</sup> August 2018 re. Teaching Principals

### Opening Statement by IPPN

IPPN is the professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence. Recognised by the Minister for Education as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the DES, the National Parents' Council, management bodies, unions, education agencies, academic institutions and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. As a professional body for school leaders, IPPN provides a variety of supports and services to almost 6,500 Principals and Deputy Principals and articulates their collective knowledge and professional experience.

As a body supporting principals in their professional and personal development, IPPN has an obligation to highlight the increasing challenges faced by those principals who teach full-time in addition to their leadership role – commonly referred to as 'Teaching Principals' - and to make recommendations that will address some of those challenges, so that Teaching Principals may be enabled to focus on their core function – to lead the teaching and learning in their schools.

Today I will set out these challenges and recommendations, with particular reference to the impact of work overload on the ability of Teaching Principals to **effectively lead and manage the teaching and learning in their schools**, and also the impact this has on their personal health well-being and personal life.

Over half of primary school principals teach full-time in addition to their school leadership role, as close to 2,000 schools in the state have fewer than 177 pupils.

In 2000, the Department introduced 'release days' to allow Teaching Principals to 'undertake administrative, leadership and management functions'. The number of days depends on the number of classroom teachers in the school and there are between 17 and 29 days per school year available, from September 2018, for this purpose. This is inadequate. IPPN's number one priority for several years has been to secure a minimum of one day a week for Teaching Principals to undertake their school leadership responsibilities.

Teaching is a full-time role, where the responsibilities and expectations have expanded exponentially in recent years. I believe everyone can appreciate the importance of devoting all of your time and energy as a teacher to the pupils and their learning. That is no more than all of our pupils deserve. It is also the understandable expectation of every parent in the country that their child's teacher focuses entirely on teaching and learning. All teachers and all principals are acutely aware of this.

The role of Principal is *also* critical to the school's success – to the culture, the environment, the quality of relationships across the school community and to the quality of teaching and learning, among numerous other aspects of school life. Principals need adequate time to lead teaching and learning, to manage all aspects of the school's work, and to support the Board of Management in governing the work of the school. It would be hard to argue otherwise. Yet the 2000 Teaching Principals in the country are expected to do both roles at the same time. It is **simply unsustainable** with the current resources available to them. They are continually being called away from teaching to deal with other important tasks –

whether this means responding to urgent matters relating to pupils or members of staff, answering the phone, dealing with those calling to the school and a myriad of administrative issues which should be the responsibility of ancillary staff. It is a significant concern that those children in the teaching principal's class often pay the price for these interruptions. The principal also pays the price – in stress levels, guilt, work overload and so on.

Despite that, Teaching Principals are the school leaders with the LEAST support – as secretarial/ administrative, caretaking and cleaning, middle leadership posts, financial and other resources are all based on the size of the school. It also has to be clarified that the way schools are categorised is fundamentally flawed, because the complexity of teaching and learning is not taken into consideration – the number of teachers counted for the calculation of leadership and management days refers to mainstream class teachers only. It does not take into account additional support and ancillary staff such as learning support teachers, resource teachers, special class teachers, special needs assistants, ancillary staff or bus escorts, in addition to other staff such as nurses and occupational therapists that are often allocated to special schools. These additional staff members report on daily basis to the principal.

Some schools have three teachers, including the principal, and a part-time secretary. They are considered to be a 3-teacher school. Another school may have 3 mainstream class teachers, a resource teacher, a learning support teacher, 4 SNAs, as well as ancillary staff. They are also considered a 3-teacher school, even though there are more than 9 staff in the school. They are not equal, but they get the same resources. It is fundamentally unfair.

So, we believe that two key things need to be prioritised to support Teaching Principals.

Firstly, **adequate TIME to carry out leadership and management responsibilities** i.e. a minimum of one day per week and within that, a re-categorisation of schools to take into account the reality of the actual size of the school. For this to work, a national panel of qualified substitute teachers needs to be set up and allocated to clusters of schools - to ensure adequate and consistent cover for Teaching Principals' leadership and management days.

Secondly, all schools need to have **access to full-time skilled administrative support**, to ensure all the administration is carried out efficiently and to facilitate communication with parents and others – to free up the principal from such work so they can focus on teaching and learning, leadership and management. There are a number of ways to achieve this, which we would be happy to discuss.

Thirdly, and very importantly, 18 of the 137 special schools are led by teaching principals. Due to the complexities of the role of principal of a special school, the large numbers of non-teaching staff and many special schools catering for both primary and post-primary pupils, IPPN recommends that **principals of ALL special schools be automatically designated as administrative principals**.

I would be delighted to elaborate on any of the above. Of course we have plenty other suggestions that we don't have time to go into today, but we will provide additional information to you for further consideration.

Thank you.