



Teachers' Union of Ireland

Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills regarding 'the status of non-teaching staff in school' (April 2019)

Introduction

TUI represents teachers and lecturers (17,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools and the institutes of technology.

Key Points

The TUI welcomes the work of the Oireachtas Committee in examining **the status for non-teaching staff in schools**. This is important both in terms of staff working inside schools such as secretarial and caretaking/cleaning staff and also staff working in vital support agencies such as CAMHS/NEPS/Tusla etc. The role of SNAs in supporting the care needs of students with special educational needs is also relevant here.

Recent years have seen drastic cuts in the resourcing of support agencies in particular. Schools rely heavily on support agencies, especially when working with students with special needs or students experiencing crisis. Crisis situations require the presence of ex quota guidance teachers but also other specialist agencies. Guidance staff in schools, and principal teachers, often find it very difficult to access outside support when needed as the agencies themselves are under significant pressure. The TUI recognises the valuable work done by staff in agencies such as Tusla, the National Council for Special Education, the Health Services Executive, the National Educational Psychological Service and many others. Despite

the best efforts of staff in those agencies, the level of resourcing available to them means that schools often cannot access professional support when needed. In recent weeks, the TUI has heard reports of possible cutbacks in the National Behaviour Support Service. We have been unsuccessful in contacting the NBSS to assess if these reports are correct.

The most important issue in relation to staffing is to ensure that schools have access to well-trained, high quality teachers. The current crisis in teacher supply is unhelpful in this regard. The solution to the teacher supply crisis is clear – it is to resolve once and for all the issue of discriminatory pay rates.

The presence of both non-teaching and teaching staff is vital to schools. The great educational theorist Larry Cuban once said that “when society gets an itch schools get scratched”. Schools have responsibilities but so too does society. Schools should not be held responsible for issues beyond the remit, resourcing or staffing of schools. The smooth running of schools requires the availability of non-teaching staff including caretaking, cleaning and secretarial staff. Many post-primary schools are open from early in the morning until late in the night. Many also open their doors to the local community over weekends. It is not possible to safely and reasonably do this with an allocation, as available to many schools, of one caretaker and one cleaner. Furthermore, in some schools, non-teaching staff are paid through ancillary grant, which means that their pay is determined by individual school boards of management. This causes a significant issue in terms of consistency and fairness. The TUI supports our colleagues in Forsa in their current campaign on this issue.

Next Steps

The TUI welcomes this research by the Oireachtas Committee and would strongly welcome any future initiatives of the Committee to further examine the issue of staffing resources for schools. This could include the Oireachtas Committee asking the DES to carry out an audit of non-teaching staff supporting schools. This data could demonstrate exactly how many non-teaching staff are available now compared to a decade ago. This data could further

take into account the huge rise in student numbers being experienced in second-level schools between 2012 and 2025.

Ends