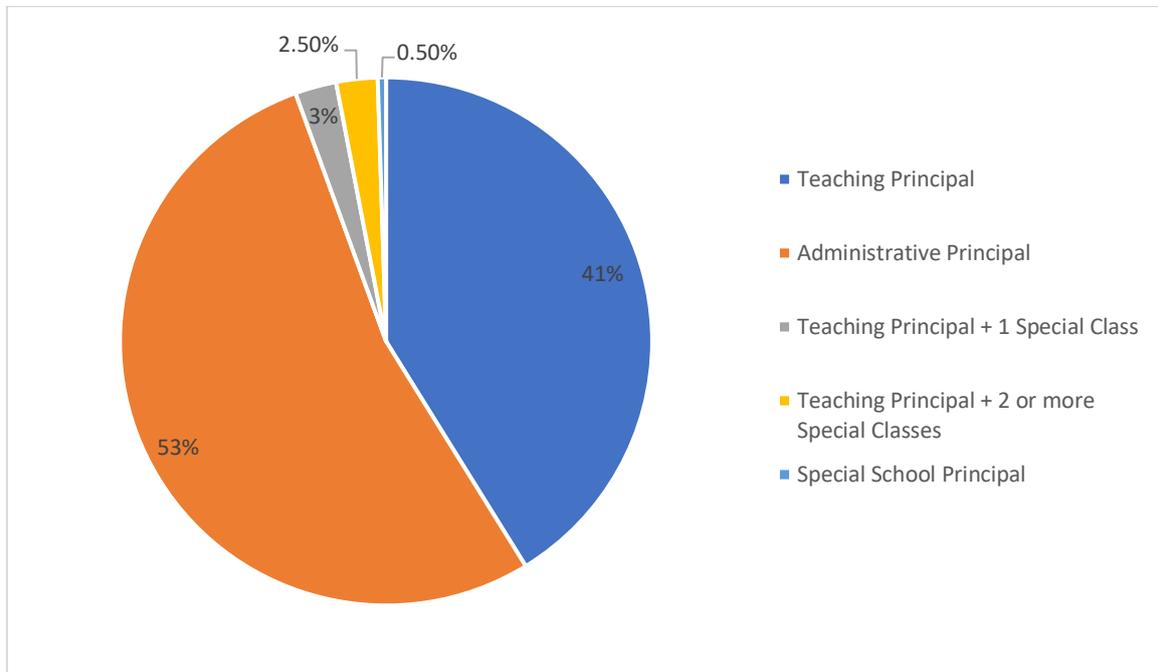


NPF Principal Survey October 2020

530 primary principal teachers from various school sizes, locations and school types completed National Principals' Forum Survey on the 15th and 16th of October 2020.

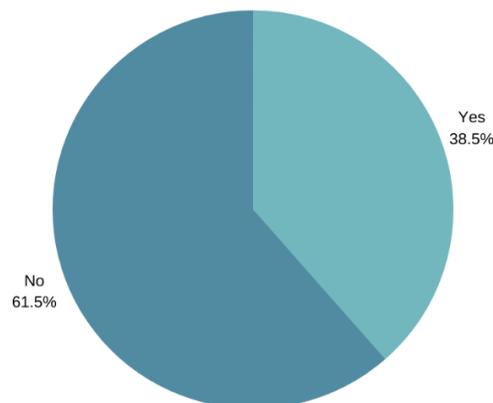
Results:

1. Principal Status of Respondents:



2. Release Time for Teaching Principals:

Is the 'one day a week' release time meeting your administrative and leadership needs at this time?

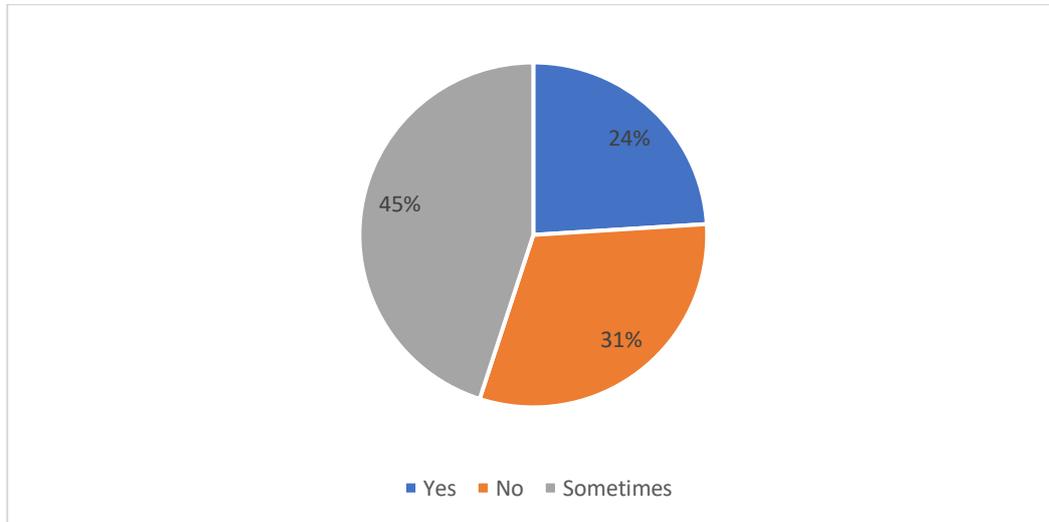


The principals who responded with a "yes", also highlighted that they were only in a position to meet *parts* of their administrative duties with the current level of release time, and were not meeting the teaching and learning needs of their classes unless prepared to accept an intense workload and stress levels that cannot be sustained in either the short or long term. Principals are not supported in meeting the relentless demands of the dual role to any level of professional or personal satisfaction.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

3. Dual Role of Teaching Principals:

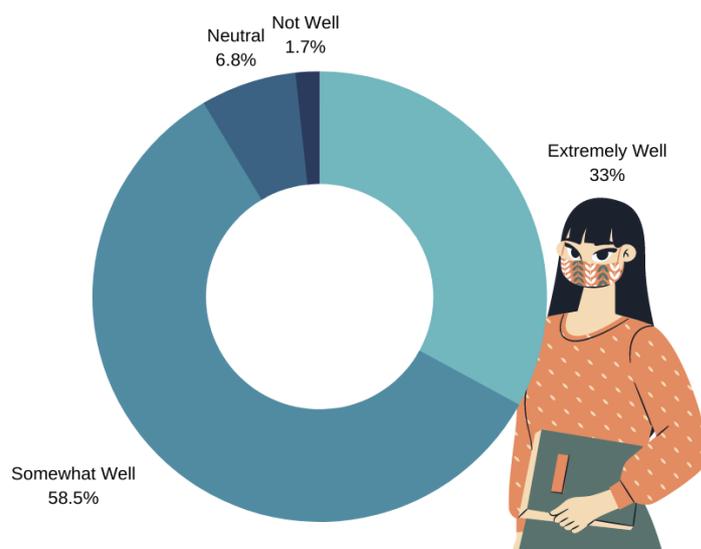
Are you able to meet the demands of teaching your class 4 days a week, in addition to your leadership and administrative duties?



Those who answered “No” or “Sometimes” (76%), said that it is impossible to do two full time jobs at once. Principal release time relieves pressure for ONE day, the rest of the week, teaching is interrupted constantly with leadership, safety and management issues. The additional hours a teaching principal is putting into their dual role is far in excess of a 48 hour week. Those that answered “Yes”, added that the pressure of meeting these demands is adversely affecting their health and family life and something has to give.

4. Covid Compliance with DES Covid Guidance:

How well is your school equipped in terms of your Covid Response Plan?



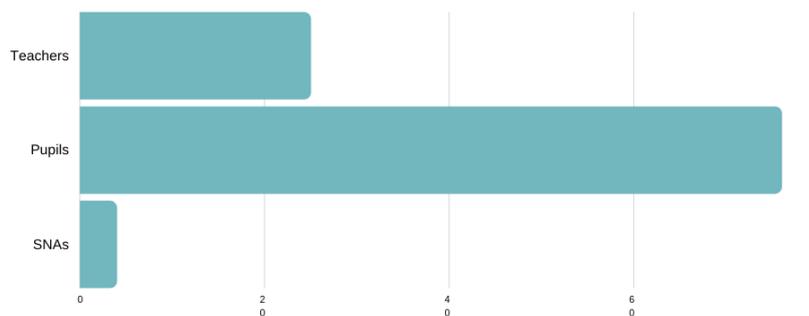
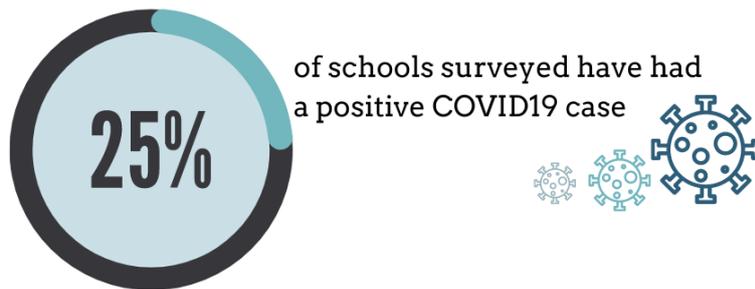
92 % of schools feel their school is well-equipped with a Covid Response Plan. A testament to the efforts of our school leaders with the support of their staffs, within our given circumstances.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

5. Qn.: Is social distancing physically possible for your senior pupils (3rd – 6th Classes) and staff in their classrooms?



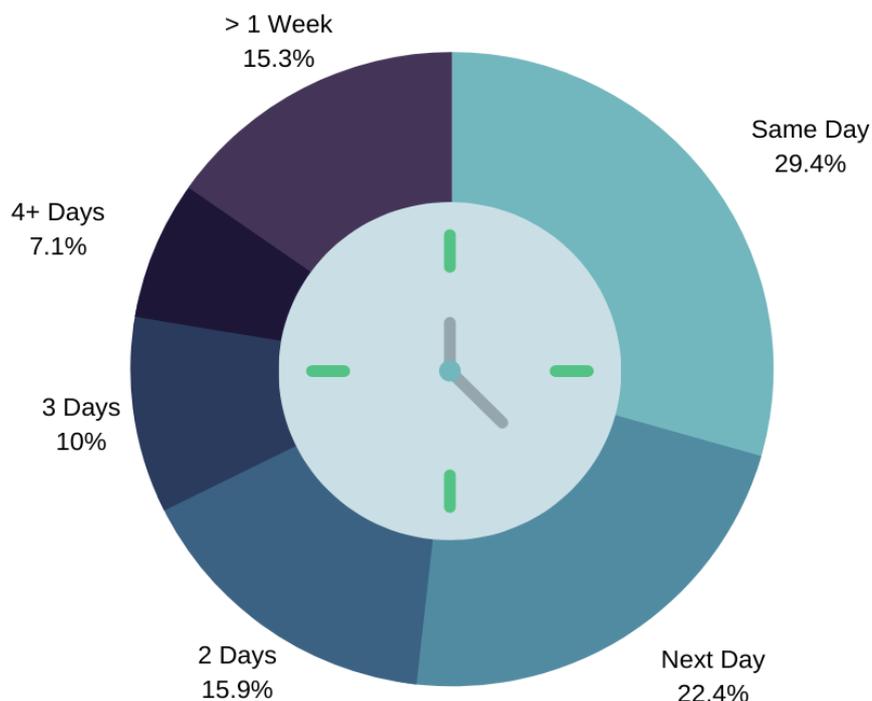
6. Positive cases of Covid 19 in schools since schools re-opened at the end of August 2020:



NPF Principal Survey October 2020

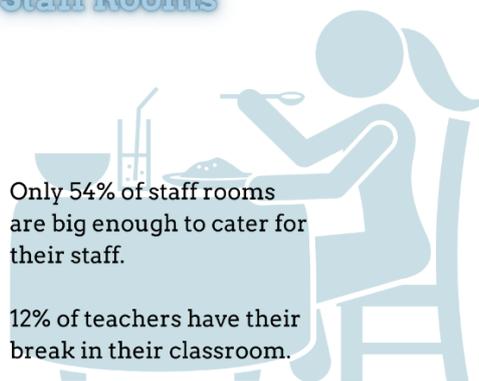
7. HSE Support and Communication:

What was the time lapse between receiving the original call of a positive case and a call from Public Health?



8. Staff Facilities and the Impact of Covid Restrictions on the Workplace:

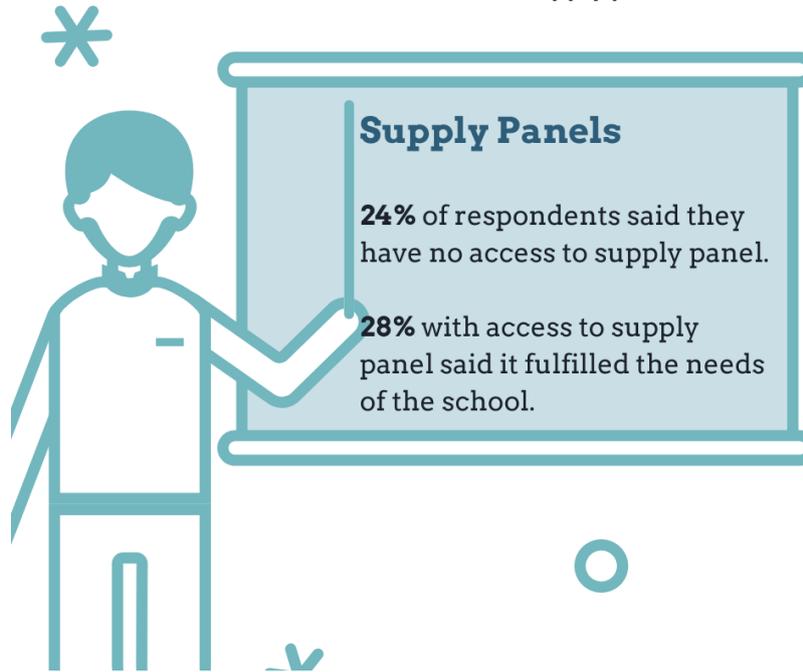
Staff Rooms



Many teachers are eating lunch in their cars or corridors, and are not getting reasonable breaks at all in the day due to increased (unpaid) supervision, before, during and after school, in their efforts to maintain pupils in bubbles and pods. The cumulative effect of such detrimental working conditions on staff is not sustainable long term. 47.7% of respondents identified staff with high risk health in their schools. 9.8% have a staff member working from home due to being deemed at such high risk. Only 75% of schools were able to identify a suitable space for use as a Covid Isolation Room. 70% of principals are seriously worried about having a Covid case in their schools and how they will manage if current trends continue to escalate.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

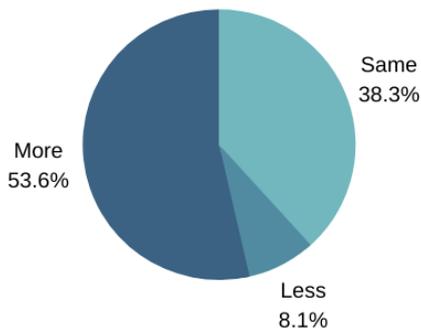
9. Availability of substitute teachers and access to teacher supply panels to cover absences:



This is set to become an even bigger issue, with rising cases of Covid and an inevitable increase in staff absence.

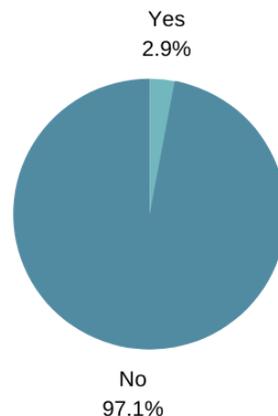
10. SEN (Special Education Needs) in our schools post Lock-down:

Special Education



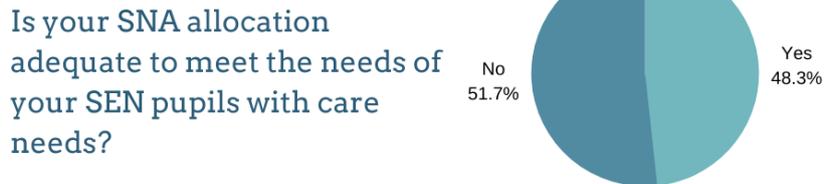
Are you observing more or less needs, directly as a result of Covid 19?

Have you received more supports to meet the increased needs?



NPF Principal Survey October 2020

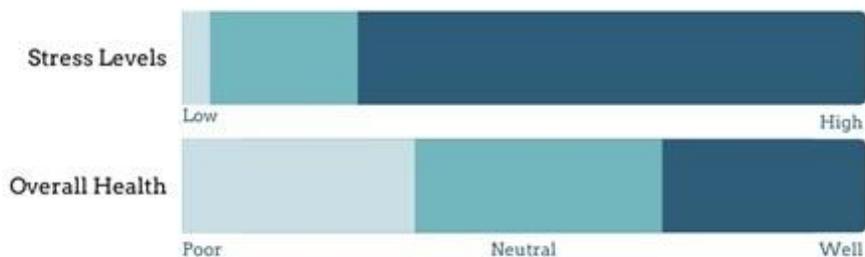
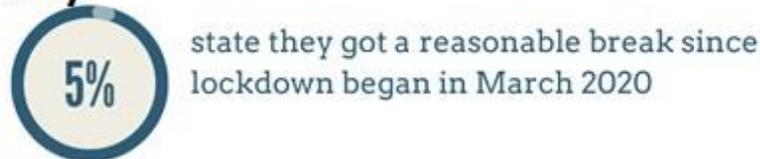
11. SET and SNA Allocations in our schools.



12. Principal Wellbeing:

Principal Wellbeing

Only



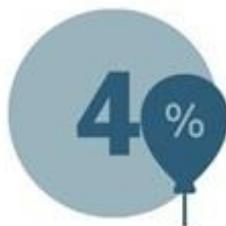
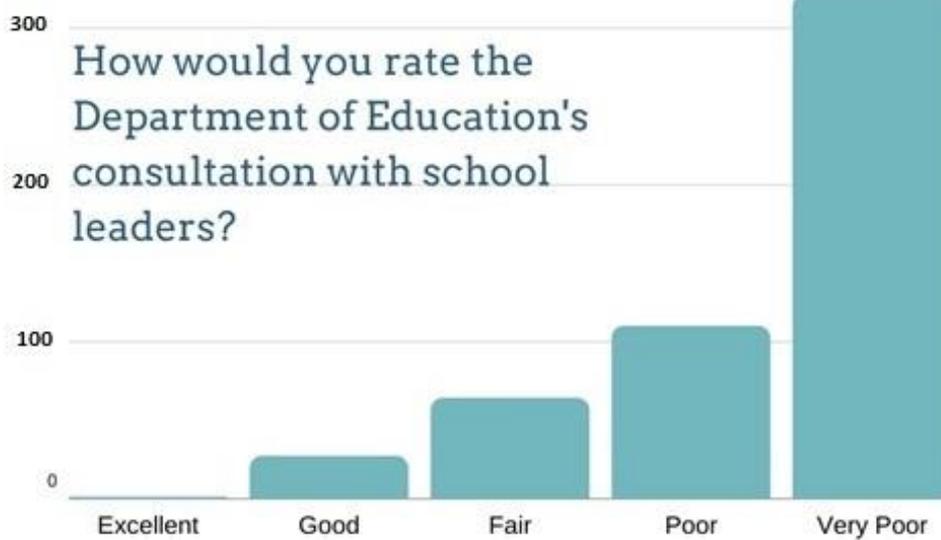
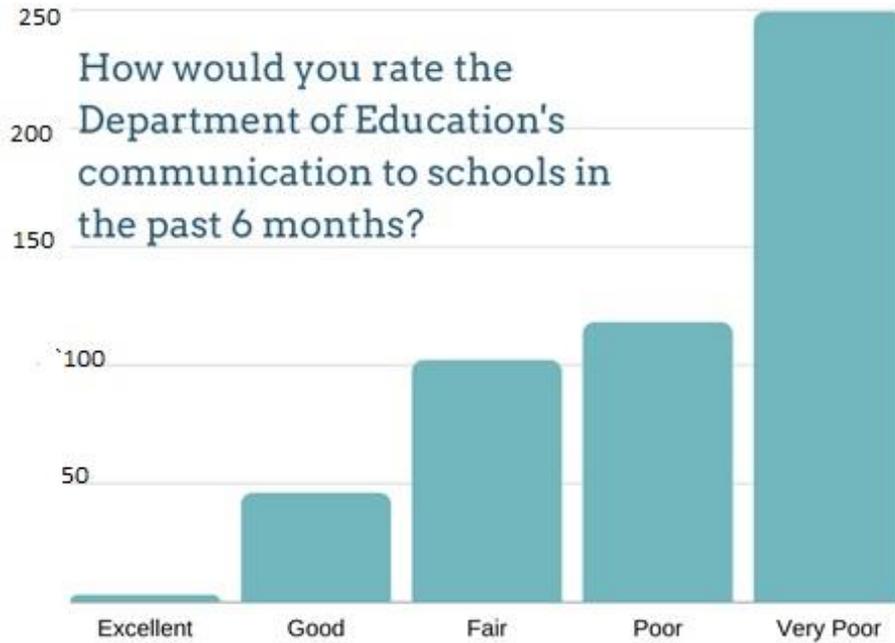
Those that stated that their health is suffering due to workload and stress



NPF Principal Survey October 2020

13. DES Communication:

DES Communication

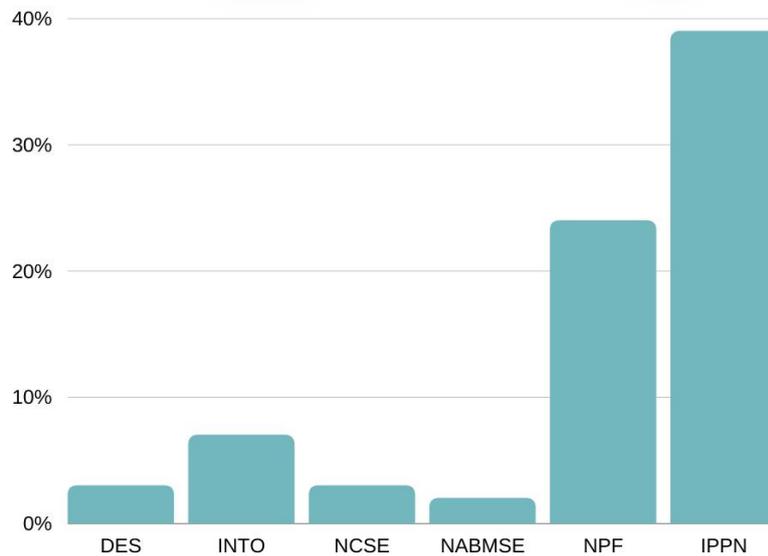


considered that guidance notes were delivered in a timely and comprehensive manner to schools !

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

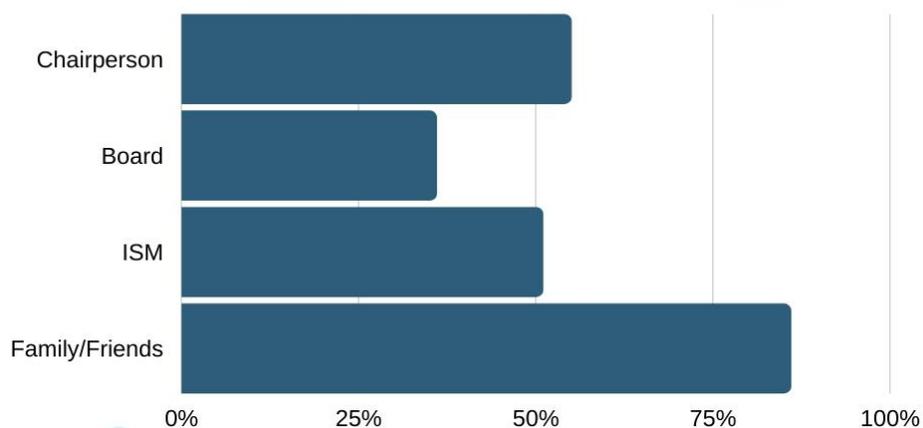
14. Support For School Leaders:

Who Supported Principals?



It is not the role of NPF as a lobby to actively support school leaders, therefore question must be asked of all of the other stakeholders as to why such statistics have been returned.

Who Supported Principals?



5%

stated that they had no one to support them

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

Questions 15 – 18 were long answers, and so a cross section of the answers given are highlighted below. Each Q. had 550 responses and so we have collated the most common issues and themes from these answers.

This is essential reading to truly understand what the situation on the ground in schools is like at the moment. The main points have been distilled in our submission's conclusion also.

15. How did leading remote schooling and the re-opening of school affect you as a school leader?

- “Never experienced the amount of pressure and stress in my life previously.”
- “Got no summer break. Stressed. Constant roller coaster of a workload. Changing goal posts. Lack information from DES. Hear things through media. Want to resign / retire NOW”
- “I had to be treated by my GP for stress related symptoms”.
- “No break during the summer. Very poor communication from Department, The Friday evening circulars/guidance notes are an absolute disgrace. Communication through the media is very demeaning to the profession and shows a total lack of respect for schools”.
- “It has been extremely busy since the school closures. The workload I would have had from this time last year has not reduced but a huge amount has been added to it. Summer came and went with no days off and as a teaching principal, my energy levels after nearly 7 weeks of schooling are now nearly on the floor”.
- “stressful and lonely”.
- “Reopening my school has been a logistical challenge. As a school leader my number one focus of leading learning has been disregarded completely. Dealing with failing communication from the DES, trying to decipher the best approach to reopening my school and maintaining a level of calm and cohesion amongst my staff has consumed my life - both professional and personal since our school officially closed for the summer holidays in June. As I try to ensure the wellbeing of everyone else who is caring for mine? I told my BOM that I would not be working in any guise over Mid Term as I feel a sense of impending burnout personally. Now however, with the continuous kite flying in the media, I have this tightness across my chest daily as I feel that we will be dropped last minute into a school closure again. I don't want my school to close. We want to stay open. But the levels of speculation and lack of guidance from DES is not helping. I'm struggling with having lost a teacher, a building that is not fit for purpose and COVID grants that are being whittled away to near nothing each and every day. Please tell me that I'm not alone.....this job is not in any way rewarding at the moment and if it wasn't for the smiling faces of children each morning as they come into the school building I'm not sure I could last too long more. I have been a Principal for almost 8 years and a teacher for nearly 20. This current crisis has never left me feeling more alone”.
- “It was exhausting and anxiety-inducing. It was all left to the principal to do, with everyone's anxiety directed towards you. There was an overwhelming sense that you were on your own”.
- “I am completely and utterly exhausted. I was advised to take leave but how can a leader leave their staff?”
- “Because the Roadmap for reopening schools was issued in July, when all staff were on holidays, I felt very alone in organising the reopening of our school. With Interviews, for teachers and SNAs, school food provision etc in July and the Roadmap to implement in August, I got no break. The responsibility for reopening was totally on my shoulders”.
- “Serious exhaustion, feeling overwhelmed all of the time. Completely unrealistic expectations. I feel like I am always spinning plates and am in fire-fighting mode since March. I have small children and family time has been seriously impacted, my children barely saw me over the

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

summer break. I am an organised person and the constant waiting for guidance and lack of direct communication from the DES has caused me to feel anxious and frustrated and disrespected. Teacher bashing in the media has not helped either. I am seriously considering my career choices at this point as this kind of pressure is unsustainable. The only reason that our return to school has been successful is as a result of huge support from my ISM and massive hours put into planning by myself. There has been no real acknowledgement of this or of the complete lack of any time off since March. Unrealistic expectations - I feel like I am expected to be a 'Jack of all Trades' - maintenance, cleaner, pest control, purchasing, budgeting and accounting, health care professional, diplomat, counsellor, expert etc It's all so far from teaching and learning!"

- "It has been a hugely stressful and challenging experience. I feel as if I'm on a treadmill, the situation is evolving daily. This is not sustainable".
- "I have decided to retire. This was not my intention early in 2020 but having worked non-stop this year, the time has come for me to call a halt to the relentless pressure. I am really sad about this but feel I have no option but to take action to protect my health".
- "I worked solidly for the whole summer. I have been out sick for the last week because of exhaustion. I am seriously considering leaving my job. I have a fantastic school, lovely staff etc. but the workload is unsustainable".
- "The stress was unbelievable. The lack of a clear line of communication was disgraceful and still is. Right now, I am exhausted and at breaking point. I have huge problems with the facts and figured as portrayed by HSE and DES. It was stated that mass testing had taken place where Covid positive cases were discovered in schools yet the anecdotal evidence on the ground completely contradicts this. Someone needs to get clarity and deliver correct, true information to us".
- "It was an extremely difficult and exhausting time, where everyone looked to me as a school leader for all the answers and solutions to a mountain of issues. I feel exhausted and extremely frustrated that we were left in a position where we were expected to manage staff, school grounds, protocols, recruitment, protocols, furniture, signage, PPE, training, wellbeing of others, checklists, accounts, policies, ...the list is endless but it rests on our shoulders as school leaders. It affected my homelife, my wellbeing, my own children's lives. I felt we were expected to look after the wellbeing of the whole school community but who was looking after ours?"
- "I feel there is very little consideration for principals. We have been treated very poorly by the department during this pandemic. I, personally, have had no summer holidays and went straight from organising distance learning and manning a parental helpline every day to working in the school, solo, with a tractor and trailer moving furniture until 9 or 10 pm every night to try to accommodate social distancing. We are hit with circulars at 6 pm on a Friday and often hear about developments regarding schools from the media or parents. My own well-being has suffered greatly during this time and I am now on call 24/7, another weight to burden that may just be the straw to break the camel's back. I am seriously considering leaving the role as it is unsustainable".
- "It was the single most stressful period in my 6 years as principal. I actually had to take anti-anxiety medication as a result of the pressure and stress in the month of August".
- "I had very little time with my own children this summer. I did not get any planning or preparation done in August for my teaching job. I would usually be well prepared for the year when I come back in September but Covid preparations took all of my time right up to the day before we opened".

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “I am exhausted and feel like I am on call 24/7. I worked all summer for very long hours. We have had numerous cases of Covid and the support from the HSE is abysmal. The stress of the inability to ensure social distancing amongst pupil and staff is unbearable. I have to deal with everyone's fears: parents, pupils, staff and the BOM's fear of running out of money to pay for everything. My Covid call from the inspectorate was a box-ticking exercise. Very little thanks and the media and government are the worst of all. I am a principal 18 years and have never worked so hard in my life”.
- “In twenty years as a principal the pressure and stress of re-opening was the worst I have experienced. The lack of consultation, the fiasco of procurement, the burden of responsibility, the fear of the unknown and the sheer workload having not been able to switch off all summer due to continuous commentary and media coverage coupled with Friday evening emails made this the most challenging 6 months to date”.
- “I have handed in my notice to my Board as I no longer can cope with the stress levels and expectations placed on me from the DES, Inspectorate, Teachers, Ancillary, BOM, pupils and no support for me. I now have lost all enthusiasm for my job and all job satisfaction”.
- “I have actually resigned from my position to step down to most junior member of staff currently waiting upon new appointment”.
- “I am utterly exhausted. I am so tired; I can barely think. I cannot even face doing the weekly shopping as I am simply unable to function. I put every ounce of energy into teaching and running the school and ensuring everyone is safe”.
- “I am utterly and completely exhausted and overwhelmed. The extra stress has put a huge strain on my home life, physical and mental health”.
- “I'm on my knees. I'd retire in the morning if I could access my pension. I'm struggling mentally. I'm having the same conversations with parents and teachers about issues where my hands are tied and no support. I cry at the slightest thing.... privately”.
- “It was absolutely shocking. I'll do anything for the good of the school community but what was expected of me was awful”
- “I realised that I am much more capable than I thought I was. I also realised that we are on our own. Principals had to drive it all, put in crazy hours with no support - only for that and fellow principals. I am so glad and proud to be part of a cohort of such AMAZING people - principals!!!”

16. What are your main concerns relating to school safety at present?

- “Rise in Covid cases in the country”
- Lack of social distancing in class and especially in SET setting
Safety of staff and vulnerable family members
Lack of SEN supports - spread too thin at the best of times but very compromised by pod and bubble system.
Lack of transparency with school Covid cases
Lack of stakeholder support”
- “Lack of social distancing and no acknowledgement that, as per international studies, Covid is airborne and many children are asymptomatic spreaders”.
- “The HSE and Dept of Education must communicate with school principal's more effectively”.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “Some parents not willing to inform school of Covid tests (and send pupils in) or complying with our response plan. Stress levels of staff in general. The recent media speculation around school closures caused definite upset regardless of reassurances offered”
- “The effects of school closure on all pupils especially SEN”
- “Testing being overwhelming as well as Contact Tracing, having to close the school, risk to my family and parents, another lockdown without guidance and sufficient broadband, running out of money, lack of sub teachers/SNAs, Secretary, etc.”
- “The HSE is not dependable to dispense timely advice and I feel very much on time own when contacting the HSE and trying to decide the correct and prudent thing to do. I feel that it is a matter of time before an outbreak of a cluster happens and I dread to think of the repercussions. We also have 3 special needs classes for children with ASD and I am so worried that if the school closes, some children and parents simply won’t cope. This needs to be the exception to remaining open, if schools do close.”
- “Parents not wearing masks outside the school gate.
Large classes of 30 children with a teacher and an SNA - no social distancing possible.
Staffroom not big enough to cope with social distancing even with staggered breaks - some eating lunches in cars and classrooms.
Health and wellbeing of staff - all very disjointed. Some staff are very stressed “.
- “I am very frustrated, annoyed and tired of receiving news about polices, guidance and information relating to school through online forums, gossip and the national media. Surely our DES can find a clear, coherent and efficient way of communicating with us, they have repeatedly asked us for contact details with the expectancy of our 24/7 availability for one thing!”
- “My main concern is with delays in contact tracing. I am also experiencing difficulties sourcing substitute SNAs - I've had to ask parents to keep children at home due to a lack of SNA substitutes. The children in question cannot be left unattended at any point during the school day. This is extremely unsatisfactory”.
- “Lack of clarity around levels 4 and 5 for what protective measures will be in place in schools. As we are a special school and dealing with autism and complex needs, (both medical and behavioural) there is no social distancing. Parents are sending in sick children and we are having to deal with angry parents, anxious staff while trying our best to create and maintain safety in a school environment which is rented on a community centre site (prefabs 15+ years old) with no ventilation”
- “The virus is spreading in the community and as a result in schools. The lack of acknowledgement of this is insulting to those who have worked so hard to make schools as safe as they can possibly be”
- “We have 2 positive cases (teachers), a further 7 teachers awaiting tests, several SNAs and 2 student teachers. This is unsustainable”.
- “Cost of PPE
Keeping children and staff safe
Bubbles /pods in classroom but no guidance for break times
Cleaning grant a disgrace /not enough money
Wellness of staff considering little adult interaction with other staff
Burnout of all staff
Extra yard duty now due to staggered breaks/some days teachers get no break”.
- “I do not think we are safe if a case comes into school. Not enough space and too many pupils in a room”.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “Despite the best efforts of schools, the situations in schools is highly precarious due to the class sizes and inability to social distance – any risk is too much risk currently and this decision to keep schools open, whatever the cost will very definitely be regretted!
- “Parent behaviour outside of the school environment, organising playdates, not observing social distancing, not adhering to guidelines”
- “I am concerned about the day to day risk of contracting Covid 19, being high risk and living with a vulnerable person and not having precise advice regarding what is acceptable AND possible interaction with children”
- “Lack of honesty from dept and HSE regarding cases in schools.
Delay in contact tracing, dismissal of the idea that children/ adults in same class are close contacts
Lack of simple guidelines for school leaders
Staffing levels as cases of virus rise
Child wellbeing/ anxiety
Staff Wellbeing”
- “I was informed of a positive case on Tuesday. The search for correct information while supporting the parents and pupils has been lonely and stressful. I have found it impossible to get timely coherent information. I'm very aware that one wrong decision & I'll be vilified
“Lack of timely communication from Public Health when cases occur in school, extremely frustrating. Different definitions for close contacts in school situations to other workplaces. School staff are being left wide open.
Government determined to keep schools open no matter what happens.
Inadequate accommodation.
Inadequate funding to make the changes we need to make our school safer.
Inadequate supply of subs
- “Getting a remote teaching and learning plan in place that will be effective
Supporting children/ Pods sent home while the remaining children are in school”
- “Oversubscribed classrooms, teaching principal unable to meet needs outlined by the Dept for the safety of all, if the school is locked down trying to motivate all staff, parents and pupils to do remote teaching and learning again, inadequate internet in the school and a big digital divide in homes, we're living a lie - we are unable to guarantee the safety of all children whilst also maintaining a "normal" school atmosphere
- “The presumptions that schools are a low risk environment, while experience tells us this is not so”
- “My SNA allocation was increased by 0.5; I applied for an increase of 2 infant days; we are struggling every minute of every day; there is NO highlighting of this by any stakeholder ANYWHERE. The appeals process on top of Covid was a nightmare; had I decided to take the summer off in the way NCSE did the school would not have opened”
- “We will lose our developing post meaning there are times there's not enough teachers in the school. How to isolate a child or manage like that is very difficult to imagine, in addition to having to merge classes together after 30th of October when we lost this teacher. Appeals for sense have fallen on deaf DES ears. How can this be justified?”
- “We want to stay open, we want to stay safe – the two are not compatible without realistic supports and guidance. We are winging it. Our children need their education, the

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

socialisation and the support and structure of school. Keeping school open at all costs would be a fairer and more realistic prospect if all costs were actually considered – but we have suffered from persistent cuts to education for years – despite the spin from successive governments”

- “The level of burnout of Principals who have kept the show in the road. We cannot take much more”

17. What is needed to make a principal’s job more sustainable at present?

- “Adequate release time
Support
SEN provisions matching the actual level of need in the school
Availability of sub teachers”
- “A guaranteed break when no emails or circulars will issue from the DES. A reduction in paperwork. A change in the system of allocating SETs and SNAs. Sufficient substitute teachers in each area”.
- “Full restoration of ISM teams - we lost half our posts during the moratorium, and regained none so far. Greater sharing of the workload, but staff already have enough to do. Voluntary Boards of Management; well-meaning people and grateful for their input, but not a sustainable system going forward”
- “Clear direct communication and consultation from the Department”
- “Do not cut teachers. We are losing a teacher on 23rd October – this is debilitating for our school”
- “Improved communication and technology, a higher budget for PPE, greater supports for Special Education teachers, more explicit directives and resources with regard to remote learning”
- “All teaching principals should have been employed as admin principals this year, combining both has been nearly impossible at times to the detriment of my class”
- “Smaller classes”
- “Better Pay
Acknowledgement from the Department of the extra responsibilities that are being put on the shoulders of school principals and the fact that principals have to available 24/7”.
- “More leadership support - deputy principal release days
Increased admin support
No more Friday evening circulars/Communication from the Dept. / Govt. that affects schools, sent directly to Principals in advance of media”
- “Access to subs. I'm so tired of getting calls at 6 am and spending all morning trying to sort subs when I have to get my own children ready for school. Working till 10pm again sourcing subs and finding none”.
- “There is no off button at the moment - a mid-term break with no announcements about closures would be great - if they could let us know what is happening before the 23rd October so we can plan in”.
- “Proper SEN support for children in need of it”.
- “Extra secretarial support. All DPs should have release days. The allowance for a principal in a very small school (1-5) is not enough, it’s not worth the money for the huge workload. We need more timely communication from DES. Media leaks are not helpful. Clarity about at

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

what level we close. Our county goes to level 4 tomorrow, level four is schools open with protective measures but we haven't been told what Extra protective measures Will be in place at level 4".

- "Honour the payment of the benchmarking award granted in 2008 – pay parity with second level".
- "Department of Education to answer a phone call or email.
Help us instead of making us jump through hoops for minor issues.
Stop publishing important documents at 6pm on a Friday.
Maybe do schools the courtesy of giving us information before the media"
- "More support for school leaders
Realistic working hours
Proper breaks
Dedicated testing for staff and a line of communication to the HSE"
- "Better communication and support from official bodies"
- "In relation to building projects - Schools should be able to hand over this responsibility to a paid project manager; this should not fall entirely on the shoulders of the principal who will take it on because of their never-ending dedication to their school and its community"
- "A break. This just simply cannot continue. I worked all day yesterday, until midnight, on contact tracing with the HSE and trying to find subs – this is most days for me – the issues change but the workload doesn't. "
- "Reduction in workload. Impossible to devote time to leading learning given the initiatives and work load at present".
- "Better supports. Reliable information from DES.
The minute a case is reported in a school that HSE give guidance to school immediately , that the school is not waiting days for a phone call.
More subs, impossible to find.
That principals can switch off this midterm - NO documents released by DES during that week."
- "Less circulars. Identify 5/6 key areas for school leaders to tackle and implement and ensure they are implemented as opposed to new circulars every few days. Less administration on principals in relation to wages/tendering projects/Ros payments etc. There are qualified people to deal with these areas who won't join our BOM as a result of workload expected of them for free".
- "Stop making us fight for every drop of resources to support SEN. Believe us when we say we need it."
- "Change the structure of BOM so they actually function. the current system has been shown to be a joke when the Principal was largely left on their own during the summer and at weekends to manage everything.
Full time secretary paid by the DES, like an SNA, for every school. regardless of size.
Proper scaled admin days for principals so there is no cliff between the allocation of admin principal and teaching principal.
Contract for Principals and realign DP role as well. There should be no scenario where a DP is paid more than ANY Principal. There is no comparison between the responsibilities of the roles."
- "At present. I need extra SNA support. I am awaiting another psychological report to support this.1 NEPS assessment for us is totally inadequate. I also need more admin time and extra SEN hours to be able to cope with this situation."

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “More space or 50% attendance.”
- “Principals need a proper break. The constant presence of Covid has meant that I have had no break from work since March. Properly planned lockdowns for 2/3 weeks if necessary. Clear advice on how much interaction is allowed amongst young children in a school setting. Teachers are now frontline workers and should be prioritised for testing etc. if the Government wants to keep schools open.”
- “A step down facility for teaching principals. Full time secretarial hours. Professional treasurers for schools.”
- “A massive restructuring of what the principal is responsible for.”
- “Extra funding for heating - bills very high due to the need to ventilate and heat at the same time”.
- “A clearly defined role. No correspondence from DES or other agencies over ALL school holidays. The school is closed so the principal should be entitled to take a break. No new initiatives in schools for at least two school years. Adequate BOM training with clearly defined roles. More in school management posts”.
- “Admin status for every principal. Failing that 1 day per 1 teacher school, two days for two teacher school and so on. If a school has a special unit the principal should be admin”.
- “Subbing for all absences as classes cannot be split up and teachers from other areas of school cannot be supervising lots of different classes. SET cannot be eroded covering these absences and further disadvantaging our SEN pupils”.
- “Priority for staff in schools for Covid-19 testing”.
- “Increased levels of supports and resources and access to assessment of need should be made available immediately to children in disadvantaged situations and to those with Special Educational Needs. Everyone has suffered during the past 7-8 months. These two groups in particular have regressed and have come back with increased levels of anxiety. The gap between these groups and the main population of students has grown at a much faster rate than before. The services that both of these groups would usually be availing of (if they're lucky enough to have access to them) have been either slow to start back or have not started back at all. This leaves families and schools desperately trying to bridge a gap in an effort to bring them back on par with their peers. This is not possible and is putting a huge strain on the mental health of the children, their families and staff in their schools. Some of these children have not come back to school at all due to high levels of stress and anxiety.”
- “DEIS status - There is still a massive glitch in the system that has not been resolved. DEIS 2 senior schools are enrolling children from their feeder school(s) who are DEIS 1. These children are rightly being given access to more funding, more resources, more initiatives, and more teachers for three to four years and only to enrol in the senior school and not have these supports in place.”
- “Have someone in the various departments of the DES answer the phone to a query or at the very least to respond in a timelier fashion. I am still awaiting responses to queries I sent in 3 weeks ago. I'm the one who gets flack when I'm not seen to be dealing with something quickly enough.”
- “I keep losing school secretaries due to the terrible pay and conditions. Training in and keeping new secretaries has been my biggest stress.”
- “I can't teach and lead. I need administrative status to attend to the needs of my school.”
- “Respect and acknowledgement for the trojan work being done by principals.”

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “Proper support from INTO.”
- “A principal's office so that I do not have to use my car or the school shed on release days.”
- “No Principal should be a teaching Principal – it is cruelty.”
- “DES need to listen to the schools and take their concerns seriously and to trust our judgements. I feel the DES are totally disconnected to the reality in schools at the moment and the efforts we have made to reopen and keep schools open during a pandemic.”
- “More outspoken concern for leaders by INTO, IPPN and media.”
- “Genuine support from the DES and time to breathe.”
- “Ensuring Principals get proper support from ISM team with accountability for same.”
- “Access to a supply panel, an increase in posts of responsibility, more acknowledgement of and support for principals’ wellbeing.”
- “I feel we need to be reassured that if we have a case that the advice will be immediate from HSE. That waiting period is soul destroying for Principals as the word will have got out via social media very quickly and everyone expects an immediate response from the Principal. I worry about that waiting period, as do my colleagues.”
- “One voice from education stakeholders - not 5 different emails from 5 bodies all saying roughly the same thing... but not exactly the same thing! There are too many cooks and far too little actual help for those of us on the ground. Partnership between the stakeholders persistently leaves out a key stakeholder – the school leader!”
- “Co-operation from the Department and understanding; I have made a staffing appeal to them, we were short one pupil for an appointment last September (2019). The child was coming from another country but due to legal reasons was unable to be with us on time. The child in question came to the school in February 2020. The Department refused the appeal that we made in February. We have 4 over and above the appointment figure this year, I have appealed again and expect to have the appeal refused, meanwhile I have a class of 32 with a teacher and SNA and with in-class support teaching there are 35 bodies in the room. I have mentioned Covid concerns but know this will be refuted. THE DEPARTMENT NEEDS TO START UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT IS LIKE ON THE GROUND DEALING WITH THESE ISSUES and stop ticking their own compliance boxes without having a clue what it is like on the ground.”
- “If I had one wish to address this problem, it would be to have a massive reduction on expectation levels of teachers. We simply must reduce the burden on teachers. One thing I find very frustrating is that we are regularly told to look after our own mental health and not overburden ourselves. This is usually followed by being given an extra demand or deadline. I don't understand that hypocrisy.”
I also get very frustrated when I hear that we need to apply strategies to deal with stress as well as the importance of engaging in wellness activities. To me this is akin to building more lifeboats but never addressing why we are crashing into icebergs. Why can't we reduce the pressures and burden of expectations that are on people in order to address the root cause of all these anxieties and stresses?”
- “Chairpersons need to be paid, trained and clustered. Surely one person could run several small schools of similar size and their expertise would be beneficial to all the schools This idea of a new person every 4 year is a disgrace. They no sooner understand the way a school is run - then they move on”.
- “The child welfare situation is a ticking time bomb at present. I work in an area of high disadvantage. The situations some children are living in is criminal. We report constantly and chase social workers constantly. There are young children living in hellish situations and the resources are not there to help them. As Principal, I am picking up the pieces from the

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

lockdown. I am spending 50% of my time on child welfare and 40% on Covid related matters. My amazing deputy principal is running the school as well as doing SET. It is unsustainable and starting to affect my mental health because of the feeling of absolute powerlessness to help these vulnerable children. They have no rights and nobody to look out for their welfare except the teachers and myself. If the 'stories' of some of the children in my school were printed on the front page of the Irish Times there would be uproar and tribunals."

18. What is needed to keep schools open right now?

- "More collaborative time to organise ourselves as staffs to assess our current situation in school to plan for all eventualities."
- "Adequate financial support
Full time secretarial support
Adequate cleaning supports
Admin principal status
Postponement of SNA frontloading model
Adequate resourcing of SNA model to increase schools' capacity to e.g. integration and true inclusion."
- "More PERSONNEL - teachers, SNA's, SET. Availability of substitute teachers and immediate access to same, A panel of SNA's in the area to fill positions vacant due to COVID."
- "Breathing space."
- "Full secretarial support."
- "Admin status for principals to enable us to cope with the huge workload in the midst of the added complexities of coping with this pandemic."
- "Faster contact tracing
Priority testing for school staff
Increase availability of flu vaccine for school staff"
- "Please do not cut teachers when there is no room for more children. We will have NO distance between children, never mind social distancing."
- "An effective Department of Education."
- "Funding that fully reflects the changes schools have had to make and continue to need making going forward."
- "Reassurance for staff and parents that the country is locking down so that we may stay open (not that we are being sacrificed and 'immune' to Covid.)"
- "Adequate IT supports for all pupils - lack of Internet in home is the number one issue
Additional IT grants for training for staff in remote learning and purchase of devices
Fast tracking of COVID testing and contact tracing for schools
If case emerges all class sent home along with teachers - none of this pod lark as it is not a workable safety element in our school."
- "Realistic availability of sub SNAs and teachers. I cannot get sub teachers and am constantly calling upon SETs to cover which impacts on the most vulnerable and needy children in the school. Better service from the HSE for confirmed cases."
- "A vastly improved procurement service for purchase of PPE and cleaning materials."
- "Dedicated testing for school staff and better communication with HSE on risk assessments
Effective communication and consultation between DES and school leaders is essential
Information regarding funding for PPE and cleaning for the rest of the year"

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

Better guidance and support for queries from DES

More support for school staff and wellbeing.”

- “That parents are mindful of their own social interactions and follow the government guidelines. I feel to keep schools open the whole school community has a part to play that if you are feeling unwell or a child is unwell, that you err on the side of caution and stay at home.”
- “A Plan B!! It doesn't have to be all in or all out. Consideration should be given to half the pupils being in school on particular days etc. In the event of a worsening situation this could be turned to for a period of time rather than a full shut down of schools.”
- “A plan to safeguard the most vulnerable children – living in poverty, direct provision, with SEN, etc.”
- “Clear and timely communication from the DES directly to school principals, before releasing it to the media. I am tired of finding new information on Twitter before the DES has communicated with schools. It is extremely disrespectful.”
- “Schools need to close for 2 weeks to regroup. After an excellent start, the past week has been insane. We are constantly hearing that schools are fine but they're not now. Everyone I spoke to in the HSE over the past few days said they were overrun with calls from schools and trying to deal with them.”
- “Honesty about what is happening in schools, clear communication (before release to the media) from DOES to school principals DIRECTLY and the same public health advice for schools and the rest of the community.”
- “A department that works. It is unbelievable that you cannot speak to a person in the department, and if you can they are mostly working from home due to Covid workplace restrictions and yet are doling out instructions to us cramped into supersized classes with no hope of workplace safety. The website is a joke. We are on our own.”
- “Principal supports (financially and mental health) No pay rise in 20 years but massive work load increase, Increase Middle management”.
- “Respect and proper consultation with real school leaders on the ground - and more importantly listen and take their advice.”
- “Proper funding for ICT - as a Special school we got just under €4,000 this year - already used on repair and replacement of worn out teachers' laptops so they could work from home. All existing ICT infrastructure over 10 years old and breaking down, but no funds left to replace. The secondary school beside us got €46000!!! they are giving all staff a new laptop AND iPad, they have bought pupil laptops for all exam years - no fair comparison but highlights the inequity as our SEN pupils have little or no access to technology in the homes and we have no equipment to give them.”
- “More staff, the NCSE, NEPS to do their jobs and stop hiding behind Covid - we aren't afforded that luxury. We are ticking over with SET working as SNAs, parent volunteers working as SNAs etc. Got NEPS psychologist this year after having none 3 of the past 4 years.”
- “Proper high quality broadband and ICT infrastructure. Building programme to equip all schools with adequate space/facilities.”
- “Special Covid-related leave for teachers/school leaders who are parents who may have a child at home who is restricting their movements, rather than them having to take personal leave. Recognise that principals, if required to stay at home for such a reason, are still working from home, and therefore there is no need to key in leave to the OLCS”.

NPF Principal Survey October 2020

- “The DES needs to stop sending us so called guidelines, (too late) that do not guide us in any way . We need sustained support from DES and the HSE. ”
- “Please... no more important documents issued on Friday evenings, especially on Bank Holiday weekends, without notice or advertisement. It is impossible to keep up with all that has been issued.”
- “More proactive and meaningful support from inspectorate, department, INTO, IPPN, etc. To feel that we are not holding the whole thing together alone. That pressure is immense.
- “Recognition that there are cases of COVID 19 in schools and taking appropriate action to ensure safety of all within the school.”
- “As advised by NPHET - schools cannot be just kept open 'at all costs' - which seems to be the approach at present. The human cost could be very high.”