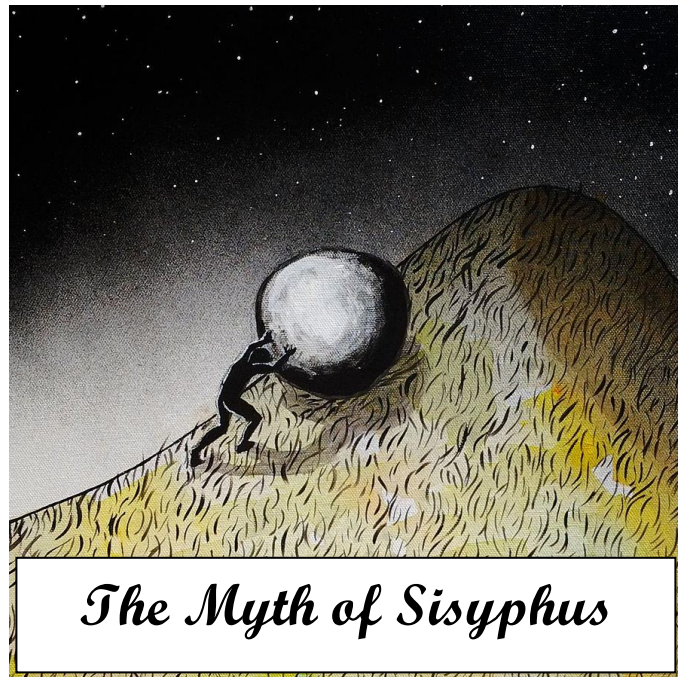




National Principals' Forum

Submission from the National Principals' Forum to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills - August 2018



The Myth of Sisyphus

United for Integrity: Recommendations to address the untenable situation of Primary Principals

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Introduction:

1,765 out of 3,114 Primary schools in Ireland have a Teaching Principal (56.7%) (Appendix 6). All Principals, administrative and teaching, are under immense pressure from the increase in workload in their roles. Those with the dual responsibilities of teaching a class while performing the additional duties of Principal are finding that the punitive workload is adversely affecting both their mental and physical wellbeing.

The National Principals' Forum has been established as a grassroots campaign group set up specifically to highlight the intolerable working conditions being endured by principals. The group comprises of both teaching and administrative principals from every single county in the Republic. Though relatively new, it is well-organised, vibrant and determined to achieve its goals by engaging with the stakeholders in education to affect meaningful change. To date the forum has engaged with the IPPN, addressed parliamentarians in Leinster house and corresponded with the Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton T.D. (Appendix 2).

This submission describes many of the challenges facing school leaders and the many additional duties they undertake. These include unending demands to comply with regulatory requirements and new initiatives, increased administrative duties and ongoing challenges to retain teacher numbers.

The results of a survey of Teaching Principals shows disturbing levels of stress and overwork causing detrimental effects to both mental and physical health as well as family life. 89% of Principals have seen their health impacted, 84% have seriously considered stepping down from their positions and the vast majority are working excessive.

The future of the Primary Education System is very much at risk. Most worryingly, educational outcomes and the school experiences of Pupils are being impacted.

The National Principal's Forum seeks:

- The Allocation of at least one day per week Release Time to all Teaching Principals.
- A review of the criteria for calculating Release Time, in consultation with Principals.
- Administrative status for Teaching Principals in Special Schools / with Special Classes.
- To reduce the rate of new circulars and initiatives from the Department and to include principals in discussions to develop the priorities for each academic year.
- Full-time secretarial support and specific training for School Secretaries.
- Pay parity, agreed upon in 2007, to be implemented for all Principal Teachers.
- Provision to be made for a dignified step-down process for Principal Teachers.
- Adequate finances to support the running of schools.
- Restoration of pay equality for all teachers.
- The full restoration of posts of responsibility.

International Research has identified the importance of school leaders in influencing pupils outcomes (OECD, 2007) and it is generally accepted that “the success of the Irish Education System is down to the quality and commitment of the people who teach in, lead and manage our schools” (Seamus Mulconry – CPSMA).

Voluntary initiatives undertaken, such as cooperation with Teacher Training Colleges, GAA/sporting activities, Green School Initiatives, plays etc., which generally make schools more attractive, inclusive and child centred are being side-lined as school leaders attend more and more to compliance and bureaucracy.

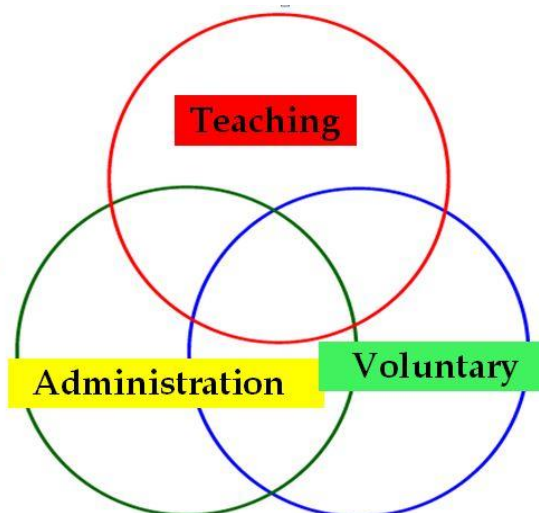


Figure 1-Conflicting Duties of Principals.

This document outlines how teaching principals are chronically over-worked and under-supported in their roles, with a huge cost to their health and wellbeing. Principals are increasingly stepping down from their roles or moving into administrative positions in other schools (including Deputy Principalships in larger schools, which is a better paid, much less onerous and a less stressful position than Teaching Principal). The education system is haemorrhaging some of its finest leaders. The future of Educational Leadership in Ireland is in jeopardy and educational outcomes will inevitably be seriously compromised.

What are the biggest challenges you currently face in your Principal role?

Mentimeter



Figure 2: Views expressed at Primary Principals' forum meeting July 2018

Main challenges of the Dual Role of the Teaching Principal:

- The role of the Primary School Principal Teacher – has not been defined in over 40 years. Circular 16/75 is the only document that attempts to list the duties of the Principal. There has been much legislative, curricular and societal change in the intervening years.
- Many publications in the past twenty years have identified problematic issues around recruitment, remuneration, the rate of change and introduction of new legislation and initiatives and the wellbeing of Principal Teachers (Appendix 9). Many years ago, the role of the Teaching Principal was identified as being “extremely difficult if not impossible to deliver on effectively”, (Hay Group Report, 2002).
- There has been increasing accountability across all areas of educational provision and in the day to day management of schools. Principals are fully responsible for all activities within their school– with the support of a *voluntary* Board of Management (Appendix 4).
- Leadership duties are undertaken in addition to full teaching responsibilities – in many instances in multi-grade classes – with far less secretarial, financial or post-holders support than that afforded to administrative principals. This is exacerbated in smaller schools.
- Teaching Principals have the same administrative, compliance and leadership responsibilities as fully administrative Principal colleagues. They are *held accountable to the same standards* by the Inspectorate. They have approximately 900 less paid hours per school year to fulfil these duties due to their teaching duties.
- Cuts to small schools made in 2011/2012 have had a detrimental effect on these schools and their leaders, who are “year on year” at the mercy of reaching a specific number of pupils retain teachers. A small incoming Junior Infant class or a large outgoing sixth class can have a catastrophic effect on a school. Losing a mainstream teacher due to a shortage of a pupil or two has far reaching consequences for educational provision and whole school planning.
- The appointment figure for gaining back a mainstream post is much higher than the retention figure for keeping this post. This causes huge pressure for small schools.
- The value of small schools to their communities cannot be underestimated or viewed primarily through an economic lens.
- In 2017 there were eighty-four Circulars released by the DES. So far, this year Circular Forty has been reached by July.
- Circulars require careful reading, interpretation and implementation by Principal Teachers. There is a huge workload attached to each circular and they generally have compliance or serious legislative implications that must be attended to.

- Adhering to every directive from DES leads to an unbalanced relationship between administrative and teaching responsibilities, the principal's focus will be on ensuring boxes are ticked rather than teaching which leads to poorer pupil outcomes.
- In a recent survey (Appendix 1) **89% of teaching Principals reported adverse effects on their health**. It is grim reading but highly reflective of Principals' experience.
- Principals are unable to deal with administration duties during the school day and so it is completed during personal time; adversely affecting family life and work-life balance. Many Principals are forced to burn the candle at both ends all year round.
- School holidays are spent dealing with a backlog of administrative paperwork and class planning, in addition to managing building projects, maintenance issues, recruitment/appointment procedures, etc. There is no time to get much needed recuperation or rest.
- The stress directly attributed to this role is extremely hazardous to both mental and physical health (Appendix 1- Survey and Appendix 8 -Testimonials).
- Traditionally, school leaders relied on the voluntary efforts of parents and the local communities. While requirements for Garda Vetting and safeguarding practices are understood, it should be acknowledged that the Garda Vetting is a complicated process, slow and arduous, which turns people off and discourages volunteerism.
- The recent introduction of a more expansive CSL Mentoring Programme and Carecall service is welcomed. These valuable services are designed to offer principals mentoring from their peers when newly appointed or coaching to a limited number of principals annually or to treat the symptoms of crisis or burnout but cannot address the root cause. The CPSMA reported a seventy-two per cent increase in calls to their helpdesk in the past four years.
- The future of the Primary Education System is very much at risk if the current trends around teaching principal burnout and step-down are not addressed immediately.
- Teaching is still a popular career choice, but the retention and promotion of our brightest students is a serious issue- we are educating our young teachers, and future school leaders, only to lose them to demoralisation, apathy and emigration.

Additional Responsibilities of a Principal Teacher:

- Online Claims System (OLCS)
- Pupil Online Database (POD)
- Serving as Secretary to the Board of Management (No remuneration for anyone appointed post 2012)
- DEIS Plans
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Application for SNA access / Liaising with SENOs
- Appointments of ancillary staff / SNAs/ Teachers
- NCCA
- STEM
- Liaising with the Inspectorate
- Leading teaching and Learning
- Managing Critical Incidents
- Managing Curricular Change
- Liaising with CAMHS / HSE/ NEPS
- Liaising with the Parents' Association
- Arranging/ chairing Staff Meetings/ following up on decisions made
- Coordinating, arranging for the ratification and dissemination of whole school plans
- Child Protection responsibilities
- PDST
- Special Education Teachers- Time-tabling/ Supporting/ Liaising/ Inputting for IEPS etc.
- Circulars Compliance
- Teaching Council compliance
- Dealing with and managing Challenging Behaviour in all classes
- CPD
- GDPR
- School Self- Evaluation
- Inclusion
- Legislation
- School Improvement Plan
- TUSLA
- GAA
- SEAI
- INTO
- FSSU
- National Parents' Council
- Work with the Education Welfare Officer
- Numeracy and Literacy Strategy
- Public Relations
- Social Media
- AISTEAR
- Human Resources
- GAA
- LGFA
- FAI
- Camogie Association
- Bullying Incidents (both in school and online)
- Student Teachers
- Assessment
- Grievances
- Medmark
- Enrolments
- School Transport
- Payroll Maintenance
- Code of Professionalism
- Droichead
- Intimate Care
- Staff
- Supervision
- EAL
- Book Rental
- Societal Issues
- Bereavement
- Religious Sacraments
- Multiculturalism
- Health and Safety
- Fundraising

Research Questionnaire Findings

In May 2018, 270 Teaching Principals, with representatives from all 26 counties participated in a questionnaire to ascertain the challenges and barriers that they face in carrying out their duties. This exercise sought their input into how they view their role and regard their situation.

The key findings of this survey are:

- **Between 62%- 91% work an additional 20-30 hours per week in addition to school hours.** This means that principals are working as many hours in the classroom as in the office (in some cases more) and still must prepare and mark corrections for their classes. Taking the allowance of a principal with four other teachers (P+4), they would earn a total allowance of €179 per week gross pay. A Teaching Principal working twenty-five extra hours per week is earning an allowance of €7.16 per hour before tax. A Teaching Principal working thirty extra hours per week is earning an allowance of €5.97 per hour before tax for their extra and onerous responsibilities.

Official School Size	% of Survey Respondants who admitted to working 20-30 Additional Hours Per week.
2 Teacher	62%
3 Teacher	55%
4 Teacher	70%
5 Teacher	81%
6 Teacher	91%

- 100% of schools have a far larger staff than is recognised or counted towards the allocation of either release time, administration status or salary.
- **89% of Teaching Principals have had their health adversely affected by their role.**
- **84% of Teaching Principals have considered stepping down from their role**
- Average secretarial, cleaning and caretaking provision are not covering the schools' needs. These services are underfunded.
- 13% of the schools surveyed have special classes.
- 76% of those surveyed said that they cannot physically open a special class.
- 70% of schools have an insufficient Special Education Teacher (SET) allocation.

Mental Health	Physical Health
Stress and anxiety	Migraines
Burn Out	Heart Palpitations
Insomnia	Exhaustion
Sense of failure/ inadequacy	Tension related back issues
Demoralised	High blood pressure
Depression	Chest pains
Strain on family life and relationships	Miscarriage
No quality of life	IBS, Crohn's disease, colitis
Hopelessness	Shingles

Figure 3 Health issues reported by teaching principals

Recommendations to address challenges faced by Teaching Principals:

1- A minimum of one day per week Release Time for all Teaching Principals.

At present the level of release days allocated to Teaching Principals is inequitable and inadequate. This is compounded by a substitute teacher shortage. The ad-hoc basis in which

Release Time for Teaching Principals in Primary Schools	
Size of School	Number of days Release Time
Principal + 5/6	29
Principal +3/4	23
Principal + 0/1/2	17

a substitute teacher can be acquired (depending on availability), leads to planning issues and inconsistency of curriculum delivery. This is completely unfair on both pupils and conscientious Principals.

Figure 4 Release Time allocated for Teaching Principals.

(The figures required for these purposes are enrolments on 30 September 2017)

STAFFING SCHEDULE FOR 2018/19 SCHOOL YEAR			
Principal plus mainstream classroom teachers (MCT) as follows:	Ordinary Schools & Gaelscoileanna Appointment & Retention	Gaeltacht Schools	
		Appointment	Retention
P+1	18 *	18 *	17
P+2	54 **	54	51
P+3	84 ***	84	81
P+4	113	113	95
P+5	143	143	121
P+6	171	171	152
P+7	176	176	157

Figure 5: Thresholds for the appointment and retention of Teaching Staff

Principals must carefully plan work for their classes before taking a release day. If a substitute teacher cannot be secured, but the day is necessary for the Teaching Principal to take, classes must be split between other teachers and classrooms, effectively leaving pupils without instruction for the day and interfering with the work of the entire school.

Principals spend much time dealing with unscheduled issues that arise when they take a Principal Release Day to attend to essential administration work or meetings. The effect of not having regularly planned release time and a consistent substitute teacher places pupils who must deal with their teacher being absent at a disadvantage. Even if pupils should meet their educational targets and outcomes, the lack of consistency has a detrimental effect on pupils' confidence and can create anxiety or trigger emotional or behavioural issues for children, especially for those with special needs – these needs also are learning outcomes.

Many release days (inaccurately referred to as “extra days off” recently in the Seanad) are spent attending training or information days relating to the relentless onslaught of new initiatives – either curricular or legislative, as there is often no substitution cover provided. Principals are then expected to find time to deliver this information back to staff and to plan, implement and monitor the change.

To grant all teaching principals a minimum of one release day a week (which has been standard practice in Northern Ireland for over 10 years), will not solve the work overload issue but would enable Principals to plan more effectively to manage this workload.

The *National Principals’ Forum* estimates that the annual cost for this measure would be €4,942,000. This figure is calculated as number of schools X number of days to make 37 release days X cost per day for substitution.

There are currently 1,765 Schools to be considered.

14 days needed is estimated as an average number between 20 days needed by 2 teacher schools to 8 days needed by larger schools.

A teacher who entered before 1st Jan 2011 will cost approx. €209.29 per day. A teacher post 1st Jan 2011 will cost €186.47 per day. For the purposes of this calculation a figure of €200 per day is used.

- 1,765 schools x 14 days x €200 sub. rate p/d = €4,942,000

The Department have suggested that this measure would could cost over €12 million. This would be the case if every school required the maximum of 20 extra Administration Days and if every substitute was to be paid at the top of the pay scale €341. (1800 X 20 X €341 = €12,276,600). These assumptions are wrong and an independent appraisal of the cost for this crucial support should be undertaken.

2-A review of the criteria for granting Principal Release Time.

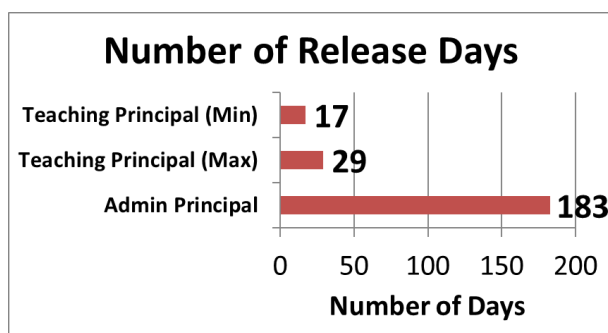


Figure 6: Administration Time Discrepancies

There is huge inequity in the current criteria for allocating release time. Only mainstream class teachers count towards the allocation of Principal Release Time. Special Education or Special Class Teachers are not counted, rather are considered bizarrely to be ‘ex-quota’. Special Needs Assistants and Ancillary School Staff are not considered for either Principal salary or allocation of Release Time calculations. The survey conducted (Appendix 1),

shows that all Teaching Principals, irrespective of school size, are managing a much larger staff than is recognised for the purpose of either salary calculation or the allocation of Principal Release Time. All

personnel managed by a Principal should be reflected in Release Time and Salary calculations. HR is a huge demand on Principal time and energy and requires skilful management. The complexities of this multi-faceted role are very poorly reflected in salary. Combined with the stress and workload – it is easy to comprehend why step down is becoming so prevalent and why Teaching Principal Positions attract very few applicants across the country. What should and could be a highly sought-after position has become an onerous and unattractive one where the cons far outweigh the pros in terms of remuneration, job satisfaction, health and wellbeing.

The current criteria for the allocation of release days is illogical. A Teaching Principal can go from a maximum of 29 release days to 183 days (Administrative Principal Status) with the addition of one pupil to achieve the magic number of 113 pupils if you have an ASD Unit, or 176 pupils if you do not have an ASD Unit. A school may have one special class, but you must have two such classes to be classified as a Unit by DES. A more equitable and realistic sliding scale into Administrative Principal Status is required.

3- Principals in Special Schools or with Special Classes need more resources and Release Time.

Teaching Principals of Special Schools or schools with a Special Unit (ASD, EBD etc.), need full administrative status regardless of school size or enrolment. It is not fair on anyone, least of all pupils. Staff in these schools need an increased level of direction and support from their Principal. In the current set up, they cannot access this support during teaching hours as principals are responsible for their own full teaching duties and must try to minimise interruptions to this time. In the absence of any guidance or policy from the DES for issues such as physical intervention in the event of pupil self-injury or aggressive physical misconduct, who else can the teachers rely on for support or intervention but their Principal?

This is both hindering the success of existing special classes and is discouraging schools, who may wish to open a special class, but are fearful of the increased workload and complexity of this development without appropriate supports.

Principal Teachers are keenly aware of best practice planning for SEN pupils and endeavour to support inclusion within the support afforded to our schools by the DES. Principals reject the implication in some releases from the Department that they are not doing enough to accommodate SEN pupils. The truth is that Principals are one of their biggest advocates in the education systems, adept at fighting their corner with the SENOs, NCSE, DES and other external agencies and adept at managing scant SEN resources.

The New SET Model, which has mainly been embraced by Principal teachers also places immense accountability on them and is a potential litigation nightmare for schools. Analysis shows (Appendix 1) that 70% of Teaching Principals are unhappy with the SET allocation given to their school and pupils under the new model yet are fully accountable to understandably anxious and aggrieved parents etc...

4- Pay Parity for Principals, agreed upon in 2007, needs to be implemented

In 2007, Section 14.15 of the Report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body (PSBB) made a significant pay recommendation in respect of Principals and Deputy Principals in Primary Schools. The PSBB noted the difference in allowances at primary and post primary levels. A revised system of allowances was recommended to achieve pay parity. It was considered that Teaching Principals were particularly disadvantaged by the existing allowance system considering the duality of the role. The case for payment of this award was made and won by an independent body (Submission on behalf of INTO/TUI to the Public Service Pay Commission, January 2017). It has never been paid.

Principal Teachers are steadfast and dedicated leaders. An allowance (Appendix 7) in addition to the Teaching Salary is awarded to remunerate for the additional duties of Principalship. Again, it is important to note that only teaching staff are considered in the calculation of a Principal's allowance and therefore the remuneration for this complex managerial position is not at all reflective of actual workload or workforce being managed.

Prior to the PSBB Report in 2007, The Report on the Public Service Benchmarking Body in 2002 found that "Principals are the only public service leadership/managerial grade rewarded within the same salary scale as those they manage/lead". "Rewarding the leadership role of Principal by simply adding an allowance to a teacher's salary compromises the role before it even begins. This contributes to the crisis in the recruitment and retention of Principals as teachers believe that the role is simply not worth the remuneration" (Investing in School Leadership, 2006, IPPN). Add to this the excessive strains and stress leading to ill health in 89% of Teaching Principals and this creates an untenable situation.

The average teaching Principal earns between €10 - €20 per day after tax. The recent Questionnaire results found that between 62% - 91% of Teaching Principals in all small school sizes work an extra 20 -30 hours per week in addition to their school week (Appendix 1). This is further supported by the startling results of a survey conducted by Dr Philip Riley from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and commissioned jointly by primary and second level principals' networks, IPPN and NAPD. "The research revealed that *more than half of school leaders in Ireland work more than 41 hours a week during term*, with almost one in five working more than 56 hours and nearly one in ten working more than 60 hours – that's 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. During school 'holidays', more than a fifth work more than 25 hours a week. It seems there is an issue with rest and recuperation, which we know is a recipe for poor health." (Páirc Clerkin, CEO, IPPN).

There are not enough hours in the day to deal with all the paperwork and face to face interaction and communication necessary to ensure a well-managed and proactive school and a well-managed and planned for class. When juggling so much with so little support from the DES, there is always a very real danger of dropping the ball somewhere, somehow.

5- Consult Principals to develop the priorities for each academic year and agree a calendar for issuing circulars

Too many circulars and directives are issued by the Department without due regard to the ability of Educators to digest and implement them. There needs to be a reduction in the rate of new circulars and initiatives being issued. Principals' representatives should be included in discussions to develop policy priorities and agree an implementation calendar during each academic year. Initiative overload is a major stressor for Principals.

6- Full-time secretarial support and specific training for School Secretaries.

Secretaries should be paid directly by the DES and have fair terms of employment, with consistent pay throughout the year, hours and holiday arrangements – relieving the Principal of the Revenue and Payroll issues associated with ancillary staff. Additionally, it must be noted that Teaching Principals do not have the time needed to liaise with their secretary during the school day and this often leads to more administrative work than is necessary falling to the Principal. In addition to general secretarial skills, training for secretaries should specifically include working with OLCS (Online Claim System), POD (Pupil Online Database), ESINET (portal for DES circulars etc), ROS (Revenue online), Payroll, Online Banking, School Email, Text system, School Intranet, Accounting, Website, Newsletter, and the myriad of DES forms and publications relevant to school administration. This would be an immense help to Teaching Principals. It is a reasonable and practical expectation that all Principal Teachers have adequate secretarial support.

7-Implement a dignified Step-Down process for Principal Teachers.

84% of Teaching Principals have considered stepping down due to workload/detriment to health crisis (Appendix 1). However, they have no options available to them to recognise their years of dedicated leadership in their schools. They automatically lose their seniority and move to the bottom of this list in the unlikely event that there is a teaching position available in their school. The more likely scenario is that they become unemployed, with no panel rights, no financial security and lose much of their pension entitlements. Very many Principal teachers have stepped down this year. Several attempts to secure data about this have been made. i.e. putting Parliamentary questions to the Minister, submitting data requests to the DES, reaching out to the relevant stakeholders (CPSMA, INTO and IPPN) to highlight this serious trend. This needs to be analysed. There are countless examples of anecdotal evidence of principals having stepped down in the past two years due to their health or wellbeing being compromised by their positions. The Oireachtas Education Committee is urged to investigate this further.

8-Provide Adequate Finance for Schools

The forum calls for measures to reduce the constant stress and fear around budgetary issues in schools, and the relentless fundraising which Principals must organise to pay our utility bills,

fund maintenance, pay school insurance, etc. The annual uncertainty in relation to payment of the minor works grant is extremely stressful and problematic.

The maintenance and cost of maintenance of school buildings is one of the most stressful and problematic aspects of the Principal's role. Many Principal Teachers report having to personally unblock sewage pipes or to request spouses and other family members to patch up broken items, paint, cut grass, strim weeds etc. Those jobs which must be outsourced to professionals – plumbing, building etc., must be project managed by Principals, and almost always in their own personal time.

Schools are public buildings and should be properly maintained and financed by the government. The Capitation grant for Primary School pupils is less than half of that granted to Secondary school pupils – despite schools having the same overheads and financial stresses in primary level.

9- Restore pay equality for all teachers

Pay inequality is a seriously detrimental blight on the teaching profession. There are no incentives for the brightest young students to train to become teachers, no incentives for great young teacher graduates to remain in Ireland and no incentive to up-skill or engage with C.P.D. It is an unacceptable situation which has done much harm in the past 7 years. It is very difficult to lead a team of teachers who work in the same school, the same staffroom, undertaking the same work, accountable to achieving and maintaining the same standards of teaching and compliance, while being on an unequal pay scale to their colleagues. The cost of this measure is estimate at €10 million which has been endorsed by the I.N.T.O.

10- Full restoration of Posts of Responsibility

School leaders play a key role in improving educational outcomes by creating a positive school climate and environment. It is generally accepted that the quality of school leadership is second only to effective classroom teaching, in having a crucial impact on pupil learning (Circular 0063/2017). The partial restoration of Posts of Responsibility in some schools is acknowledged, though this did come with additional requirement on all schools to engage in an arduous school self-evaluation process. To properly support all Principals and to help with the increased responsibilities of leadership, the full restoration of Posts of responsibility is a necessity.

Appendix 1: Findings of Teaching Principals' Forum Questionnaire- May 2018

Teaching Principal Forum Questionnaire – May 2018

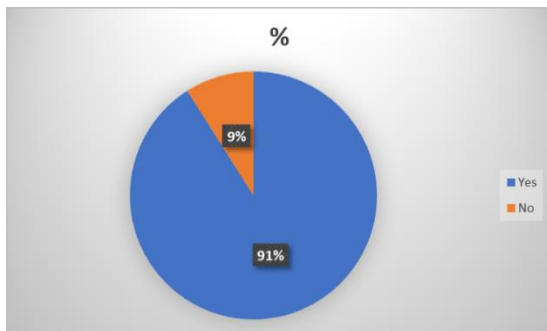
Purpose: To gather information about the reality of the workload of Teaching Principals and of the impacts on their health and wellbeing.

Responses were received from all 26 Counties and from 270 Teaching Principals across all school sizes.

Q - How many staff are employed in your school including SNAs, Secretarial Staff and Caretakers?

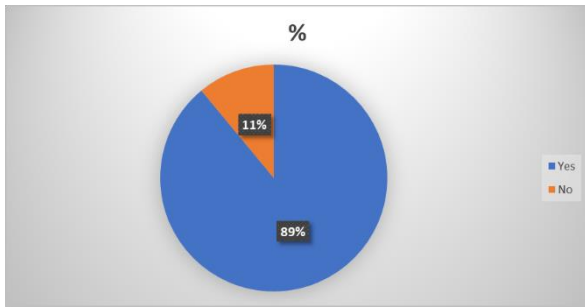
Official School Size	Average Number of Staff Managed by Principal	Number of Release Days Granted
2 Teacher	5.8	15 (17 Next Year)
3 Teacher	7.7	15 (17 Next Year)
4 Teacher	12	20 (23 Next Year)
5 Teacher	11.1	20 (23 Next Year)
6 Teacher	13.8	25 (29 Next Year)

% of Schools with Secretarial Support



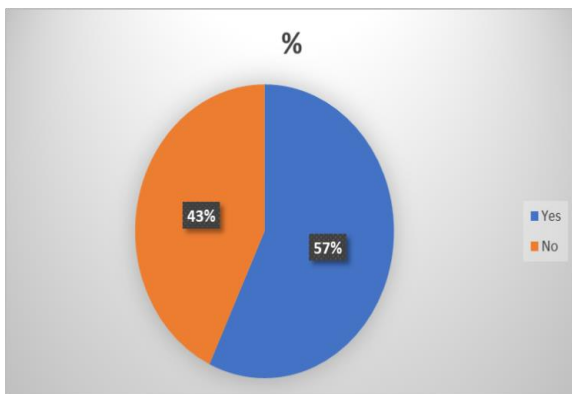
Official School Size	Number of Secretarial Hours per week
2 Teacher	7
3 Teacher	8.5
4 Teacher	11.8
5 Teacher	19
6 Teacher	18.5

% with Health Impacted by Workload as Teaching Principal



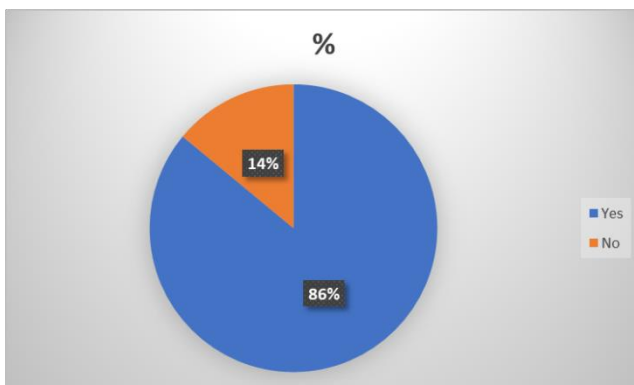
Mental Health	Physical Health
Stress and anxiety	Migraines
Burn Out	Heart Palpitations
Insomnia	Exhaustion
Sense of failure/ inadequacy	Tension related back issues
Demoralised	High blood pressure
Depression	Chest pains
Strain on family life and relationships	Miscarriage
No quality of life	IBS, Crohn's disease, colitis
Hopelessness	Shingles
No work-life balance	Stress related Cancer

Schools with Access to Caretaker Services



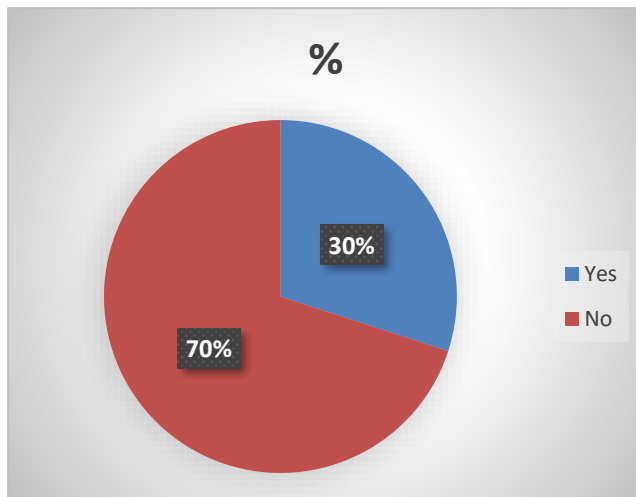
The 57% of schools that have a caretaker, have access to this service for an average of 6.5 hours per week.

Schools with Access to a Cleaner



The 86% of schools that have a cleaner, have access to this service for an average of 6.6 hours per week.

Schools who feel they have adequate Special Education Teaching Hours



41% of respondents appealed their allotment of SET hours

Of this, 62% were unsuccessful and 25% are still awaiting result of their appeal. 13% were successful with SNA appeal only. 0% were successful with appealing SET allocation

70% were unhappy with their allotment of hours but up to 29% did not have the energy or time to lodge an appeal of their allocation.

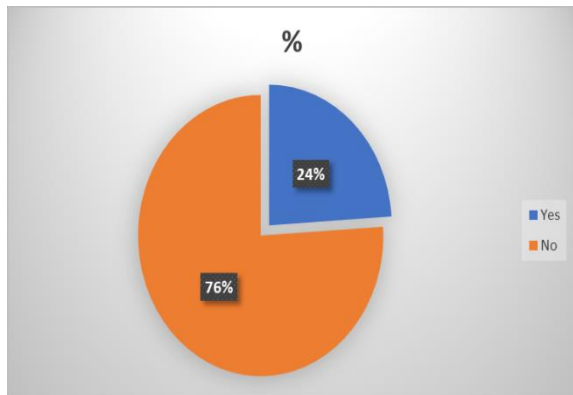
Reasons Given by Principals to Explain why Students Cannot Access Enough Special Education Resources:

- SET allocation is insufficient to meet the school's SEN needs.
- Appeal of SET allocation was unsuccessful.
- More pupils were assessed or identified with SEN since the allocation was set 2017 for two years.
- The current SET model while welcomed for its aspirations for greater flexibility and inclusivity is not fit for purpose and there is no room for expansion.
- Particular issues arise for schools with special classes in relation to pupils transitioning into mainstream class. They remain on the ASD spectrum needing SET and possibly continued SNA access without extra access for this being sanctioned or considered. This is a huge hindrance to their progress and morale.
- No forward planning of thinking by the DES and NCSE in relation to long term management of these special classes.

Capacity to Develop Special Education Provision

Q. Does your school have a Special Education class? - Yes = 13%

Does your school have the capacity to open a Special Class if compelled?



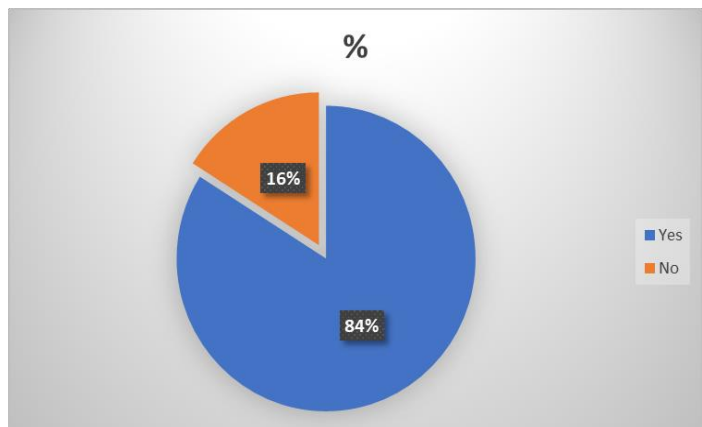
Reasons given why school could not open a Special Education Class include:

- Lack of physical space
- Lack of resources
- Lack of DES Support
- Lack of staff training
- Lack of time
- Huge increase in administrative workload and time needed to liaise with external professionals, agencies, parents and staff.
- Lack of support for Teaching Principal with additional staff and workload.

Additional Hours Worked by Teaching Principals

Official School Size	% of Survey Respondants who admitted to working 20-30 Additional Hours Per week.
2 Teacher	62%
3 Teacher	55%
4 Teacher	70%
5 Teacher	81%
6 Teacher	91%

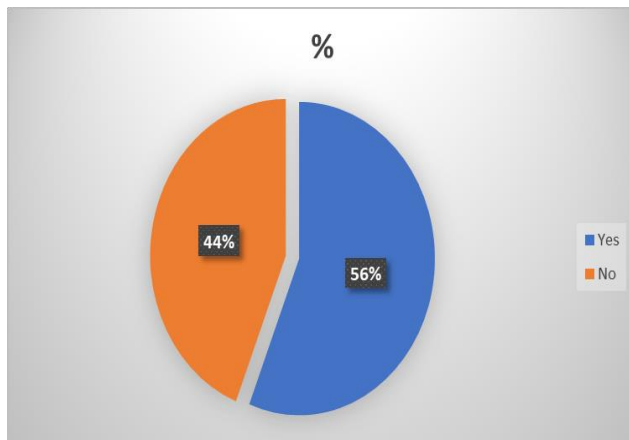
% Who Have Seriously Considered Resigning



Why did you decide not to resign?

- Want to be able to do the job we signed up for.
- Professional pride and sense of responsibility.
- No dignified or fair step down facility.
- Financial implications
- School would be placed in jeopardy of closing.
- Public perception/Inherent implication is that you are not fit for the job.
- Stoicism
- Hoping for change to come

Do you feel supported by the Board of Mgt? support?



Which other relevant bodies offer

14% identified the INTO as a source of support.

47% identified the IPPN as a supportive body.

17% identified the CPSMA as a supportive body.

56% felt *morally* supported but not *practically* supported by their BOM.

Other bodies mentioned as being supportive by the respondents include: local Principal support groups, Educate Together Management body, PDST, staff, parents, Deputy Principal, CSL, Diocesan office, Teaching Council, SESS.

Do you feel Supported by the Department of Education and Skills? Why?

No – 100%

- DES is taking advantage.
- Does not answer calls.
- Does not respond to queries in a timely manner.
- Regularly does not respond directly to emails.
- Staff can be rude and impatient to Teaching Principals.
- They are not in tune with our reality at all.
- Rate of dissemination of new circulars and initiatives is far too fast.
- Timing of these circulars/ initiatives is also very unhelpful and pointed – e.g. Friday evenings, immediately before/ during school holidays etc. Perception is that this is designed to avoid a backlash or resistance.
- Response to any queries or call for assistance is usually answered with a list of information already known to us but not addressing the issue at hand.

Additional Comments submitted by Teaching Principals in the Questionnaire:

- It's akin to trying to shovel snow in a blizzard."
- "It's like trying to bail water out of a sinking ship."
- BOM has a "very onerous role with many legal responsibilities. The lion's share of this falls to me."
- "Principals feel isolated because we don't want to let ourselves or our schools down."
- "There should be no such thing as a teaching Principal. It is an oxymoron, a virtual impossibility. The role is no longer sustainable with all the demands of today's education system."
- "How can anyone reasonably think that this job is doable?"
- "Ireland's most diligent, dedicated and visionary leaders are being failed by all who purport to represent us, not least the DES."
- "The problem isn't a lack of capability, or mental illness or weakness of any sort – the problem is the workload one person is impossibly charged with."
- "Callcare will not sustain me in this role. It is a welcome support but a temporary help in a permanently awful situation – it treats the symptoms not the root cause – the workload."
- "This is sheer and utter exploitation."
- "The greatest resource in any school is its staff. Invest in this and observe a system blossom for both the educated and the educators."
- "Teaching Principals are severely overworked and underpaid. The quality of teaching and learning and the health of Principals are in serious danger."
- "I am not sleeping or eating. I'm regularly sick but never out due to lack of sub. cover. I have resigned from my position – it's not worth it! It's a very unfulfilling role – a thankless job."
- "I have been working so hard to get out of the hole I find myself in for the past two years. I am swamped with work overload. It never ends. I cannot cope. I am miserable."
- "I am a good leader. I have tried everything. I know what works and how to be effective in my role, but lack of time and support makes it impossible for me to continue. My health is in bits."
- "I lost my baby due to chronic work-related stress."
- "My marriage has suffered because of the huge demands on my time and energy."
- "My staff are wonderful, always stepping into the breach where possible. I cannot delegate any more to them – they too are overburdened and stressed – this year has been the worst ever for workload. I don't think I can do it for much longer, but I can't afford to step down. I feel so trapped."
- "I don't want to give the impression that the special needs children bring so much workload with them – but they do, and I can't manage it all without support. I want to be inclusive. I advocate for SEN and inclusion every day. I cannot do a proper job to support them without support for me as school leader."
- "There is no regard for my health or my work from the DES."
- "It's like having a hundred balls fired at you all at once and someone yelling catch! I can try to juggle, I am really good at juggling, but some of them remain up in the air,

lots inevitably fall, and I am exhausted with this effort that never yields the results I strive for. It's impossible! There is no job satisfaction whatsoever."

- "I am a teaching Principal since 1994...the workload has grown so much... I am taking early retirement...you'd want your head examined to apply for this role – its inhumane!"
- "In my efforts to safeguard my pupils from the fallout of my dual role, I am utterly broken."
- "I'm going to my GP tomorrow and it looks like I won't make it through the final fortnight which makes me feel so guilty because I have so much to do. I would love to step down but the implications of losing a permanent job or being unemployed are too much."
- "I have worked too hard to throw in the towel just yet, but I am staring it in the face. It gets worse year on year. When will enough be enough?"



Teaching Principals' Forum

01/06/2018

Dear Minister Bruton,

You have heard from members of our Teaching Principals' Forum in recent weeks. We have petitioned you in relation to adequate support with regard to our increasingly excessive and unsustainable workload. We were very realistic and fair in our request for essential changes to be made to the allocation of Principal Release Time. We have yet to receive a response from you on the matter.

In the meantime you have announced your new powers to 'compel schools to open special classes' where the NCSE identifies a need. This is a decision which will have a huge impact on your already seriously overburdened and under supported Teaching Principals. The optics of your announcement were also very misleading and unfair to all schools as the implication is that we are unwilling to engage with this aspect of SEN and inclusivity when nothing could be further from the truth. We at the coalface are ardent advocates for SEN pupils and we are working ourselves to the bone to ensure fair and efficient access to education for all of our pupils within our **limited resources** and means.

The inclusion of special classes is most welcome by all of us, however it is of paramount importance that you become far more cognisant of the daily reality of our workload in order for you to understand the impact of your decision and put in place the supports necessary to enable us to continue to lead teaching and learning in our schools, which are the best in Europe by many standards due to the diligence and expertise of your dedicated teachers. We wish for this to continue however we feel that our education system is under threat from the excessive pressures we as teaching Principals are under.

Your teaching Principals are seriously burned out and disillusioned. You are losing fantastic educational leaders every month to burn out and ill health. This is unnecessary and truly a shame on the DES who should be listening to our concerns and our advocates, instead of continuing to heap initiative after initiative upon us pushing many of us to breaking point. In addition to responsibility for introducing, implementing and monitoring all of these initiatives and curriculum change, and compliance with ever changing legislation, we are fully responsible for teaching duties to our pupils. Little children who deserve our time and attention, but must settle for the crumbs off our table at times such is the level of workload placed upon us. And despite the best delegation and collaboration in the world, the workload and responsibility that rests with the teaching Principal alone is simply irresponsible and utterly impossible to manage within the current framework. This is detrimental to all concerned – teachers, pupils and the entire school community – all of whom are lead and supported by the teaching Principal. We are maintaining and improving our standards all the time but we are

completely and utterly exhausted from it and the situation is not sustainable in either the short or the long term.

The following is a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, list of our daily responsibilities and difficulties as Teaching Principals:

Administrative Policies – devise, collaborate with Parents/Staff/BOM, ratify, communicate to all stakeholders, review, update, publicise, ensure compliance, monitor. Keep abreast of new circulars, directives, etc. There are some 60+ policies which pertain to most primary schools (see appendix). Ultimate responsibility for these lie with the school Principal. Each policy must be tailored to our individual school profiles and needs and requires a triangulation of collaboration between Management, staff and parents (and pupils often) to be efficient and relevant to school practice and of course compliant with the host of regulations and legislation we must adhere to. Also we have responsibility daily for...

- ✓ Cognisance of and compliance with every new circular from the DES. Responsibility for communicating this to the relevant stakeholders.
- ✓ NEW Child Protection Procedures – training, Risk Assessment and Child Safeguarding Statement.
- ✓ GDPR.
- ✓ The reintroduction of SSE, the SIP and the huge whole school planning this entails.
- ✓ Standardisation of school year – school calendar – managing planned and unplanned school closures.
- ✓ Serious and Critical Incidents

Curriculum Policies for Whole School Plan:

- ✓ 12 Curriculum areas broken into further subsets. All requiring whole school policies and class policies. Long and short term planning and team planning – led by principal.
- ✓ Avail of training (if available), devise, collaborate with staff/NCCA/PDST, draft, ratify, communicate to all stakeholders, review, update, publicise, ensure compliance, monitor. Keep abreast of new curriculum developments and relevant timelines for implementation, try to find time to meet and plan with staff, etc.
- ✓ Lead teaching and learning, implement change and encourage best practice across the whole school. Support teachers with their planning and implementation of the national curriculum. Lead team-teaching initiatives and find time to plan this with staff (in addition to full teaching responsibilities).
- ✓ Numeracy and Literacy Strategy.
- ✓ Digital Schools Strategy.
- ✓ Aistear
- ✓ Lead the school through the process of understanding and implementing the new language curriculum without adequate or timely training ourselves.
- ✓ New Maths Curriculum to come and other curricular changes coming done the line without due consultation or consideration.
- ✓ STEM Education Policy.
- ✓ Digital Learning Framework.
- ✓ NCCA – Primary Curriculum Review.

- ✓ Revised DEIS Plan
- ✓ Encourage and plan the extra-curricular activities that make your school a successful centre of learning, nurtures the school ethos and realises its mission statement and vision and roots the school in its community.

Staff:

- ✓ **Pay inequality – teaching staff in the same staffroom on different pay scales – deeply demoralising and totally indefensible.**
- ✓ Lack of post holders and middle management support structure.
- ✓ Lack of time to plan on a whole staff level.
- ✓ Droichead!
- ✓ OLCS – ensure compliance and accuracy.
- ✓ Teaching Council compliance.
- ✓ Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019.
- ✓ Inadequate secretarial support due to lack of funding. Lack of time to liaise with secretary due to full teaching responsibilities.
- ✓ Appointment procedures which are extensive and very time consuming. Also manage the expense incurred by this and also the impact on the school of changing staff profiles and the ensuing impact on whole school planning etc. Class allocation.
- ✓ Staff meetings and communication. Building and safeguarding staff morale and team work.
- ✓ HR: managing conflict, underperformance, sickness and a host of other interpersonal and individual issues brought to our table to assist with or resolve.
- ✓ Delays in DES announcing staffing arrangements and panel resolutions.
- ✓ Croke Park/Haddington Road Hours.
- ✓ Cosán.
- ✓ Supervision and safety issues.
- ✓ CPD and whole staff training.
- ✓ Absences – managing this without adequate sub cover.
- ✓ Maintaining staff files
- ✓ Garda vetting compliance – retrospective vetting of school staff.
- ✓ Code of conduct
- ✓ SNA policy
- ✓ Ancillary staff – secretary/cleaner/caretaker – inadequate funding for all three. Maintenance is problematic and expensive.
- ✓ Inspectorate
- ✓ Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.
- ✓ Safeguarding staff morale in an ever increasingly pressured work environment.
- ✓ Mentoring new teachers and facilitating, supervising and mentoring college students on work placements.

Pupils:

- ✓ Child Protection – New Procedures and compliance. DLP duties. Overseeing this implementation and training for staff of new guidelines. Oversight report to BOM. Liaising with Tusla and social workers. Stress of Mandated reporting.
- ✓ POD – Populating and maintaining this online database.

- ✓ Attendance: maintain Clar Leabhar and roll book. Maintenance of electronic system – Aladdin etc.
- ✓ Attendance Strategy.
- ✓ Tusla – returns and reports. Monitoring and tracking attendance.
- ✓ Assessment of learning and for learning.
- ✓ Maintaining student files.
- ✓ Assessment files
- ✓ Work portfolios
- ✓ Differentiation of curriculum
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Station teaching
- ✓ ICT and ensuing funding, maintenance and workload and risk management.
- ✓ Irish Exemptions and lack of clarity around these for SEN pupils, especially in special classes/units.
- ✓ Code of conduct.
- ✓ Challenging behaviour
- ✓ Intimate care
- ✓ Discipline.
- ✓ Anti-bullying.
- ✓ Pupils with medical issues, administration of medication, indemnifying the school etc.
- ✓ Pupil care plans.
- ✓ Student Council
- ✓ Book lists
- ✓ Book rental
- ✓ Standardised testing and reporting of same to DES and parents
- ✓ Passport to secondary school.
- ✓ Transitions
- ✓ Enrolments
- ✓ Open nights
- ✓ Cyber bullying and ensuing issues in school
- ✓ Deteriorating mental health – huge rise in pupil anxiety.
- ✓ Faith development – new Religion curriculum + programme to implement. Sacrament preparation, etc.
- ✓ Growing up in Ireland Surveys, etc.
- ✓ SEN

SEN:

- ✓ Planning and implementing of New Special Needs Model. Huge whole school planning needing much time and collaboration to organise and embed. Resources inadequate in most cases – the loaves and the fishes. New responsibility for assigning SEN to pupils without diagnosis.
- ✓ New planning templates for IEPs, PPS, Behaviour plans, etc.
- ✓ Ever changing remit of SET and indeed class teacher roles in relation to caring and planning for children with SEN.
- ✓ EPSEN ACT – endeavouring compliance despite this never being fully enacted by Government.
- ✓ Timetabling – classes and SNAs.

- ✓ Collaboration with parents who need time, assurance and direction.
- ✓ Collaboration with external agencies (see list).
- ✓ Integration of special class pupils into mainstream classes.
- ✓ Organising CPD for SET and Class Teachers to ensure whole school efficiency and up-skilling to meet pupil needs. Organising sub cover for these training days to free up staff.
- ✓ Liaising with NCSE regarding resources and SNA access. Huge paperwork in new SEN model.
- ✓ NCSE cuts to SNA access and inadequate SET hours being allocated by the NCSE. Truly terrible appeals procedure with no positive outcomes for schools.
- ✓ Lack of forward thinking by DES and NCSE with regard to the management and progression of pupils in special classes. No guaranteed supports in place for pupils who move to integrating fully into mainstream thus hindering this progression.
- ✓ Lack of secondary school places for pupils in special classes.
- ✓ Liaising with HSE and Bus Eireann – hugely time consuming.
- ✓ Appointing Bus Escorts.
- ✓ Managing challenging behaviour in the absence of any advice or guidance or indeed safeguarding from the DES.
- ✓ Having resources cut to the pupils or school when the pupils make progress which incidentally is hugely counterproductive and a vicious cycle of one step forward and three back.

BOM:

- ✓ BOM appointment procedures – huge workload every four years.
- ✓ Liaising with the CPSMA or other relevant management body. Being compliant to their directions and demands.
- ✓ Most Principals are secretary to the BOM – the paltry allowance for which was discontinued in recent years.
- ✓ The Principal’s report for the BOM has become increasingly more complex and detailed, never more so than with the recent mandatory additional of the Principal Child Protection Oversight Report. This report is very detailed in order to inform you BOM (comprised of VOLUNTARY MEMBERS) many without a background in education at all. The Lion’s Share of the BOM work rests squarely and heavily on the Principal’s shoulders.
- ✓ Staff appointment procedures and interviewing.
- ✓ Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019.
- ✓ New FSSU procedures.
- ✓ Mandatory SEAI reporting
- ✓ Policy drafting and ratification.
- ✓ Correspondence.
- ✓ Many Principal’s are also saddled with Budgetary and Treasury Issues despite this not being our remit. ROS and Payroll being two huge jobs to manage.
- ✓ Funding – we are worn out with regular fundraising to plug the huge deficiencies in our capitation grants and other grants. Utility bills, maintenance costs, annual school insurance and wages being a constant struggle to meet and maintain.

Parents:

- ✓ Communication – funding and managing or delegating school text system, school website, newsletter, etc.
- ✓ Liaising with the Parent Association. Setting up or appointing new PA.

- ✓ Parent Teacher Meetings
- ✓ Biannual reports
- ✓ Conflict resolution
- ✓ Parental Grievances
- ✓ Being available to meet with the parent of any child at their request as school Principal.
- ✓ School and community events
- ✓ Fire-fighting minor queries and issues **all the time.**

Building and Maintenance:

- ✓ Capital Funding project and ALL the work this involves – applying for funding, grants, tendering procedures, leading the BOM in these projects, audits, etc.
- ✓ Lack of adequate space or school buildings not fit for purpose.
- ✓ Lack of consistency with Minor Works Grant. Schools on their knees with maintenance expenses.
- ✓ Summer Works Scheme.
- ✓ Risk Assessment and Health and Safety issues with no funding or supports to reduce the identified risks, while bearing all of the responsibility/culpability.
- ✓ Lack of funding for cleaner or caretaker.
- ✓ Organising and monitoring jobs for cleaner and caretaker or ensuring Garda vetting for volunteers who assist in this regard.
- ✓ Having to deal with housekeeping maintenance matters such as blocked toilets, light bulbs gone, grass cutting, etc without maintenance support or funding.
- ✓ Accidents and injury. First Aid training and application.
- ✓ Road safety issues at collection times. Applying to the council for traffic calming measures which are not forthcoming.

Other Initiatives:

- ✓ Green Schools
- ✓ Active Schools
- ✓ Amber Flag
- ✓ Health Promoting Schools
- ✓ Wellbeing in Primary Schools
- ✓ School Completion/Outreach Programmes
- ✓ RSE
- ✓ Stay Safe
- ✓ Food Dudes
- ✓ Ireland 2016 –Proclamation Day – Proclamation for a New Generation.
- ✓ Etc etc etc...

Minister, all of the above duties are IN ADDITION TO FULL TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES and our FIRST RESPONSIBILITY MUST BE TO OUR OWN CLASS. I am sure you must be aware from your close relationship with the Inspectorate, of the extensive responsibilities placed on us as teachers to our pupils with regards to teaching and learning. This alone is a full time job requiring dedication and skill.

In addition to this, we are managing a much larger staff than is recognised by you in the allocation of our Principal Release Days or indeed our salaries; and it takes time, tact and managerial skill to nurture, motivate and lead a team of people – we are not afforded this time in any way.

You may well argue that certain items listed here can be delegated or shared out, and yes we are quite adept at collaboration - however the vast majority of these responsibilities lie with the Teaching Principal alone and there are not hours in the day to meet these responsibilities - and so I beg of you please address our grave concerns regarding this excessive and totally unmanageable workload NOW!

Please do not insult us with talk of task forces to investigate workload, gather data etc. The time has long passed for that. We are giving you a snap shot of our excessive workload here and bear in mind this is only a snapshot – it is comprehensive but far from complete, as each school has their own individual circumstances and demographic to serve and manage. A thesis could be written on every duty and responsibility listed and the amount of time, energy and professionalism it takes to manage efficiently and compliantly.

The cumulative result is the same nationwide – it is TOO MUCH! Our recently formed Teaching Principal’s Forum has over 100 members spread around the country. We are very much united in our campaign here to affect change and stop the haemorrhage of excellent school leaders from their untenable positions. This should concern you greatly. The plight of NQTs and pay inequality was largely ignored, and look at how that has manifested in substitute teacher shortages of an unprecedented level. This is yet another huge difficulty we face in our positions and have no choice but to manage despite the immense difficulties it poses for us and our schools. We also await the benchmarking promised to us many years ago and this is hugely important in the interests of fairness and recognition for our hugely difficult roles.

The bottom line here is that your teaching Principals cannot sustain this level of burnout and pressure without grave consequences on a national level – you need to listen, understand and act accordingly – please represent us at government level in your capacity as Minister for Education. This is more than a budgetary issue so please do not reduce us and our wellbeing to figures on a excel sheet. Our value cannot be measured to our school communities and the education system as a whole, but it can and should be recognised and appreciated by you and your office.

If you are not prepared to listen to your dedicated and capable school leaders on this issue then please at least give us direction on how we are supposed to manage all of this without the support or time we require. **This is a serious crisis and it is your duty of care to us Teaching Principals to assist us in our roles as school leaders.** Our education system is being held up to very high standards by the very individuals who are appealing to you now to help us to continue our work without sacrificing our health or vocation. Significant changes need to be made to the support structures in place for Teaching Principals. A complete review of the criteria for allocating Principal Release time in particular is an absolute necessity and we will not be appeased on this matter anymore. We are not prepared to continue to put our health and wellbeing on the line, as this is not serving anyone and it is overwhelmingly detrimental to us in every way conceivable.

We are available to meet with you and await your response.

Teaching Principal

Chairperson of BOM

Chairperson of Parents’ Association

Also appended: A List of School *Administrative Policies which the Principal must organise, oversee and ensure compliance with in the interests of best practice and safeguarding pupils and staff (this is not exhaustive – but is certainly exhausting)

Appendix 3: Minister Bruton's reply with analysis from forum members

A standard version of this response was given to Teaching Principals (and anyone who made representations on their behalf) who wrote to Minister Bruton in relation to these issues. Please note the National Principals' Forum analysis in **Green**.

DÁIL QUESTION for a WRITTEN ANSWER - 26/06/2018

* To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teaching principals in primary schools by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Dara Calleary T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 26 June, 2018.

* To ask the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the burden of work placed on teaching principal teachers in primary schools across the country; his views on whether further supports are necessary for these principals in order to avoid burnout; and his plans to address their challenges. - Dara Calleary T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 26 June, 2018.

Response:

"1,765 out of 3,114 primary schools have a teaching principal in the 2017/18 school year with just over 24% of the primary pupil population enrolled in schools that have teaching principals.

The Irish education system has certain characteristics that have influenced the evolution of the Principal's role. The distribution of the population necessitates a relatively large number of small primary schools. In the case of Principals in smaller schools, while management and administrative duties are smaller in scale than those of larger schools, they must be undertaken in addition to their full-time teaching duties."

We are charged with the same administrative burdens and legislative compliance as our Administrative Principal colleagues regardless of school size. We, by comparison however, have less time, secretarial support or the ability to delegate, in addition to having full teaching responsibilities.

"The enrolment required for Administrative Principal in ordinary schools, Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht is 176 pupils, or 113 if operating a specialist autism unit. "

The criteria for achieving Administrative status is not inclusive or cognisant of special education teachers, SNAs or ancillary staff all which require intense leadership and management.

"Schools that have less than this enrolment have teaching principals. Recently published Circular 40/2018 is available on the Department's website, which outlines the number of

days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. “

The allocation of one release day per week for all Teaching Principals is the absolute minimum requirement we need urgently to sustain us in our roles. A complete review of these criteria is necessary as the system is entirely inequitable and unsustainable. Teaching Principals with special schools/classes require recognition and adequate provision made for the huge increase in administration and management duties this entails. At present we are spending our release days attending training and seminars, or completing work in relation to the relentless introduction of new initiatives by the DES – be they legislative or curricular. We do not have time to manage our day to day administrative duties (which are extensive) due to the unrealistic pace of this change. There is not sufficient time to process these circulars and training, plan effectively with our staff in a meaningful way, implement and monitor the effectiveness of these initiatives, before the next one comes along.

“Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding will see an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.”

While optically this sounds somewhat progressive, it does not reflect our reality whatsoever and does not address the serious leadership crisis of Teaching Principal burn out and step down. It is not remotely doing enough helping us to manage our dual roles to the level of excellence we hold ourselves accountable to.

“Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the

equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary. (2,600 in total)”

What could have been a very welcome, positive development if full restoration was granted in this circular. Giving Principals appropriate time to lead and manage this would have made this a very helpful development. As it stands, it is just lip-service and a wasted opportunity for shared leadership.

“The selection and recruitment process is well under way in most of our primary schools and the majority of these new middle management posts will be filled in the current school year, including schools where the Principal is a "Teaching Principal". Circular 63/2017 was issued by the Department in September 2017 which deals and sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools.”

The Role of the Primary Principal has not been meaningfully or comprehensively reviewed, defined or qualified in over 40 years. Principal Teachers do not have a contract or any means of resisting the relentless increase in workload and complexity of our roles, or the gross exploitation of our pay and conditions, including the neglect of the DES in their duty of care to us school leaders. With our own role being so poorly defined it is difficult to clarify what can be delegated to post holders - if one is fortunate enough to have any. Time for meeting with post holders and planning in a meaningful and practical way is severely hampered also by our full teaching responsibilities and leadership responsibilities to all staff members. The Principal gets a mere 5 line mention in this circular. While we welcome the beginning of the restoration of posts, the bigger leadership issues are not addressed by this circular and ultimately it does not address the difficulties of the manager of these post holders – the Principal.

“While the Principal is ultimately responsible to the Board of Management for the management and leadership of the school, the Deputy Principal occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in each school. The Deputy Principal co-operates with the Principal in the fulfilment of the Principal's role and acts or deputises as the Principal in the Principal's absence.

In relation to the duties assigned to Assistant Principal posts, the Principal following consultation with staff, agree the schedule of duties as best meet the needs of the school. These duties are designed to reduce the workload of the Principal. “

We must plan these duties and their delegation. We must monitor and review the progress involved. We need time to do this, time which we are currently not afforded. With the provision of adequate time for Teaching Principals, this system could be very helpful and productive. As is, it is entire unrealistic and unachievable.

“I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the 2018/19 school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school. “

Cluster groups are a welcome progression, and we appreciate the extension of this pilot scheme. However there are two major issues here – (1) 50 Principal Release Clusters will only serve a portion of the Teaching Principal population leaving others isolated. (2) Clusters are time consuming to organise when our release days are so inequitable and ad hoc. With the provision of one release day per week, a straightforward, practical cluster could be established between 5 schools with Teaching Principals, providing a permanent position for a teacher and stability and consistency for the Principals involved. It would also provide for a small support network between the 5 schools involved in the cluster.

“Any additional increase in the number of release days will be considered as part of the next annual

budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector. “

This is of vital importance to prevent the collapse of our Education System.

“Attached is the breakdown of the number of teaching principals in primary schools by county as requested.”

Appendix 4: Agencies Principals liaise with regularly

- ✓ DES – Department of Education and Skills. All sections, many of which only take calls on certain days between certain times.
- ✓ The Inspectorate
- ✓ NCSE – National Council for Special Education
- ✓ SESS – Special Education Support Services
- ✓ CPSMA – Catholic Primary School Management Association
- ✓ St. Senan’s – Diocesan Management Body for a number of Dioceses
- ✓ IPPN – Irish Primary Principals Network
- ✓ INTO – Irish National Teachers Organisation
- ✓ TUSLA – Child and Family Agency
- ✓ DEIS – Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools
- ✓ HSE – Health Service Executive
- ✓ NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service
- ✓ CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- ✓ OHS – Occupational Health Service
- ✓ Medmark
- ✓ OTs – Occupational Therapists
- ✓ SLTs – Speech and Language Therapists
- ✓ Psychologists
- ✓ EWO – Education Welfare Officer
- ✓ FSSU – Financial Support Services Unit
- ✓ SEAI – Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
- ✓ NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- ✓ PDST – Professional Development Service for Teachers
- ✓ NIPT – National Induction Programme for Teachers
- ✓ NABMSE – National Association for Boards of Management of Special Schools
- ✓ Cuman na mBunscol
- ✓ County Council
- ✓ Parish committees
- ✓ Planning and development committees.
- ✓ Secondary Schools
- ✓ Other primary schools, etc...
(this is not an exhaustive list)

Appendix 5: Legislation since 2011

Since the 1998 Education Act, at least nineteen pieces of significant legislation have impacted on schools.

Since 2011, Schools and Principals have also had to manage:

- 2011 Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020
- 2011 Children First New Child Protection Guidelines
- 2012 Report on Standardised Testing
- 2012 School Self-Evaluation
- 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools
- 2013 Procurement
- 2013 School Uniform Survey and consequential changes in uniform Policy
- 2014/15 SEAI Reporting on energy performance
- 2015 Primary Online Database
- 2015 Droichead
- 2016 Primary Language Curriculum
- 2016 Digital Strategy
- 2017 Implementation of New Model for Allocating Resource Teaching to Pupils (SET)
- 2017 Reintroduction of SSE
- 2017 Second Phase of New Language Curriculum.
- 2018 New Child Protection Risk Assessment and Child Safeguarding Statement
- 2018 General Data Protection Regulation
- 2018 Admissions Bill
- 2018 - FSSU
- 2018 Parent and Student Charter
- 2018 Attendance Strategy
- 2018 STEM Education
- 2018 Wellbeing Policy

Please note the steady increase in workload and the exponential increase in new initiatives/legislation in the past two years in particular.

Appendix 6: Teaching Principals by county in 2017/18 school year

Figures taken from PQ 27829/18

These Principals are in Schools with less than 176 pupils:

COUNTY	Number of teaching Principals 2017/18
CARLOW	19
CAVAN	57
CLARE	88
CORK	184
DONEGAL	140
DUBLIN	48
GALWAY.	155
KERRY	101
KILDARE	31
KILKENNY	46
LAOIS	42
LEITRIM	29
LIMERICK	83
LONGFORD	24
LOUTH	21
MAYO	138
MEATH	52
MONAGHAN	43
OFFALY	39
ROSCOMMON	79
SLIGO	49
TIPPERARY	113
WATERFORD	40
WESTMEATH	47
WEXFORD	59
WICKLOW	38
Total	1765

Appendix 7: Promoted Post Allowances

Figures are taken from DES Circular 0004/2010

School Size	01/01/10
	€
I (1-5)	9,310
II (6-7)	10,432
III (8-11)	12,238
IV (12-13)	14,360
V (14-16)	16,705
VI (17-19)	19,084
VII (20-23)	21,386
VIII (24-26)	23,714
IX (27-30)	25,427
X (31-35)	27,197
XI (36+)	29,776

Appendix 8: Testimonials from Teaching Principals across Ireland

Angela Dunne, Teaching Principal Loughmore NS. Co. Tipperary:

In Loughmore NS, I am managing a staff of twenty-three people, yet ours is considered a 'Four-Teacher School' by the DES as it has only four mainstream classes. Our school is far from an anomaly. According to Eddie Costello in the Special Education section of the DES, there are sixty-six schools nationwide with Teaching Principals and special classes – including one DEIS 1 and five DEIS 2 schools. The additional administrative, HR, CPD and time management this entails is hugely significant and places Teaching Principals, and by default our staff and pupils, under immense pressure. The reality is that I am leading a team of nine teachers, nine SNAs, two bus escorts, a part-time secretary, a part-time cleaner and a Tús Caretaker (we cannot afford a caretaker within our ancillary services grant). I am also teaching a multi-grade class of First and Second Class pupils. We opened an ASD Unit in 2013. We promote and facilitate integration and inclusion in every conceivable way. We have a fantastic school with a hardworking, caring and proactive staff. Managing all of this is truly becoming next to impossible while having full teaching responsibilities. I have 20 (soon to be 23) Principal Release Days. This is hugely inadequate to do my job to the standards of excellence and consistency to which I hold myself accountable. The shortage of substitute teachers, the lack of consistency for my pupils in my absence, the anxiety or criticism of parents who fail to understand the duality of my role, the anxiety of my pupils in relation to the lack of consistency of my presence, the amount of HR required with a staff this size, the paperwork mountain, this all amounts to copious amounts of needless but debilitating stress for an extremely conscientious and hardworking Principal who is doing her level best on all fronts to deliver excellence in both aspects of this dual role. My situation is indicative and indeed reflective of the reality faced by all Teaching Principals who manage far more staff than is recognised in their pay and conditions by the DES.

Martina Arthurs , Principal Teacher (Stepping Down September 1st 2018), The Naul N.S., North County Dublin

I became Principal of a four-teacher school in March 2012. I have been Principal for the last 6 years of Naul National School in North Co. Dublin, a beautiful rural school nestled in a quiet village on the edge of Dublin. I managed a five-teacher school, 3 SET teachers, 3 SNAs, 2 part time secretaries and 2 part time cleaners. I am teaching 17 years. I have thoroughly enjoyed my teaching career, but the last 6 years have been very demanding as I juggled the demands of teaching a class full time while also managing a school. I have gained huge satisfaction with what I have achieved for the school in that time, but it came at huge personal cost. The pressures to get all accomplished and achieved in a short space of time without adequate Principal release days meant that much of the extra workload and compliance that has increased in the job ate into personal and class preparation time. During my 6 years as Teaching Principal I managed two building projects at the school while also carrying out full time teaching duties. The pressures of meeting building project deadlines while teaching and trying to lead learning at my school was a hugely demanding time both professionally and personally. Work has often gone late into the evening over the last 6 years. Summers were busy, and holidays were shortened. I worked extremely hard at the school in my position these last 6 years but If I were to continue to work at the rate I was putting in for the next 6 years it would not be good for my continued

and sustained resilience or my wellbeing as a teacher and leader of a growing school. The compliance demands, the lack of subs and the pressure to always keep up with one circular after another these last two years indicated to me that if the system will not slow well then, I needed to slow or indeed step away. I decided to step down in June of this year. This was not an easy decision because of all my hard work but it was the right decision for me and my family. I will miss leading and managing hugely. I will continue my teaching career and someday I may lead again but I will only consider it when release days are increased to one day a week.

Nóirín Ní Mhaoldhomhnaigh, Principal Teacher, Co. Tipperary

I have been working in the role as Teaching Principal since 2012. I am working in a school and in an area I care deeply about. I absolutely love my job – yet, I have absolutely no doubt it is detrimental to my health and my life. After a day fraught with constant multi-tasking, every single day, I usually stay in school until 5.30pm daily, then home to my children and daily domestic life. After the children go to bed, the laptop comes out again as I furiously set to work trying to catch up on work that I did not get to during the day. I reply to emails and queries from the parents in particular and organise staff as efficiently as one can on the online management system and reply to their queries there also. Parents with children with SEN often need to liaise and these emails need urgent attention. As the week goes on, I will alternate laptop work with correcting books in order to get everything done in the week. Does this leave me with the feeling that I am on top of my work? Absolutely never. I spoke to an educational professional in the Dept. previously about this very anomaly and asked “Is this job possible to do? Can you tell me where I can spend my time more wisely?”. I was advised to make sure to “work smart”. Let me assure you, I could not possibly work any smarter. I am punching above my weight daily. I stay in my room teaching for as much of the day as I possibly can (yet I still have unscheduled disturbances), I really focus on getting to know and building relationships with my class and indeed, the children, staff, parents and school community. I have worked hard to develop our school to both improve the educational outcomes for each individual child and also to develop the school and Staff to give every child the opportunity to develop socially with a sense of themselves. I go to all CPD training that I can both on school days and in the evenings. I use my admin days for these and that has a knock-on effect, but we take it on the chin at home. I work hard to keep my BoM as informed and up to speed as they possibly can be. I have an excellent Chair and Vice Chairperson. I have initiated an IT committee, a subcommittee for Summer Works and robust scrutiny of policies at a Board level. Yet – the lion’s share inevitably falls back on me as I am a paid member of the Board (though ironically, I was appointed after the abolition of the BoM allowance) and the majority of The Board are not.

The teachers are utterly snowed under, SNAs are run ragged covering multiple children and managing their notes for the SENO – another paper trail mountain developing right there. We have a part-time secretary, we recently appointed a caretaker for 2 hours a week (as we hadn’t another cent to give) and a part-time cleaner. All of these go above and beyond on a daily basis. The post-holders are heaving under the weight of their roles and the rest of the staff pick up slack wherever they can. Who is left for me to delegate to? To my mind, the Dept., the diocesan offices and the NCSE are disproportionately focussed on accountability, stats. and avoiding litigation. I have worked the past month (July) but I don’t feel stressed at all- because I am only juggling my home life and children and the role of Principal, and not that of class teacher. I have had interviews and a Summer Works project, and two SNA allocation appeals to keep me busy. The last two could not wait and had to be done ahead of our return. I will return to the “Hamster Wheel” on August 30th, safe in the knowledge that

however busy it is and however tired I feel- it could have been so much worse had I not attended to the work over the summer. Yet, I will be tired. And guilty. This role is the creator and maintainer of endless guilt. I am compelled to write this because every day I encourage children in my care to “Do the right thing”, “Have courage”, “Do not be a bystander. Do not sit on the fence”. It does not sit easily to release this in a public forum, but I want my legacy to be such that my family and my school and future leaders know that I did all I could to fight for and speak up for them. This is an educational crisis and an educational scandal.

Clíodhna Breen, Administrative Principal Teacher, Co. Tipperary

In 2013 I joined a 3 teacher, 65 pupil school as teaching principal. I was thrilled to be given an opportunity to work in a role where I could, or so I thought, lead teaching and learning. The reality couldn't have been further from the truth –responding to the door bell, coping with a Part Time secretary, struggling to fit and work my admin duties while all the time worrying about the children in my classroom. Despite all my best intentions my role in the classroom did not get 100% of my attention – neither did my role as Principal. The constant pull and push of classroom demands, staff issues, parental concerns and DES initiatives brought me close to breaking point at times. The impact on my personal and family life was growing on a weekly basis nightly laptop work, 2-3 hours additional office work after school officially finishes, the continued struggle to try and keep on top of the growing list of expectations and demands. It was never ending.

After 3 years I moved into the role of Administrative Principal in a new school. I left behind a small school which I cared deeply about but for my own sanity and health and well-being knew I couldn't exist in it as a career option for much longer. The role of Admin principal was one which I thought would bring me back to the key values of the role of Principal – leading teaching and learning.

Again, I was looking at a role through rose tinted glasses. Building demands, DEIS finances, coping with home-school issues without a HSCL teacher or team, a rise in children presenting with SEN and anxiety needs and a newly established ASD unit, all brought me back to the push and pull scenario where my number one aim to lead teaching and learning was/is being called into question. The key difference I now have as Admin Principal is that I don't experience the same level of guilt that I had as a teaching principal.

I am terribly concerned that all Principalships are morphing into a role that requires a super human effort just to keep your head above water. Teaching Principals need support on a weekly basis to attend to their dual duties. All Principals need support on a daily basis to ensure that our number one focus gets back to leading teaching and learning.

Please give us the time to embed the numerous initiatives and actions we are trying to foster in our schools. Please give us the secretarial and caretaker support necessary to ensure an efficient running of a school, its building and environment. Please support all Principals as professionals and afford us the opportunity to give 100% to the key aspect of our job – leading teaching and learning.

The following testimonials are from Principals who do not feel free to put their names in the public domain for fear of adverse consequences. All names have been withheld below but The Forum can verify the legitimacy of these testimonials privately if requested.

Principal A:

I have been a teaching principal for ten years. Our school has five mainstream class teachers, one fulltime Special Education Teacher (SET), one part time SET, no caretaker and a part time secretary. The workload has become progressively worse each year. I began this journey teaching 5th/6th class and without a secretary. Towards the end of my second year, a part time secretary was employed by the school. It was not sustainable to cope with the workload of 5th/6th as a newly appointed principal (NAP), so I moved to Jun/Sen infants to benefit from the time from 2-3pm for planning, admin. etc. and due to the guilt of my class missing out when I was called to the office etc.

I have been on Maternity leave 4 times in that 10 years. I was always under pressure on maternity leave to deal with recruitment and "Summer Works", often bringing a new born to the school when contractors had to be met and decisions had to be made.

This was extra difficult as I was breastfeeding at these times also. As the family grew, I would have to pay for childcare to look after the children at home so I could work on school business for most of the summer. This is not unique to my situation and is standard for most principals in similar situations. I was always contacted by the Acting Principal or Chairperson to help with decisions or for advice and specially to deal with recruitment while on maternity leave. I always felt under pressure to return to work as soon as possible after maternity leave purely due to the system and because as principals we are never fully 'off' even when on leave. This is what I resent most about the job; the fact that my kids and family life suffer and when they do have my undivided attention I'm mostly snappy, cross, wrecked and lacking in energy.

The job is too much for one person, too many new initiatives like GDPR, Child Protection etc. and with the best staff in the world, teachers are under a lot of pressure too and know that it's not their responsibility. The buck stops with the principal at the end of the day. We lost a post of responsibility when our Deputy Principal retired, and a B post-holder got the job and we have been without that post for nine years now. While my 2 post holders are both excellent teachers and capable, their attitude towards middle management is do what they're asked by the Principal, nothing more, and I have to 'butter them up' somewhat to encourage them to help me out.

The job feels so isolating and lonely because of this. This last year has been the worst by a mile - incessant workload, pupils missing out from having a teaching principal, issues with parents on the increase, losing out with the SEN allocation and more cuts due next year, unfair cut to our sna allocation, ongoing maintenance issues, subs crisis, funding issues, etc., etc. All principals know the issues.

This summer, due to recruitment I have been in school working most days since the holidays. I am taking a break now to go on holidays with my family, but will have to catch up on my own teaching notes from last term before I even consider what needs to be done for September. It's frustrating that my own class work has suffered while I was tending to administration, maintenance, discipline, parent issues, policies, planning etc.

I feel completely exhausted, mentally drained, almost on the brink of a breakdown and I can't seem to switch off to enjoy the holidays. I constantly find myself wondering is there any other job or work I could do as stepping down is not an option for principals. I would love to job share for a few years while the kids are small, but this is not allowed either. I don't want to leave my job, but this option is becoming more of a reality if my mental health is to become a priority. I honestly don't know how I am going to cope going forward.

Please God, this effort movement for better conditions will improve our situation. Here's hoping.

Principal B:

I am in this position since 1995 taking it on as a young enthusiastic thirty-year-old teacher. I qualified from Mary I in 1986 with an honours degree but spent four years subbing until I got a permanent job in 1990. In 1995, my Principal retired due to bad health and as I was Deputy I took on the role enthusiastically. I engaged with all agencies and brought our school building into the 21st century through the noughties.

But since 2010 the job has become impossible. Every week there is a new circular, a new policy a new directive New agencies to deal with NEPS, NEWB, Inspectorate, B.O.M ,to name a few. I had just gotten used to the revised curriculum when off we went again with the Primary Language Curriculum and School Self Evaluation. The most difficult job is dealing with all PLUS teaching. My first love was and still is teaching and the pupils. I don't know how I have managed to still love it as I have had serious challenges in the last eight years. Our enrolment has dropped due to living in rural area with very little employment. Also we have a lot of two-teacher schools in the area fighting for the same pupils. This is an added pressure not mentioned to date: PROMOTION OF YOUR SCHOOL is now like a business. Scrambling for pupils leaving schools in competition and isolated from each other, therefore decimating comradery between staffs of neighbouring schools. Sometimes, a family leaves our school to go to a neighbouring school .My staff (4 in total) work so hard but when a family leave s the school for whatever reason, you and staff are the talk of the parish. Two years ago the local media got wind that our numbers had dropped and wrote an article about us on the Connacht Tribune. How public is that? It was a dirty tricks campaign, as we found out later.

I would say my mental health has been affected over the last eight years. I try to keep all going home family and school. I talk to family and friends who say DELEGAT. How can you with so little staff and resources. The Principal has to co-ordinate everything. I am attending CSL at the moment which is helpful, but again, giving up my free time. I spend every night at paperwork from September to June. By early July I can barely speak. I tend to be irritable with family and friends, who, with the best will in the world don't understand. I don't even understand, the level of burn out is colossal. I intend to get out of this position when I have 35 years service and am 55. I am 52 now. I don't want to leave but I see no hope of improvement. I have seventeen principal release days next year- totally inadequate to deal with all that I would like to do for my school. September will come around again, my twenty-third year a principal and no improvement. I no longer have either energy or enthusiasm as I am concerned for the future generations of Principals. My own daughter is in Mary I training as a teacher. I have told her to stay away from Principalship. I think she will as she has seen the toll it has taken on me over the year- with two miscarriages and a lump on my breast.

Principal C:

I began my position of teaching principal in 2014, with 56 pupils and three class teachers. In 2017, we opened a special class for children with autism. This has been a very tough year, trying to coordinate both temporary and permanent accommodation, recruiting staff and running a mainstream school as well as the special class. I am allocated 15 principal release days, set to increase to 17 days this year. Our school now has 86 children, six teachers, four snas, three bus escorts, a secretary, cleaner and caretaker. There are not enough hours in the day to deal with this workload, let alone deal with the

increasing number of 'bright ideas' coming from the Department via the post and the internet. I have 29 children to teach, however the department fail to recognise our special class for the purpose of release days. There needs to be a drastic change as this workload is not feasible.

Principal D:

I have been a teaching principal since 2009. I work in a rural school with a diminishing student population and therefore a decreasing staff also. In the past 4 years we have lost one teaching post and two fulltime SNA posts. These adults were crucial to ensuring the ongoing provision of a high standard of education to the pupils in my school, yet we are expected to do so and to implement the unending stream of edicts and programmes without them. In that time despite the decrease in human resources, the workload on teachers and on myself as a Teaching Principal has become all but unbearable. I teach a full day, drag bags of corrections home, attend to my private life and on a daily basis spend another 3 hours on my administration duties. To say that this is unsustainable for any human is an understatement. I would step down if there was a mechanism to do so. I would seek another position but there is no fair progression available to us. I am taking career break for the coming school year, not because I need it for family or further education, but because I need a break. I need a break from a job I love and I school I am dedicated to because my employer does not value me enough to support me in the work that I do.

Principal E:

I am a teaching principal of a rural DEIS Primary school. I have found the position extremely difficult and stressful over the past few years. I teach a multigrade classroom with three different class levels of 32 pupils. Looking after their educational and pastoral needs, managing and leading teachers and SNAs , parental requests, Board of Management demands, ancillary staff issues and community demand is completely exhausting. The results are that my family are being ignored and state of my mental health is very concerning. I am researching leaving the profession and transferring my leadership skills to another sector completely where my experience will be valued and not abused. Where my pay reflects the HUGE amount of effort and work done daily and is not considered to be done under the umbrella of "goodwill". A huge amount of skills & experience will be lost as teaching principals everywhere like myself look for a way to escape this disastrous position and hellish combination of workload.

Principal F:

I've been teaching for 15 years and a Teaching Principal for five years. In those five years I feel I have aged twenty years. I never before suffered with stress and now I do every day trying to do this impossible job (two jobs).No matter how long or hard I work I never feel on top of it. I have I have begun checking educationposts.ie every day and am looking for any teaching jobs locally as the pressure of this job is too much.

Last week, I had three evenings of meetings outside my normal working hours. I have worked hard and have been successful in building up this school but at a huge cost to myself. I am now totally burned out. I have my own young children to think of too and I no longer want to be an exhausted mother. I should add that in a previous life I worked in management of high end retail and hotels. I also have a Masters and other post graduate qualifications but nothing could have prepared me for the impossible demands of this job. I would never advise anyone to take on a teaching principal role.

Principal G:

For your submission I am focusing on just one area, that of the Board of Management and the Principal.

As a primary school Principal I am responsible for everything and everybody. I am the Human Resources department, the Accounts Department, Data Protection Officer, Compliance Officer, Health and Safety Officer, Administrator, Maintenance Officer, Child Protection Officer, Timetable and Diary keeper and sympathetic ear to the entire community. Oh, and I direct teaching and learning in my spare time.

If anything goes wrong everyone looks at the Principal and wonders what happened.

But what about The Board? "Don't they have ultimate responsibility?", you might ask.

The Board of Management are spoken about in circulars and Department directives as if they were the Board of Directors in a private company with a salary and expenses to match.

In reality, they are a group of (usually) lovely but unpaid volunteers who do not have the expertise, training or time to perform any of the tasks allocated to them. They do not have a sense of their own legal responsibility and look to The Principal for guidance on every matter.

Most schools have to plead with people to sit on the Board and The Principal has to direct them. No sooner have we cobbled an ad hoc group to work together when they are disbanded and the whole process starts all over again. In most schools The Principal IS the Board. This is a most lethal position to be in from a legal perspective. As principals, we are sitting ducks who are trying to keep all the eggs warm at once.

Principal H:

I am a Teaching Principal in a three teacher school (plus 1.65 S.E.T. teachers) I am almost 51 years old and I have been absent on sick leave since early June 2017. My health has completely broken down. The past two years have been a very expensive nightmare of visiting doctors, dentists, two neurologists and a pain management specialist. I now have a diagnosis of atypical trigeminal neuropathy and occipital neuropathy. To cut to the chase....I have very bad nerve pain on one side of my face, my ear, my mouth, teeth and my gums. I also suffer from very bad nerve pain in the back of my head and neck. This disease is also known as "The Suicide Disease" because the painful flare ups are so unbearable and unremitting that eventually the sufferers seek a way to end it all. Seriously! Not much consolation in finally getting THAT Diagnosis! Thankfully I am getting considerable relief from medication and although I am not a suitable candidate for surgery I have been left with very little hope that this disease will improve or go into remission in the short term. And so my life is a constant round of consuming very strong tablets that leave me in a "zombie" state and nerve blocks (injections into the back of my neck and throat) every six weeks to calm the trigeminal and occipital nerves and stop them flaring. Meanwhile Medmark are doing their best to get me back to work. Another story for another day.

For the past six or seven years the job of a Teaching Principal has become an impossible task. I really do mean impossible. Principal teachers are a rare breed. They are extremely conscientious and hardworking. School comes before your own life, family and health and even with the best staff in the world and a good Board of Management, it is a lonely job. I cannot imagine how much more stressful it would be if the staff and BOM were not supportive of The Principal. I can say with certainty that I would never have heard of "The Suicide Disease" let alone be suffering from it if I had had the good sense to step down from my position with the advent of school Self-Evaluation.

Let me now “self-evaluate “ as to what major stressors have brought my health to breaking point.

1. Serious and ongoing underfunding of small schools by the Department for the last ten/twelve years. There is constant pressure to have fundraisers just to pay the bills. All of this pressure falls on the principal.

2. Ridiculous and vexatious amount of paperwork FOR EVERYTHING but especially the duplication of paperwork with Garda vetting. What ARE The Teaching Council doing? What is their function? Either a teacher is registered and vetted or not.

3. The change in the pupil /teacher ratio. It used to be 49 pupils to retain our third teacher. It rose to 56 at one stage. The loss of a teaching colleague has been hanging over my head for the past few years and every September it has been down to the wire. This is an extremely stressful situation not helped by difficult parents mindful of their new power over the school demanding Tommy or Billy get x, y and z or they will be moving schools! Reduce the pupil/ teacher ratio for rural schools.

4. The sheer amount of time and work required to get any additional help for children with Special Needs.

5. The paltry remuneration for the job of being a principal.

6. The increasingly common pattern of extra work landing on our desk the day before the Christmas/Easter/Summer holidays. I am glad to see principals fighting back at last against the absolute senseless workload. At present I am unable to help. I would like to warn all Principals that we are not invincible and I am paying the price for being overworked and over stressed. Be careful and remember your health is your wealth.

Principal I:

This is my second year in the role of Teaching Principal - I'm currently Acting Principal in my school (four classes) and there is little about the job so far that would entice me to continue in the role if my Principal were to decide not to return to the role.

There is no job description - I'm Teacher, Principal, Board member, Administrator, Accountant, Health and Safety Coordinator, Psychologist, Nurse, Engineer, I.T. Technician, Mediator... and many more roles all at once - whatever is needed, I have to be it. All learning is on the job with minimal training. Misneach is great to pick others brains and to network and to know you're not alone in the crazy, stressful nature of the role but not so practical on the what you do when the plumbing backs up and the internet goes down and the million and one everyday challenges principals experience.

My first year was busy, this last year was insane. Initiative after initiative, new SNA appointments allocation procedures from NCSE, new SET allocation model, new Primary Language Curriculum, Critical Incident planning, attendance strategies, posts of responsibility policy changes, child protection changes, data protection changes, school self evaluation reintroduction, and on and on. I've been running to stay still and slowly losing my mind from stress.

The circular on in-school management is all well and good but when the deputy principal and Assistant Principal 2 get only a pittance extra it's not right to burden them with another twenty jobs each even if it could ease my list of jobs to do a little bit.

The money for teaching principal in a four teacher school is a joke - for less than €5000 extra take home after all the taxes and levies I have all the extra responsibilities, stress and headaches and the knowledge that if anything goes wrong, it's on my head. It's wrong that I should earn less than a Deputy

Principal in a bigger school who ultimately doesn't have the responsibility on their shoulders that the I have.

My summer has been spent in and out of school getting work done to keep the administration side up and running, sorting repairs, interviewing and appointing an SNA and lots of small but essential jobs that inevitably fall on nobody else. I'm tired. I need an actual holiday but at this stage that can only happen if I'm out of the country. I'm worn out from initiatives. I'm worn out from fighting for my pupils to access SET teaching, access SNA support, access assessments through the HSE, access CAMHS support, from trying to support pupils on waiting lists to access urgent supports they need and support their families because nobody else seems to be. I'm tired of having the goalposts constantly shifting and having to reinvent the wheel on policy after policy. I'm sick of doing everything in my own time - my evenings, my weekends, my holidays because the admin days allocated don't go any way towards the time actually needed to run a school. This job is not worth the pittance extra I earn. I'm doing a damn good job of it but the way the system is set up right now, no way will I look to continue in a principal role as anything other than acting principal - at least I have the ability to step down right now once this job has fully broken me.

Something has to give - to this point it seems to be the health and wellbeing of principals but this is not sustainable. This needs to change and soon!

Principal J:

I am a teaching principal in a five teacher school. We are going to six teachers in September while also opening the first of two ASD classes. I am currently on maternity leave but since my baby has been 3 weeks old I've been dealing with an objection to planning permission for our temporary accommodation. This has been extremely stressful (the person objecting has told me he'll hold me personally accountable!) and it has had a knock on effect with staff. Parents are up in arms as to the uncertainty of what's happening in September. We have no facilities onsite to house the extra classrooms. Therefore I've had to source outside accommodation. CPSMA/IPPN told me that my BoM should be looking after it. All my BOM are working full-time and it is unrealistic to expect this of them. Three months into my maternity leave and I'm still working. This is just one of many examples of how impossible our job is.

Principal K:

I began teaching in in February 2001 in a rural school which had three teachers at that time; we gained another teacher in 2004. I became Principal in September 2009. The first few years were busy but not too stressful.

- Policies were created and ratified.
- I applied and got the free insulation for the school.
- We replaced all doors and windows under the summer works scheme.
- A new soft play area was created for the infants.
- More parking spaces were created outside the school.
- Refurbished computers were bought for use by the pupils.
- A full set of graded readers were fundraised for and bought to improve literacy standards.
- The school prefab was replaced with a permanent build and we also got additional funding to build a Learning Support room and a Staffroom.

- We had money left over from building the extension so we plastered the school, replaced the fascia and soffit put in a concrete yard to replace the yard that the extension was built on.

However the workload slowly increased and then there were issues with 3 different staff members and that made life very stressful.

I found a lump in my breast on 30th December 2016 and was diagnosed with breast cancer on 19th January 2017. I had my first surgery on 8th February and had to have another surgery on 8th March as the surgeon left precancerous cell behind. I had 20 sessions of radiotherapy and luckily had no fatigue or skin complaints. I finished my treatment on 14th June and was back in school on 16th June. Granted I was only in the office and had a sub in my classroom while I was admin leave to sort out report cards and all the usual end of year work. I was sitting at the kitchen table one day in February or March when I said to my husband that I didn't realise how stressed I was until I went out on sick leave. **I was more relaxed and less stressed dealing with my cancer than I was at work.** He replied that I was a hell of a lot easier to live with since I got sick even though he didn't like being around sick people.

I was dreading going back to work and even spoke to the INTO about stepping down on health grounds, I have a hormone driven cancer and I have no doubt that it was the stress of the job that caused my cancer. My prayers were answered when a teacher resigned her job to take a position nearer to her home and I officially stepped down on 18th October 2017. It was the best decision I ever made. One of my biggest regrets is the effect the job had on my family. I was often moody, cranky and tired, but it was youngest daughter who suffered most.

Principal L:

It is 24th of July 2018. My daughter just gleefully announced to her sisters "Yay, Mammy is going to play with us today!" It is a rare occasion – she is delighted and immediately somewhat cynical. I have been in school every day since the holidays managing a massive back log of paperwork from this cruel school year, dealing with maintenance issues, appointment procedures, interviews, you name it. I feel sick listening to my poor child – this is how much this job is affecting my life – my children are constantly sidelined because I simply cannot do it all and the mortgage has to be paid. It's all well and good to talk about mindfulness and wellbeing and work life balance, to sagely remind Principals to prioritise their health and families. The capacity to do this is not afforded to us. It is all consuming – not because we are neurotic workaholics – but because we are not given a choice. The kitchen sink is being fired at us and there is no end in sight. I am strongly considering following our young teachers out to Abu Dabhi where I might be at the very least remunerated properly for my work and have the remote possibility of some quality of life.

Principal M:

As Principal I wish to get out and finish my years teaching the children in a manner that respects each child's uniqueness. Today I hate being a Principal. I work like a dog because I'm a professional educator and I'm proud of my profession and those who went before me. Where does one start about being a Principal today. Laws that must be obeyed, circulars that are expected to be obeyed, inspectors who hope to be obeyed and teachers praying to be helped. We are administrators, financial controllers, fundraisers, education innovators, leaders, carers, planners, ICT experts, cleaners, organisers, parental advisers, teacher helpers and shields and we are being played for eejits! We are responsible and it keeps coming, we are answerable and accountable.

Twenty years ago I resigned my Administrative Principal job in Dublin to take up my present Teaching Principal role in Connaught. The work as principal there was lighter compared to today so for a

Teaching Principal there is just no comparison. For me it's the dichotomy of being a full time teacher and a full time Principal in a modern school. They are in fact not compatible and therefore compromises are enacted that have either a negative impact on pupil learning or on the teacher's teaching. Before we could minimise this impact but today I just can't and it must be honestly faced up to.

As a teacher my work has changed radically, two new curricula, records and notes to beat the band, parental contact and a very significant increase in diversity of pupil needs. Planning and accountability and responsibilities beyond my imagination when I joined the profession. Inspections; which are more result driven and unfortunately less collegiate. Fear is now a constant companion for the class teacher. Our departments drive to be the Best Educational System in the world by 2026 is a political stunt that is so narrowly based that our weaker pupils are deemed 'not the best'.

Principal N:

Is Príomhoide Gaelscoile Siúlach mé ar feadh breis is fiche bliain. Is breá liom an post agus an scoil ina bhfuil mé ag obair, ach tá mé ag tacú go láidir leis an bhfeachtas seo mar tá strios uafásach orm ag iarraidh na coinníolacha uilig a bhaineann leis an bpost a chomhlíonadh.

Bím ag déanamh mo sheacht ndícheall chun ár scoil a choimead ag cur oideachas ar ard-chaighdeán ar fáil d'ár ndaltaí uilig.

Motháim nach bhfuil go leor aithintis á thabhairt ag an Roinn agus an Aire Oideachais don phost chomh tabhachtach seo! Creidim go láidir go bhfuil post an phríomhoide mar phost dúbailte an mhúinteora, is cuma más Príomhoide atá ag múineadh nó riaracháin thú. Cá bhfuil an pá atá tuilte?

Tá an-bhrú ar an dá chineál Phríomhoide. Mar Phríomhoide ag múineadh, níl aon amhras ach go bhfuil sé rídheachair an 2 phost a dhéanamh i gceart, ach nár P.O. Riaracháin, tá an-bhrú ort mar bhainisteoir, agus tagann an brú seo ó gach cúinne. Chomh maith leis sin, éiríonn sé níos deacra iarraidh ar do chomhleacaithe dualgaisí breise a dheanamh mar tá an tuiscint ann go bhfuil tú ar fáil chun iad a dhéanamh!

Athraíonn tú ó bheith mar Chaptaen Foirne go Bainisteoir agus is minic gur áit uaigneach go leor í sin. Tá mé caite leis an bpost seo. De réir mar a théann na blianta ar aghaidh ní thagam ar ais chugam féin fiú leis na laethanta saoire, mar táim faoin méid sin strios anois le tréimhse chomh fada sin mar Phríomhoide, agus ní fheicim fheabhas ar bith ag teacht ar chursaí.

Tá an post tar éis ithe isteach go mór ar mo phearsantacht, agus aithním ionaim féin gur duine an-dáiríre anois mé, gan fuinneamh chun féith an ghrinn a bheith ionam.

Nílím ach ag teacht ar ais chugam féin díreach le cupla lá anuas, tar éis tinneas a fháil nuair a dhún an scoil, a dúirt an dochtúir go raibh mar bhriseadh síos mo choirp i ndiaidh a bheith faoin iomarca brú.

An bhuaire is mó orm anois ná go bhfuil mo shláinte chun teipeadh orm, agus le clann nach bhfuil iomlán tógtha againn go fóill, bheadh sé sin go huafásach!

Impím ar an Aire chun éis teacht linn, agus chun meas a léiriú ar an bpost a dhéanaimid chun oideachas den scoth a leanúint a chur ar fáil do dhaltai an lae amárach in Éirinn.

Principal O:

In my first school as Principal:

- Excluded by Dep. Principal who would not speak to me or acknowledge me in front of parents, staff or in meetings. Accused me of being "out of it" in school to the Chairperson.
- Threatened to be killed by a student.
- Student threw stones at me, a student kicked and punched me.
- Verbally abused by students and parents.
- Chairs, DVDs and stationery thrown at me.
- Excluded by staff members.

- Was stepping down from my position but got a job in my current school.
I am lucky now in my current school but I was very close to stepping down in my last one.

Principal P:

I was informed in September 2017 that we now have DES support to open a Special Class. I'm afraid it's too late for the SNA who was injured last year by a frustrated pupil with ASD and is currently on assault leave. However, I'm grateful that we will have suitable accommodation for our children with complex needs for the future. At this stage I have no energy left to fight for proper supports and I am considering early retirement. McBeath (2013) talks about 'being locked in by external expectations', this is how I feel at present. I feel I am spent of energy and if the powers that be will not and cannot support me in my endeavours, then what is the point. It is so deflating and energy sapping. My health is suffering.

Principal Q:

The administration necessary to appoint teachers and SNAs is enormous. This year I had three teaching appointments and one SNA appointment to make and it was so time consuming and tiring but necessary because it is crucial we get the right teachers and SNAs for the children. Appointment procedures are considered a chairperson's duty but in reality it is The Principal who organises everything. The Chairperson is often very busy with working commitments of their own. We had to cajole our new Chairperson to sit on the Board. The Board is a voluntary group of people who try their best but everything seems to fall back onto my desk to sort out. Appointment forms for each must be presented, signed, copied and sent to the Department. Appointment figures for Administrative Principal is far too high. I will have 174 children in September 2018, this means I will get a seventh teacher but not until September 2019. Furthermore, if I get to 178 I will get another teacher and will have admin status! Allied to permanent and temporary staff members we have student teachers and work experience personnel in the school on a regular basis. All these placements require attention and monitoring. Sick leave for teachers becoming ever more difficult for principals. No subs to be found! First day of sick leave not covered, this should not happen in a school with a teaching principal.

Principal R:

Background Profile: Principal. Female. Age 45. Teaching 25 years. 3 years as Principal. DEIS 2 school with Special Class. 140 pupils. Principal +4 mainstream teachers. Special class teacher, Support teacher plus part time support teacher.

My story:

Special classes are a wonderful addition to schools and can make an immense difference to the educational experiences and outcomes of SEN pupils. Our BoM and school community agreed to open our Special Class for children with mild and moderate learning difficulties in 2014. They were approached by the NCSE and were promised support. They did not do this lightly or naively. They were acutely aware of the work involved, as I was, when I applied for the post of Principalship in 2015. I believed that all my enthusiasm and drive and genuine care would carry me through, however I am only human and this position requires a super human who can be in many places at once – it is almost beyond me at this point in time.

The criteria for allocating release time to Teaching Principals is, in my opinion, hopelessly flawed and is based on a fallacy. In my own instance, our school has five mainstream classes but categorised as a 'four teacher school' P +3/4 by the DES.

In reality we have 9 teachers (five mainstream teachers, one special class teacher, one full time and one part-time SET teachers and a HSCL teacher), two SNAs, two bus escorts, two ancillary staff (part-time cleaner and secretary), two School Completion personnel and 280 parents.

That is a staff of 17 people to manage and lead, while having both full teaching and administrative responsibilities.

A regular school or DEIS 2 with an ASD unit can appoint an administration principal when enrolment reaches 113.

I currently have 139 pupils and a special class (MGLD) who have similar learning, behavioural and social emotional needs to other children with disabilities. However the threshold for my school is 143 – to me there is the same administration challenges whether one operates a special class for mild/moderate learning difficulties or an ASD unit - How can this stand up?

I want to progress my school and better it – to prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow – for jobs that have not yet been created – I listened to Minister Bruton's speech in DCU last year at the launch of the Schools Excellence Fund – Digital and I couldn't help but feel enthused by his commitment to education in this area – but at what cost do I personally embark on this wonderful journey in bringing STEM to our School? We are involved in the Schools Excellence Fund – STEM / DIGITAL and we are involved in the pilot Digital Schools Framework. – All because I personally want to make a difference in these children's lives. To this, I ask you to consider this scenario in my school back in February.

I arrive into school at 8 am. It's snowing. The heating system has failed. Could you believe it? I go to the boiler house outside and down some ten steps to an underground boilerhouse and reset the heat – praying that it will fire. The school is cold. It's an old building. Built in 1912. It will take two hours to warm up. I then unlock the classrooms, check emails, answer phonecalls from parents wondering if the school is open on such a snowy day. I organise a room for a meeting with a psychologist at 2.30 pm. The bell rings at 9. The toilets are flooded. The ceiling in my 'office' - the one I rarely get into - is also leaking due to the accumulation of snow on the roof above. – A bucket to catch the drips for now! I greet my staff and pupils as they arrive. My Special Class are then waiting on me. The most vulnerable children in my school. I set them some work and organise the SNA to supervise while apologising profusely – that I'll only be a minute. I put on my 'Plumber' hat and try to curb the problem in the toilets until I ring the part time caretaker (who only works 5 hours a week) as we haven't the budget to pay him any more. He's already completed his weekly five hours clearing the snow and salting the evening before to make it safe for us to come in.) Meanwhile the Special Needs Coordinator is on the phone for me. I can't take the call but I know I need to ring him urgently. He's talking about cutting one of our valued SNA's. My part time secretary comes in at 9.30 am and she takes over the toilet issue as best she can. I go to teach my class.

11.00 break – I'm on yard duty - no lunch – I then briefly return the phone call. The secretary is on supervision duty. I get back to class and await the next 'interruption'. 12.30 pm Lunch break – I'm back on duty for the second half of break - I grab a cup of coffee in my office and return another phone call to a social worker. That afternoon I organise for my class of Special Needs pupils to be included in whatever activity is happening in their base classes so I can meet the psychologist (or whomever it should be on any given day). 2.45 School finishes for the pupils - I look about the toilet issue, the leaking roof and whatever is on the list from the secretary from that day. I return emails, make phonecalls.

4.45 p.m. I pick up my own three children from an afterschool facility-

[Whatever remuneration I get for principalship goes to pay for my childcare so I can do a good enough job - not a great one - not as good as I'd like it to be.

5pm - dinner, homeworks, football, dancing or swimming.

9 pm: children in bed I begin the two hour prep for my class teaching and some admin for the next day. That's just a snippet of 'a day in my life' – and that's a 'good' day!

I do not write about my day to look for a sympathy vote but just to highlight to you what, in actual fact, the reality is on the ground. Imagine yourself coming into work to fix the heating and the toilets, meet your constituents, excuse yourself umpteen times from that meeting to sort another urgent problem – It clearly wouldn't happen -

I feel this is grossly unfair that I, and others like me, are being forced to juggle children's education and their lives like this and I call for a review on this issue to make the necessary changes to adequately support Principals going forward. I personally feel that I should have administrative status – At present I have on average 2 days per month (that is on average), 10 hours to catch up with paperwork

Principal S:

Teaching Principal- 3 Classrooms- Co. Donegal

I took up the post 3 years ago. After course upon course, I felt ready for a change and a challenge. I didn't think that challenge would see me spend nights in the school with my husband- painting walls to make an office for myself, lifting old carpet and putting up shelves. No course prepared me for changing bulbs, salting the drive and path over bad mornings- that's what you do when you don't have a caretaker. While the many courses up to Masters level prepares me for dealing with people, and trying to develop the teaching and learning in the school- nobody taught me how to fit all this into 15 administration days. I've a super Deputy Principal who would do anything for the school and a fantastic staff, but we are a small school and nobody is paid to do anymore than what they are doing-goodwill can only take us so far.... and it's running out. This year I spoke to my ex -Principal- I explained that I was feeling more overwhelmed this year than last. He reminded me that on top of all the usual daily running issues, policy development that we've had so much EXTRA to deal with.

- Child protection
- School attendance strategy

- SSE

- and more that I've forgotten about.

Did I get it all done in 15 days?... no....

I've done what I can with all my own time. On top of this- even in my mid 30's- I've had the worst year of health I've ever had.

My school is fantastic- I've great children and an amazing staff. I've a secretary for 12 hours a week so between doing my day job, being a secretary for 13 hours a week and a caretaker it's a struggle. It wouldn't be if the TIME was created to match the workload. I'm doing two plus jobs..... I haven't mentioned that I'm a mum to a 4 year old boy. Would I recommend the post of principal to anyone? Not at the minute. It's a horrendous job where the focus of leaders of learning has been lost in paperwork and red tape. It's time we went back to basics with more time to do our jobs. We need change and we need it now before we suffer anymore personally or professionally.

Principal T:

On assuming my role as teaching principal in a DEIS urban school in 2010 I was brimming with enthusiasm and energy, confident that my experience would enable me to lead and manage my school effectively. I was and am passionate about leading excellence in teaching and learning and as a TP, leading by example.

January 2011 marked the beginning of what has been a tumultuous and wearing eight years. The eradication of the Resource Teacher for Travellers in January 2011 swiftly followed by cuts to Resource hours allocation created an impossible situation in our school where children with a multiplicity of needs were not being catered for adequately. Over 20% of our school population come from the Traveling community with extremely significant literacy needs. It is a case of the loaves and the fishes, there are simply not enough hours to go around. The inclusion model while laudable, has, in practice pushed schools such as ours to breaking point. Such were the concerns that the decision was made to open a special class for children with ASD in 2013. This has been extremely positive in many ways but the impact of leading and managing what is effectively two different educational settings has unfortunately, made my role impossible and unsustainable. The special class, though only with six pupils, requires a hugely disproportionate amount of my time and energy from liaising with specialists, parents, SNAs and bus escorts to dealing with frequent meltdowns and violent outbursts. All of this would be manageable were it not for my number one priority and responsibility -my class. It is not possible for me to be in two places at once. I cannot meet an Occupational Therapist or a parent or assist with a meltdown when I am teaching a class, it is simply not possible. Unfortunately, by not being available I am giving the message that they are not worthy of my time and thus not valued. It is an eternal and vicious cycle of guilt. The ASD class also brought with it a devolved building project, of which the BOM (i.e. me) has become defacto Project Manager. There are only so many hours in the day, additional responsibilities such as these leave less and less time for me to lead quality teaching and learning. The relentless onslaught of initiatives, policies and curricular reform have given me no time to innovate, communicate and to 'walk the walk' as school leader. My position as it is, is unsustainable. I now have a staff of 18 including ancillary staff. The time involved in managing that number of staff coupled with a full teaching load and the administrative responsibilities means there is no beginning or end to my working day or week. Several of my excellent friends and colleagues have stepped down from their positions, I do not want to follow suit, however if my health and well-being continue to be compromised by this impossible dual role I will most definitely do so.

Principal U: (Stepped down 2017)

Over the last five years, there has been an alarming rate of teaching principals relinquishing their positions. It is difficult to analyse exactly how many have left the position as it may be for a variety of reasons. They may have left to become an administrative principal, to work with PDST or the Inspectorate, to take up another position in the school or take the very drastic move to resign from their post and their school. It is becoming increasingly common and there is one very clear reason for this - Time.

I voluntarily stepped down as Principal last September. It was a difficult decision as I enjoyed the role of Principal but I could not continue in the role as the demands of the job became too much. The one and only reason in my case was "time". Since I became principal in 2010, the demands on my time increased each year. It is difficult for anyone to understand the amount of hours a teaching principal dedicates to their job. There is no contract to define the role and the duties attached to it. The job of the Teaching Principal is a combination of two roles: a classroom teacher and administrator to carry out the everyday duties involved in running a school. Both roles are rewarding, challenging and interesting but the time it takes to competently carry out these roles is increasing, year in year out.

The IPPN published a document in 2014 called *Priorities for Principal Teachers – In Clear Focus*. It endeavoured to provide an understanding of the role of the Principal. I quote Ruairí Quinn (then Minister of Education & Skills) from the foreword in this publication:

“In 21st Century Education, it is critically important that Principals can focus on doing the right thing – leading and managing the quality of learning in their school. An overloaded Principal runs the risk of losing that focus. For this reason, I welcome this document from the Irish Primary Principals’ Network. Few publications are as timely. Much has been spoken about the overall role of the Principal and my Department is conscious of this matter. Significant improvements in data management are being planned by the statistics division which will make a difference, particularly in removing duplication in form-filling.

IPPN’s publication Priorities for Principal Teachers – In Clear Focus is a valuable tool for principals and their school communities to examine where a school’s time and energy is expended. Central to this premise are the conflicting views of what is important and what is priority. Most of the work in a school is important. The challenge is how to prioritise those important activities that make schools so busy. My Department and I welcome this publication and look forward to using it as a useful aid to school self evaluation and school improvement plans.”

The Minister, and hopefully those who work with each minister in the Department of Education & Skills, recognise the increased workload of principals and especially teaching principals. It is clear to everybody that an overloaded principal will lose focus and that will have a negative impact on not only their pupils but the whole school community. As obvious as this is to everyone, the workload has increased over the years. This is undeniable.

The document *Priorities for Principal Teachers – In Clear Focus* is a worthwhile read. It provides lists of the various duties associated with the role of principal. They include “Priorities”, “Other Priorities” and “Other Tasks” but in reality all tasks are the responsibility of the principal, even those tasks that are delegated must be checked by the principal.

For anyone who is not involved in schools or who may not have an understanding of the role, please take the time to read through the lists of duties. It would be very evident that the time to complete all these duties and teach a class, which entails a large amount of time in itself, simply does not exist. If each duty attached to the role of Principal was timed and somebody went to the bother of genuinely understanding the amount of time involved, they would very clearly see the reason why so many teaching principals are relinquishing their posts. Time.

It is not that they are incompetent. It is not that they are not up for the job. In fact it is quite the opposite in that they are doing the job properly, taking on the responsibility of their role and trying to fulfil all the demands that are now placed on them. The time to do all of this does not exist.

The increased workload has been acknowledged by the Department of Education and Skills, our union The INTO, our management body CPSMA, but little has been done to improve the situation. The increase of “release days” for teaching principals was more of an insult to me in my final year as Principal when they increased by one day a year. This did not come close to allowing the time needed to competently fulfil the role of Principal.

The following testimonials are from Lower Paid Teachers who do not feel free to put their names in the public domain for fear of adverse consequences. All names have been withheld below but The Forum can verify the legitimacy of these testimonials privately if requested. These teachers represent our future leaders.

LPT (Lower Paid teacher A):

I have been an LPT for six years now - in 2011 new entrant teachers were put on a revised, lower salary scale. In 2012, my cohorts and I were to start at the bottom of this lower pay scale and also had all allowances cut. I had worked hard in college to ensure I would qualify for an honours degree allowance, I upheld my side of the requirements yet mere months before I would receive the allowance the government simply scrapped it. This allowance would have meant €4,918 to me per annum. Along with losses due to the cuts in salary this has been a huge blow to me and thousands of other teachers.

At the time when cuts were being decided, we were the most vulnerable group - we were en route to the profession (some of us in college, some of us a number on the CEO form) we had no union protection, we could not strike, we had no means of standing up for ourselves, we were a minority. We were an easy group to target.

The Effects:

We are experiencing teacher shortages because (a) pay cuts have made teaching unattractive as a career (b) qualified teachers are seeking work abroad where they receive much better pay and conditions (c) LPTs cannot afford to live in certain areas because of high rent costs.

Teachers are not taking part in further study (e.g masters or PhD degrees) because the allowances have been cut and promotion is largely non-existent.

Staff relations can be difficult when pay and conditions vary so much and LPTs know that regardless of years service we will never earn as much as the teacher in the classroom beside us.

LPTs are feeling undervalued and disrespected which is going to cause a huge breakdown in the education system.

What Next:

Reading headlines such as 'The Irish Economy is booming again' makes me wonder why I am still considered an LPT, why has my pay still not been restored, why are teachers exiting the country in droves, why are post 2011 entrants still being treated unequally and being discriminated against.

While my label as an LPT has gone unchanged since 2012, somethings though, have changed - the recession can no longer be used as an excuse for discrimination, we are union members now and we have had enough. It is time for action.

We have been bamboozled by figures from various sources, telling us that we actually haven't lost that much money really. We have. 2012 graduates will lose the price of a semi-detached house over our career. That is not fair and it cannot go on.

I absolutely love my job but even so, I have started thinking about other careers where my hard work would be respected and my earnings would reflect that.

LPT B

As a 2014 entrant to teaching, I have been affected by unequal pay scales for 4 years now.

I used to get angry about the situation but but as it has gone on longer and longer, I am starting to lose hope that fairness and equality will ever be restored.

I feel that I am valued less than other teachers. I feel that I am treated as a substandard teacher by the government, despite my dedication and my enthusiasm for my job.

I teach the same curriculum as all other teachers. Yet I am paid less and therefore, valued less and it is soul destroying.

I love my job. I've always wanted to be a teacher and I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else. However, It is exceptionally difficult to continue to give my best in the current situation.

LPT C:

For almost eight years, the scourge of pay inequality has blighted the teaching profession. Something that is an abstract concept for many, is an unfortunate lived reality for me.

Having changed careers and invested heavily in my retraining in education, on graduation I was optimistic about my new career that I loved. However, several years of stress, worry and a stalled life due to pay inequality have stolen that initial optimism and energy that should be the very core of the teaching profession. Between lost qualification allowances and lost core pay, it has also stolen over €40,000 from my paycheques to date. That's even before I calculate what I've lost due to pension reform.

As a Lower Paid Teacher (LPT), I will never experience the pay levels and pension that the colleagues sitting beside me in the staffroom will. I will continue to struggle to afford rent, be continually denied mortgage approval (if I can get a deposit together!), hope to never get sick as I cannot afford health insurance, and I will forever be different to the rest of my staff team, as the only LPT in my school. Schools are supposed to be places of inclusion, equality and teamwork. It's very hard to feel and act like part of a team when you're not on an equal footing to everyone else.

For me, continuing pay inequality means that my life is on hold. I retrained in teaching for stability, as my partner is self employed – I am supposed to be the one with the 'stable, good' job so that we can settle, have a family, etc. Well into our thirties, these dreams are slipping away because we are in flux due to our low pay.

The full upward restoration of pay for me would mean I could get mortgage approval easier, settle down, set aside some savings for our life to begin.

Additional Reading: Other sources and relevant documentation

- ✓ The Green Paper in Education, 1993.
- ✓ The White Paper in Education, 1995.
- ✓ Education Act, 1998.
- ✓ Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary School Principal, - DES, 1999.
- ✓ The Role of the Primary School Principal in Ireland – Hay Group, 2002.
- ✓ Quality Leadership ⇔ Quality Learning – IPPN, 2004.
- ✓ The Value of Leadership – IPPN, 2004.
- ✓ Quality in Education 2014 – Accountability & Responsibility – INTO
- ✓ Workload, Stress and Resilience of Primary Teachers, 2015 – INTO