

**Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher
Education, Research, Innovation and Science on
*“Ensuring that Schools are open in a manner which is both safe and sustainable”.***

Deireadh Fómhair 2020

The National Principals’ Forum (NPF) wishes to thank the Chairperson, Deputy Paul Kehoe TD, and members of the Committee for inviting us to engage with your important discussion and relay to you our experience of the pandemic at the chalk face. We also wish to thank Committee Clerk, Tara Kelly, for her courtesy in assisting us in this process.

NPF makes this submission as administrative members and representatives of The National Principals’ Forum (NPF). We are an entirely voluntary, registered grassroots lobby group of over 1,200 practising Primary School Principal Teachers, established in May 2018.

NPF seeks to work with the Minister for Education, Management Bodies and Representative Bodies to affect urgent changes needed to sustain us in our roles as school leaders and affect much needed change to safeguard our education system. We aim to provide support and collegiality to fellow school leaders through dynamic collaboration and the sharing of expertise and experience.

We have made a previous submission to this Committee in July 2018 and attested to this submission before the Committee and former chairperson, Senator Fiona O’Loughlin, in August 2018. Our submission and its recommendations were published in the Committee Report in June 2019, but we have yet to see any reasonable measures being taken to address the issues outlined in these documents and the plight of primary principals and primary education has worsened annually. NPF, in that report, outlined major deficiencies in our primary education system. These were not addressed and are now aggravating the shortcomings in our ability to respond to Covid.

NPF has also conducted numerous research pieces among primary principal teachers, both teaching and administrative, across all school types and settings, and collated the results in documents published and forwarded to all education stakeholders, including this committee and the DES.

We have inexplicably failed in our numerous efforts and requests to have our representative bodies (of which we are fee-paying members) present our research and issues directly to the DES. We are responsible for creating and maintaining a synergy between the partners in Education, and while our commitment has been tireless in this regard, it seems that we are the forgotten partners; we are afforded no consultation nor professional respect shown to us and this has to change.

This summer, in the absence of any plan for our schools, the National Principals’ Forum compiled a document of all questions that needed to be answered in order to re-open schools.

We also accepted questions from other practicing principals. It was a live document and it was updated as and when information became available. It was lauded as a great success. What made it successful? Principals were consulted with and listened to in a meaningful manner. This is the approach we recommend this Committee takes also. Listen to what practicing school leaders and teachers have to say. They/ we are best placed to provide that information.

We very much appreciate the Committee's invitation to school leaders to contribute to this discussion, and possibly make a difference to the extremely challenging situations that we find ourselves navigating daily; for the good of our primary education system, the pupils and staff concerned.

Kind regards,

Angela Dunne

On behalf of the National Principals' Forum

nationalprincipalsforum@gmail.com

www.principalsforum.org

087-7833264