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PRIMARY



Members of Ógras with President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina, at BEO - *Gaelach agus Bródúil* - the main event of Bliain na Gaeilge 2018 in Dublin on April 14.

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The views expressed in this Yearbook are many, varied and sometimes contradictory. They are exclusively the views of our highly valued writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or of Education Matters.





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Ireland's Yearbook of Education 2018 2019

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Páirc Clerkin
CEO, IPPN



Geraldine D'Arcy
Research &
Publications Manager,
IPPN

OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN 2018-2019

A challenging year of relentless change

The wide variety of contexts being managed by more than 6,500 school leaders of Irish primary schools means that any attempt at an overview of the sector will likely omit or inadequately represent some crucial aspect for practitioners. Having said that, the past year has been particularly challenging with two key initiatives – revised child protection guidelines, and GDPR – landing in schools with little or no preamble, and certainly little appreciation for the complexities and impact they would bring to bear. Coupled with new inspection models, ongoing review of the curriculum, the Digital Learning Framework, increasing expectations from all stakeholders, and a minister who had an action plan for every aspect of education, it's fair to say that this year has been incredibly intense for all primary school leaders, teachers, and others working in the sector.

Let's look at just a few examples of what has been happening in primary education over the past year or so. Hurricane Ophelia led to much discussion about school closures and mitigating actions with boards of management and parents. The review of the role of SNA highlights both challenges and opportunities to improve the way supports are offered to children with special educational needs in our schools. Investing in primary education – an initiative led by the management bodies of primary schools – brought much-needed focus and attention to the deficits of the capitation and ancillary services grants in primary schools. The minister's pronouncements on ASD classes in schools and the perception that schools weren't willing to provide for them caused a furore. Our esteemed colleague Professor John Coolahan passed away after an illness bravely borne and is much missed.

This year brought two key celebrations: the 150th anniversary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the 40th anniversary of Educate Together. Both organisations can take huge pride in their individual and collective history in advancing primary education in Ireland. School divestment continues to pose significant challenges, not least the very slow pace in divesting of patronage to non- and multi-denominational patrons. The discontinuation of the so-called 'baptism barrier', the consultation on the primary curriculum, and the re-emergence of School Self-Evaluation, a much-valued planning tool, were welcomed in many quarters.

There were some significant challenges and changes in the sector that warrant a little more attention.

TEACHER SUPPLY

There is direct evidence that the availability of substitute teachers at primary level has become increasingly challenging, and is getting

much worse over time. This is confirmed through surveys conducted by IPPN and CPSMA as well as the Teaching Council's report 'Striking the Balance'. The report noted significant issues in primary education, including the fact that only 64% of absences were claimed for by schools. A key conclusion in the report noted 'significant concerns regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the current substitute teacher system' and that 'there is a risk that this dysfunction can have a negative impact on the quality of pupil learning'. Schools, and particularly principals, are dealing with the shortfall, and with the consequences.

There are many possible explanations for the reduced number of substitute teachers, including population growth, regulation (which can restrict the availability of teachers), economic factors, and improved pupil-teacher ratios. While many schools have had significant difficulty finding available and suitably qualified substitute teachers, Irish-language schools, special schools, island schools, those situated in remote locations, and one-teacher schools have severe difficulty on an ongoing basis.

The DES has taken measures to address issues relating to the shortage of substitute teachers in the short term. However, more needs to be done if schools are to see an improvement in the challenges they face in this regard, particularly in the longer term. This requires collaboration between the DES, the Teaching Council, and the teacher training colleges to ensure an adequate supply of trained teachers in the future. There are a number of potential solutions that would alleviate the shortage of substitute teachers over the next few years, while the crisis is at its worst:

The availability of substitute teachers is getting much worse over time.

- Key to resolving the issue is the creation of supply teacher panels, to ensure that trained subs are available regionally, as this would offer security to new graduates and provide cover for the leadership days of teaching principals. Restoring pay equality for new entrants to the profession would also help retain newly qualified teachers in Ireland.
- The teaching practice element of the fourth year of the Bachelor of Education could be considered as an *internship*. This would allow for greater flexibility in the redeployment of host teachers, including flexibility to cover for their colleagues' absences.
- More flexibility could allow teachers qualified in other jurisdictions, as well as retired teachers, to undertake substitute teaching.
- Clearing redeployment panels earlier.

CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

Legislation enacted in December 2017 mandated schools to get up to speed with complex legal requirements for child protection, Risk Assessment, and the Child Safeguarding Statement by March 2018. Despite the deadline, online and face-to-face training was not available to all schools and mandated persons until after the deadline, which created significant unrest. The legislation and the procedures for child protection are critically important, and they should help safeguard and protect both children and school staff into the future, ensuring that all schools implement best practice in a consistent and transparent way.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION GUIDELINES

As with all organisations throughout the European Union, schools too have been affected by the new EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). GDPR gives data subjects the right to request from schools whatever data is being stored about them and to withdraw consent to its use, effectively ordering its destruction. According to Article 12, this request must be free of charge, easy to make, and fulfilled within one month. However, a school is entitled to hold lawfully obtained data about pupils in order to carry out its business. Coming so soon after new child protection legislation and guidelines, GDPR has put considerable pressure on schools, as well as those organisations that support them.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTS

2018/2019 will be the first year for annual school accounts to be prepared using the standardised national template, in order to fulfil obligations under Section 18 of the Education Act, 1998. All accounts for this school year must be submitted to the Financial Services Support Unit (FSSU) by the end of February 2020.

The Centre for School Leadership pilot CPD project has been a resounding success.

This will create challenges in those schools whose systems may not readily accommodate the requirements of the template. A key challenge for such schools will be the capacity and skills to take remedial action in a timely manner. It is likely that smaller schools will be disproportionately affected, as they have far less administrative support and also less funding for software and other financial and administrative resources.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CIRCULAR

Circular 63/2017 – Leadership and Management in Primary Schools, issued in September 2017, is a leap forward for school leadership and management. Two key aspects are the facility to recruit a teacher from outside the existing staff for the role of deputy principal, and a partial restoration of promoted posts and middle-leadership capacity. Seniority is no longer a criterion for promotion to a post of responsibility, and there is flexibility to meet the needs of the school.

While larger schools have not benefited from the restoration of promoted posts, overall it heralds an excellent opportunity to develop a real and genuine distributive leadership in our schools. There is an appreciation of the reasons behind the Department prioritising smaller schools in the restoration of posts, but all schools need to be in a position to develop and grow their leadership and management capacity at a time of relentless change.

CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School leaders rightly expect a coordinated approach to high-quality CPD provision. The Centre for School Leadership, CSL, formed in 2015, has consulted with all stakeholders on the design of a ‘continuum’ of professional learning for school leaders.

The pilot project has been a resounding success. One-to-one and group mentoring, leadership coaching, and the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL) are going from strength to strength. The centre's current work in the development of an Irish model of professional learning for leadership along the continuum, together with CSL's quality assurance remit, will support the Irish education system to provide professional learning of the highest quality for school leaders. CSL has achieved a huge amount over the past few years. It is time now for CSL to be established on a permanent footing and for future provision to be expanded to include all deputy principals in our primary schools.

We must say no to initiatives unless they directly support the priorities we have identified for our schools.

IMPROVEMENTS IN FUNDING

The past year has seen a number of improvements in the primary sector, which should be acknowledged:

- The pupil-teacher ratio, at 26:1, is now at its lowest-ever level. We need to build on this improvement to bring Ireland into line with the best education systems, if we are to achieve the Minister's stated aim of being the best in Europe by 2025.
- An increase in the number of 'leadership and management days', also known as 'release days', available to the almost 60% of principals who teach full-time – teaching principals – was introduced for the 2018/2019 school year. Teaching principals now have 17–29 non-teaching days per year, depending on the number of mainstream class teachers in their schools. We need to urgently progress to *at least* one day per week for all teaching principals if we are to genuinely facilitate and empower the leadership and management of our smaller schools.
- The Leadership and Management Circular brought much-needed improvement to middle leadership capacity. All schools now need to be enabled to develop their capacity to lead and manage the school, and to provide much-needed support to school leaders.

CALENDAR OF REFORM

Over the past number of years, it has been assumed that school leaders will lead reform and manage the constant stream of change, not to mention heightened expectations. Systems thrive on accountability and measurement, but children thrive on stimulating, teaching, and learning. The needs of children must always win out over those of any system.

A 'calendar of reform' is long overdue, whereby there is genuine thought and collaboration right across the sector in prioritising and resourcing multi-year system change programmes, if for no other reason than to ensure that change is fully embedded and efforts not wasted. All of the education partners and agencies need to engage in open and transparent dialogue about the change agenda. There needs to be an agreed multi-year plan and timescale to manage the pace of change, beginning with clear *priorities across the sector*. For a start, school leaders need time to implement and embed the significant change that is *already* taking place in our schools. We welcome the Department's setting up of the Primary Education Forum, which aims to 'support the planning and sequencing of

change in the primary sector' and seems to be along very similar lines to the ideas outlined above on a calendar of reform.

As school leaders, we also need to consider how we manage the pace of change in our schools, to embrace the autonomy the school leadership role offers, and to ensure that our School Improvement Plan and School Self-Evaluation work are the priorities we live by. This is why 'empowering school leaders to manage change' is so important. Schools, and school leaders, need to insist that the priorities we are focusing on remain the priorities we work to, regardless of what initiatives and programmes are launched, communicated, or promoted by external parties.

We must protect the positive learning environments in our schools by saying no to initiatives unless they *directly* support the priorities we have identified for our schools. Schools have a significant amount of autonomy, and we should exercise it – to control our response to events rather than allowing events to control us.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that something has to change, as school leaders and school staffs are under considerable pressure. There is a danger that the change agenda will undermine the positive learning environments which have been built up over a number of years in our schools. The development of a calendar of reform, proposed here, is crucial if we are to empower school leaders and build capacity and sustainability in the primary sector.



Jim Hayes, IPPN Founding President, is presented with a bronze plaque by IPPN Board member **Íde Ní Dhúbháin**, in recognition of his IPPN presidency and his contribution to primary education and school leadership. The plaque is inscribed with the mission statement of IPPN 'Tacaíocht, Misneach, Spreagadh'.

THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL IN IRELAND

How the system can help



Anna Mai Rooney
Deputy Director
Primary, Centre for
School Leadership

In the ever-changing landscape of modern education, school leaders, now more than ever, require the skills and expertise to manage change, maximise school improvement, and ensure the best possible learning experiences and outcomes for their students. They are responsible for developing the teaching and learning in their school to prepare students adequately for the infinite possibilities facing them in a complex twenty-first-century world.

57% of primary school principals in Ireland are teaching, and therefore have full teaching responsibility for a single class, a mixed class, or groups of children accessing special education teaching. These teaching duties, in addition to the task of leading the school community, have become an almost impossible burden for those who find themselves in this position.

In a recent study of the role, 77% of principals interviewed said they felt that the role of the teaching principal is unsustainable in the long term; interestingly, 72% of teachers said the same. 45% of principals said they would not be in the role in ten years' time, due to increasing workload, burnout, and demands on personal life (Salmon, 2016).¹

Education stakeholders have been listening continuously to the challenges experienced by teaching principals and have made repeated representation to government for increased release time as a priority. Many believe, however, that not enough is being done. Feedback to the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) referred to the 'overwhelming workload' and the 'hugely challenging and very lonely role', which gives an insight into the frustration felt by principals trying to juggle teaching and management duties and to show positive leadership in their school community.

Although teaching principals welcome and appreciate the significant supports in the system from the professional, union, management, and trust bodies, and the support services, alongside the mentoring and coaching supports available from the Department through CSL, there is a need for additional scaffolding to support their role.

SMALL SCHOOLS: THE PROS AND CONS

For many years now, the future of small schools in Ireland has been analysed, and closures, amalgamations, and clustering or federation possibilities have been examined. In the DES report 'Value for Money Review of Small Primary Schools', published in 2013,² the reasons given historically for the number of small primary schools in Ireland included population diversity, geographical factors, and (to a much lesser extent) minority linguistic and denominational groupings. The

main concerns expressed were how important the small school is to its local community, and the distance children would have to travel to get to school.

Internationally, the evidence suggests that small schools do indeed have a real and positive local effect. In Finland, where the number of small schools has decreased significantly since 1992, research into their closures brought the following conclusion:

A safe, small school is fundamental to a pleasant community. The school is more than just a place to educate children; it influences the community's well-being. ... Closing a village school accelerates the withering of life in the surrounding countryside, reduces the 'immigration attraction' of the village, potentially increases emigration, and leads to a downward spiral in which the remaining services in the village are terminated.³

Feedback to the Centre for School Leadership referred to the 'overwhelming workload' and the 'very lonely role' [of the teaching principal].

The current debate in Ireland on the closure of Garda stations and post offices would be significantly heightened by the closure of local schools, leaving no plan for the development and growth of rural Ireland, abandoning it to quiet residential areas with no prospects of employment or population growth. As the DES review points out, however, 'the community role of a school must be viewed in the context that the central role of a school is to provide education to children, and this is the objective against which the effectiveness and efficiency of provision should be assessed'.⁴

The committee in charge of putting the report together then turned towards the performance of small schools, in consultation with the Inspectorate. Their research found that small schools' success in teaching and learning, and outcomes for their students, were on a par with larger schools. It is a widely accepted fact that the education provided by Irish small schools is of the highest standard.

While there is no doubt about the high standards of teaching and learning, there are many questions to be asked about the well-being of the teaching principal who is expected to lead and maintain them. The demands of modern education in relation to compliance, diversity, inclusion, and expectations, alongside the social and economic challenges that exist for families, make the teaching principal's role challenging in the extreme. HayGroup (2003) concludes: 'the significant proportion of small schools within the system places considerable pressures on the ability of teaching principals within these schools to effectively deliver the leadership aspects of their role'.⁵ It raises the question of what can be done to assist them. How can the system better support them?

HOW CAN THE SYSTEM SUPPORT THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL?

According to Salmon (2016), teaching principals said they urgently need extended secretarial support, release time increased to a minimum of one

day a week (supported by clusters of schools joining together for substitute access), and the possible solution of an administrative principal for clusters of small schools.⁶

While the extra secretarial support and one release day per week would certainly improve workload issues, it is interesting that this much-sought-after improvement in conditions is not seen as sufficient to effectively address the demands of the role. Principals taking part in a study by Murdoch and Schiller (2002) reported that even with extra release time, they had to arrange their role so that they no longer had responsibility for a class: ‘Nobody can serve two masters. You can’t work in a classroom for the simple fact that there is too much administration to do.’⁷ In this study, principals in New South Wales in Australia already had full-time secretarial support if they had 50 students or more, and many part-time clerical assistants were working many additional hours voluntarily to support the principal and staff. These assistants felt ‘frustrated that they were not able to offer the degree of support that they felt was needed to enable teaching and learning to be the highest priority’.

FEDERATION OPTIONS

Work by Williams (2008) in the former National Centre for School Leadership (NCSL) in Nottingham brought the many federation options to the fore. She looked at all levels of federations, from the informal to the formal, and their impact on school communities. Informal federations work collaboratively to share best practice, learn from each other, and develop policy together. Formal federations have an administrative head teacher in charge of more than one school. They share governance and appointments and make joint budgetary decisions. Schools which formally become part of a federation usually have a history of collaboration:

With these stable federations, there existed a prior history of collaboration between the schools, a common culture shared by the communities, and the schools are in fairly close proximity to one another.⁸

In the Irish context, a move to federations would ensure that small schools remain a vibrant part of their local community. Federations might begin when a principal teacher retires or seeks to step down. In the latter case, adequate terms and conditions are essential. The school could then be supported to collaborate with another small school locally. No new principal would be recruited, and the principal of a neighbouring school of a similar size and context would be offered the opportunity to become administrative to effectively manage the two schools. Both boards of management would remain until the next changeover of boards, at which point the federation would organise a joint board with representatives from both schools. This may not be necessary, however: some respondents to Williams’ research felt that ‘by having totally separate governing bodies, the school’s individuality and identity remained undiluted and singular’.

A move to federations would ensure that small schools remain a vibrant part of their local community.

The challenges of such an approach include the level of visibility of the principal teacher in the schools, and the skills needed by a principal to approach the role strategically. Positive perception of the federation by the school community is key. Advantages of such an approach include the opportunity to practise shared leadership, with enhanced opportunities for collaboration in teaching and learning, a culture of trust and distributed leadership, and a sustainable way to lead small schools and promote the well-being of the teaching principal.

This proposal may well present challenge for a significant number of leaders in small schools. On the other hand, many will see the potential in it to attain a better work–life balance. There are many considerations in such a proposal that need further scoping. One of these is the professional learning necessary to be principal of a federation of schools. Stakeholders working collaboratively to help the process is key. Autonomy, choice, respect, and absolute support for the schools involved are essential. A pilot project could be a beginning.

FOOTNOTES

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A CALENDAR OF REFORM

Managing the change agenda in primary schools



Maria Doyle

President, IPPN
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the Executive of
the International
Confederation of
Principals

For any system to effect meaningful and sustainable change, its key players must have a clear and agreed focus on the purpose of the change, an unambiguous understanding of the desired improvements or outcomes, and above all a commitment to work together at a pace that is sustainable, manageable, and deliverable.

There is no doubt that the past year has been extremely challenging for those working in the education system, particularly at primary school level. The rate and pace of change have been significant, with legislation enacted and system reform introduced. The combined impact has caused deep frustration and increased anxiety among school leaders, who feel that expectation is now superseding feasibility.

This is not a new phenomenon. For many years, school leaders have articulated their concerns and frustration about the change agenda. Let me be clear: school leaders are themselves agents of change. But conflict arises where leaders undergo enforced change, and consequently feel pulled in so many directions that they lose focus on what really matters in their own school context. This results in system overload, where change management is seen as impossible, and innovation and improvement are viewed with suspicion or rejected completely.

SYSTEM OVERLOAD

So what is causing this system overload? And what can be done to manage the change agenda in a more sustainable way, ultimately delivering better outcomes for the pupils in our schools? Is overload a relatively new phenomenon, or have school leaders simply reached breaking point? Has the system become too focused on short-term wins, to the detriment of more sustainable and focused long-term goals? Are we now more reactive than proactive?

The diversity that exists in the primary school system in Ireland means there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to reform. It is simply impractical to expect that reform can be centrally designed to suit a small school with a teaching principal, a special school, and a large school with an administrative principal. There are complex resourcing needs unique to so many of our primary schools that need to be considered when introducing reform, and any change agenda must address these needs.

One of the greatest frustrations articulated by primary school leaders is the uncertain and sporadic way that system change is communicated to schools. Publication of the Action Plan for

Education 2016–2019 by Minister Bruton is a very welcome (and long overdue) development, but the lack of clarity on how the plan will be delivered is frustrating.

Contrast this with the current system of school self-evaluation, where our schools identify their priority areas and clearly outline their improvement plans over a defined period based on a detailed analysis of school needs. This process means that schools are clear about the focus of their own change agenda. More importantly, the school improvement plan impacts positively on the learning needs of the pupils in each school.

Unfortunately, we do not have a similarly structured approach to reform at system level, which results in what is seen as an uncoordinated and sometimes ad hoc approach to the change agenda. Simply put, there is no plan, no published calendar, and no timeline for change, either short-term or long-term.

It is important to note that the change agenda at system level often includes departments and agencies other than the DES that influence and control change in our schools. This adds to the frustration of school leaders, who feel there is no control over where the next initiative or legislative change is coming from. When a lot of change is proposed to happen within a short period of time, this puts inevitable strain on an overwhelmed system.

IPPN has continuously highlighted the negative impact of system overload on sustainable educational reform.

And what is the effect of this current approach to system change? First of all, when schools receive notification of a new initiative, curriculum change, or legislative reform, it immediately results in an unwelcome distraction from the valuable school plan already in place. School leaders are unwittingly drawn into the lure of the proposed change, become reactive, and feel they have to divert attention immediately to the ‘new agenda’. Prioritising is disabled and focus is lost. This results in teachers and school leaders feeling undervalued, disempowered, and disconnected.

Primary school leaders often talk about the lack of time factored in to the current change agenda to embed initiatives. Valuable time spent gathering data, developing processes, and planning delivery of school improvement plans requires an embedding phase if we are to critically evaluate the impact of the improvements on pupils’ outcomes. Unfortunately, the current uncertainty about how system change is determined, and the resulting logjam that is system overload, do not provide for time to embed. This is not only counterproductive but also damaging to real progress.

IPPN, the professional body representing primary school leaders in Ireland, has continuously highlighted the negative impact of system overload on school improvement and sustainable educational reform. Its 2014 publication ‘Priorities for Principal Teachers – In Clear Focus’ set out an approach to prioritising workload which was shared with every principal, deputy principal, and board of management at that time. A calendar of reform was first proposed at the IPPN annual conference in January 2015 during the president’s address to over 1,100 school leaders and invited

guests. It was seen as innovative yet challenging to a system that has traditionally been controlled centrally.

CALENDAR OF REFORM

So what does a calendar of reform look like, and who are the key players? A calendar by definition is a timetable fixing the beginning, length, and division of time in a definite order. A calendar of reform in education would determine systemic reform in a structured, planned, and connected way that would return a sense of ownership and trust to the schools that ultimately implement change.

This idea requires commitment to significant dialogue between all education partners and agencies identified as stakeholders in systemic reform, or who currently influence the change agenda in our schools. It requires open and honest appraisal of what will best serve the needs of the Irish school system into the future, and of what is manageable in the current provision of resourcing – human and material – in our schools. Critically, a calendar of reform must complement and respect the current school self-evaluation process and not supersede the autonomy it has brought to determining individual school reform. Reform of the change agenda must never become a power play or a choice between system reform and school improvement planning.

CLEARLY DEFINED OBJECTIVES ARE VITAL

Above all, there has to be a commitment to a change agenda plan that determines future reform with clearly defined objectives. This must include both short- and long-term planning at system level, and any such planning outline must involve extensive collaboration with key stakeholders in order to establish trust. The Action Plan for Education is the obvious platform for this proposed collaboration. By accepting that a new way of mapping reform will maximise opportunities for future generations of Irish pupils, those tasked at school level with implementing and embedding improvements will feel more connected and valued if honest, generous, and meaningful conversations take place. A calendar of reform is the obvious way forward.

Leadership without Borders



Pictured at the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) Conference 2018: **Dr Anne Looney**, Executive Dean, Institute of Education DCU, addressing school leaders on the topic 'Leadership without Borders'.



Seamus Mulconry
General Secretary,
Catholic Primary
Schools Management
Association (CPSMA)

IF WE WANT THE BEST, WE NEED TO INVEST

In theory, primary school education in Ireland is free. Article 42.4 of the Constitution unambiguously states:

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

Free education, however, is a fallacy. In reality, primary school education is far from free.

The Capitation Grant is supposed to cover the day-to-day running costs of schools, including the cost of educational materials. But on average it covers just over half of these running costs. Already hard-pressed parents are contributing a not insignificant €46m a year to keep schools solvent, the lights on, water in the taps, and heating oil in the tank, not to mention educational materials.

While unacceptable, this is unsurprising given that cuts to the Capitation Grant have cost schools approximately €110 million. As the recent Chief Inspector's Report pointed out, expenditure per pupil has fallen by 15% since 2010 and at primary level is now below the OECD and EU average. Ireland now spends less per pupil than the US, UK, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Norway.

While a recent Grant Thornton report quantified the monetary gap between the theory of free primary school education and the reality of state underfunding, it only scratches the surface of the true cost of underfunding to our primary system, and more importantly to the pupils in our schools.

The true cost of underfunding to schools is not just financial. There is also the significant opportunity cost of principals who should be focused on leading, and boards of management who should be focused on supporting teaching and learning, instead of having to focus on fundraising and financial firefighting.

It is important to note that despite having to cope with a virtual tsunami of social, curriculum, and governance changes combined with funding cuts over the last number of years, Irish primary schools have continued to deliver outstanding results.

Last year a major international study ('Progress in International Reading Literacy Study') found that Irish ten-year-olds were among the best in the world when it came to literacy, outscoring all their peers in the EU and the OECD. Just three countries were ahead of us in the global rankings.

These results demonstrate the extraordinary return on investment generated by Irish primary education. Despite the fact that we spend less per pupil than the US, UK, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Norway, our pupils outperformed their peers in these countries.

That primary schools do so is a tribute to the quality and commitment of the teachers who teach and the principals who lead teaching and learning in our schools, and the voluntary boards of management who support them in their work.

However, Irish primary education is now operating at or near the pain barrier. Underfunding and initiative overload are putting the system and the professionals who work in it under severe pressure, at a time when social change is making running a school ever more challenging.

As Edmund Burke once observed, 'Economy is a distributive virtue, and consists not in saving but selection.' The challenge for any Minister for Finance, indeed any Minister, is to determine what use of scarce resources will generate the best return.

International study found that Irish ten-year-olds were among the best in the world in literacy.

The business case for investing in primary education is compelling. Schools have proven they can deliver great results with inadequate funding. This leads to the question of what they might achieve with adequate funds which free principals and boards of management to focus on the real work of education rather than fundraising. Failure to invest at a time when school costs (energy, insurance, etc.) are starting to rise will put even more pressure on an already creaking system.

CAPITATION GRANT

For some time, CPSMA had been aware of growing complaints among principals and boards of management that the Capitation Grant was not covering the core costs of running a school. It therefore asked Grant Thornton to analyse the financial accounts of a representative sample (5%) of Catholic primary schools for 2015 and 2016. The key findings from the Grant Thornton Report are:



Capitation vs. General Expenditure

At just under €46k, the average *capitation grant provided is insufficient to cover general expenditure*, which amounts to €91k (approximately 50% coverage). This indicates that other sources of income are being used by schools to supplement general-purpose expenditure. There is a risk that dedicated income, i.e. grants received for specific purposes, may be used by schools to address the shortfall.



Capitation & Ancillary Grants vs General Expenditure

On average, capitation and accessible ancillary services funds combined provide coverage of approximately 53% of general expenditure. From this, we can deduce that at minimum 47% or approximately €43k must be covered by other means.



Total Income & Expenditure Growth

On an overall basis, income has declined by 4% and expenditure has declined by 2% between 2015 and 2016, with average school income and expenditure amounting to €166k and €165k respectively.



Capitation Grant Income

Capitation grant income represents 27% of the total income of schools and 52% of general income. This indicates a key reliance on capitation as a critical source of income and creates the risk of exposure or financial vulnerability should the capitation grant be further reduced.

Based on the figures contained in the sample accounts, CPSMA asked Grant Thornton to provide an estimate of the total contribution of parents and local communities to local schools. Grant Thornton estimated this at over €46m (€46,572,352).

The level of underfunding of Irish primary schools, compared to our main competitors, was detailed for the first time in a 2017 working paper by the Nevin Economic Research Institute, which found: 'the Republic spends well below the norm for advanced high-income economies when it comes to education ... the Republic's relative spend is in the region of 80% to 82% with regard to primary education.'¹

See Eurostat Table at end of article setting out the annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on FTE, by education level and programme orientation, 2013.

EXTRA FUNDING PRESSURES

A variety of extra and future funding pressures continue to come on stream for schools. Since 2010, the capitation grant has been cut by 15% but the consumer price index (CPI) has risen by 4.5%, which indicates that the day-to-day running costs for schools have risen over this period.

The nature of education and the level of technology have also changed: schools now have to pay for connectivity and ICT maintenance, for example. Schools now also face increases in insurance and energy costs as inflation returns to the Irish economy.

1. McDonnell, T. and Goldrick-Kelly, P. (2017) 'Public Spending in the Republic of Ireland: A Descriptive Overview and Growth Implications'. P20. June. Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) Working Paper.

In addition, policy changes such as GDPR and the forthcoming Parents and Students Charter will impose costs for the secure retention of data, response to data access requests, and arbitration (which, while very worthwhile, is not inexpensive). Finally, litigation involving school is becoming more common and is adding to the financial burden faced by schools.

Commenting on the 2018 Budget, Minister Paschal Donohoe said that when formulating his budget plan, he was thinking of ‘the boys and girls in our primary schools. I see the atmosphere that they are in. I want them to have the best future possible.’

As the Irish economy is now growing strongly, the Minister for Finance has a real opportunity to turn rhetoric into reality and secure the best possible future for the pupils in our primary schools, through additional investment in primary schools to cover the full core costs of running a school.

Furthermore, the Minor Works Grant must be fixed on the Schools Grant Calendar on a permanent, non-discretionary basis and paid in a timely fashion to give school management the autonomy to plan effectively for the maintenance of school buildings.

When changes to policy are planned by government, it is essential that appropriate resources are provided to ensure that schools can deliver on these mandated policy changes. The era of unfunded mandates must end.

**The era of unfunded mandates
must end.**

If the government wants to have the best educational system in Europe, we as a nation must invest to ensure that school leaders can focus on education rather than the distraction of fundraising to cover the core costs of running schools.

Annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on FTE, by education level and programme orientation, 2013, Euros

Primary and lower secondary education (Levels 1 and 2)	
Belgium	8,723.70
Germany	7,189.30
Rep. Ireland	7,220.70
France	6,893.70
Netherlands	8,027.70
Austria	10,280.50
Finland	9,266.80
Sweden	10,938.80
UK	9,368.00
Norway	15,680.60
Switzerland	18,566.10
USA	8,515.20
Japan	7,394.70
Average	10,070.43
Average (EU)	8,836.06
Median	8,995.25
Rep. Ireland gap to median	1,774.55
Rep. Ireland (% median)	80.27%

Source: Eurostat (2017c)

Notes: 2013 data unless stated. Countries included are those where data is available and with GDP (PPP) per capita of at least US \$40,000 (2016) and population of at least 1 million. All ISCED 2011 levels excluding early childhood educational attainment.

The unweighted average, the unweighted EU average and the median all exclude the Republic of Ireland.

A negative gap means that the Republic of Ireland out-spends the comparator countries.

10 YEARS OF STATE MULTIDENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

Journey of the Community National School model, 2008 to 2018



Seamus Conboy

Primary Support Officer for Community National Schools

Community National Schools (CNSs) are Ireland's only state-owned and state-managed primary schools. They are built on the core values of being multidenominational, equality-based, community-focused, and committed to providing excellence in education. They are under the patronage of local Education and Training Boards (ETBs). There are now fourteen CNSs across the country (see image).

In an education system that is still largely denominational, it is widely accepted that 'the inherited pattern of school patronage no longer satisfies the educational needs and rights of many citizens' (Coolahan et al., 2012, p.33). Only 4 per cent of primary schools in Ireland are 'multidenominational', and 45 per cent of those are in Dublin.

As a potential remedy for this, CNSs are expected to grow significantly across the country over the coming years. This could happen through a combination of establishing new schools and the 'Reconfiguration Process', whereby a school changes its ethos from denominational to multidenominational. The Action Plan for Education 2018 aims to have 400 multidenominational or non-denominational schools in Ireland by 2030 (DES, 2018).



Community National Schools across Ireland

THE JOURNEY FROM 2008 TO 2018

A press release in 2007 announcing the establishment of the CNS model outlined its vision:

The new schools will be open to children of all religions and none. They will be interdenominational in character, aiming for religious education and *faith formation during the school day* for each of the main faith groups represented. A general ethics programme will also be available for children whose parents opt for that and the schools will operate through an ethos of *inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs*, both religious and non-religious (Mary Hanifin, December 2007).

While the CNS model today is still true to being inclusive and having equal respect for all children, it has evolved significantly since this original vision. These developments have come from learning through the experiences at school level. From the outset, the principals, teachers, and managers of the schools were fully committed to creating an inclusive environment for all children. Many undertook postgraduate studies in areas like intercultural education and religious diversity and shared the learning with the other schools at network meetings. The schools quickly began to grow in confidence, and all thrived in the areas that they served.

CHALLENGES

The Community National Schools soon became the schools of choice for parents in the communities where they were located. However, when patronage of the schools officially transferred from the Minister to ETBs in 2016, the model faced a number of challenges. Because the schools were originally established as 'emergency schools', there was limited time to tease out the vision for a multid denominational state model of primary education. This meant that the schools responded to the requests and needs of their own communities in the absence of a clearly set out framework.

The Community National schools... all thrived in the areas that they served.

By 2015, the GMGY (Goodness Me, Goodness You) programme had been developed from junior infants to second class only. It was aligned with the original vision that the schools would provide both generic religious education and religious instruction for all within the school day. This meant that the children were all taught the GMGY programme together for most of the year. They then separated into their different religious or belief groups for four weeks a year to learn more about their own beliefs. This was called 'belief-specific teaching' (BST). During this time, Catholic children participated in 'sacramental education' and were prepared for Communion and Confirmation.

School experiences in this practice varied greatly. In the vast majority of cases, BST was found to be at odds with the overall ethos of the school. Therefore, various practices developed across the model. Over time, some schools moved away from separating children into different belief groups, and moved sacramental preparation to outside the school day. In other schools, the parish required Catholic children to do more than four weeks of BST a year, and Catholic children were withdrawn from GMGY once a week for sacramental education. Although these changes worked for the

individual schools at the time, describing the model as a collective was very difficult. There was a need for clarity and consistency across all of the schools.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

These challenges were all overcome as a result of combining different processes and events:

1. development of the GMGY senior curriculum (third to sixth class)
2. development of a patron's framework
3. research carried out by Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
4. correspondence from the Irish Episcopal Conference.

Development of the senior curriculum began in 2015, with the assistance of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). As a result of in-depth consultation with schools, ETBs, and the DES, BST in its original format was not a feature of the senior curriculum. In 2016, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) began development of a patron's framework that aimed to clearly articulate the core values of the schools and how they should be lived out.

The same year, TCD did a comprehensive study on the approach to religious education in CNSs. Although it found many positive aspects to the model, it recommended that BST be discontinued and that sacramental education be moved to outside the school day. The Irish Episcopal Conference wrote to ETBI expressing concern about the varying practices in schools for sacramental education. At a think-in organised by ETBI in June 2017, it was decided that BST would be discontinued in all schools and that sacramental preparation should move outside the school day and become the responsibility of the parish.

TCD did a comprehensive study on the approach to religious education in Community National Schools.

COMMUNITY NATIONAL SCHOOLS TODAY

All Community National Schools operate within a clearly set out CNS patron's framework that has been developed based on the core values of the model. Because the schools are located in very different contexts across the country, they have the freedom to meet the needs of their communities and to develop their own unique identity within the framework's clear parameters.



Core values of the CNS model

All CNSs deliver the revised GMGY curriculum, with all children taught together for the entire school year. This revised curriculum (junior infants to sixth class) has four strands: 'My Stories' (identity education), 'We are a Community National School' (values education),

‘Thinking Time’ (philosophy for and with children) and ‘Beliefs and Religions’ (multidenominational religious education).

The GMGY curriculum aims to enable each child to develop:

- a confident and positive sense of self and group identity, a sense of belonging, and respect for and understanding of others’ identity and belonging
- an understanding of their own and others’ values, and thereby develop as an individual and as a social being and contribute to the good of society
- psychological and emotional wellbeing and a positive outlook through critical, creative, collaborative, and caring thinking and participation in philosophical inquiry, dialogue, and reflection.
- an understanding of the diversity of the beliefs that inform their own and other people’s ways of living, and respect and appreciation for people’s right to express their beliefs.

The new curriculum has been very well received by schools and teachers. Children and parents have also responded very positively to the recent developments.

Many primary schools and communities are more and more aware of the ETB as a possible patron.

Many primary schools and communities are more and more aware of the ETB as a possible patron. As well as the inclusive nature of the schools, they are attracted to the ETB as a patron. As well as educational and governance support from a dedicated director of schools, ETBs provide a number of services to schools, such as human resources, IT, buildings, and financial, that boards

of management normally have responsibility for in all other models.

CONCLUSION

Ten years after their inception, CNSs and ETBs are proud of what they offer the communities they serve. The Irish state should be proud of its own model of primary education. Through the hard work of ETBs, school leaders, teachers, parents, children, and partners in education, the CNSs are now in a position to flourish in the coming years.

Many existing schools are becoming aware of the CNS model and the services available from ETBs. ETBI has developed a pack called ‘Becoming a Community National School: A Step-by-Step Guide’, for existing schools considering becoming a CNS. The full contents of this pack can be accessed on the www.cns.ie website. More information on the GMGY curriculum and its supporting materials are available at www.cns.ie/goodness-me-goodness-you/.

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LOST IN TRANSITION

Building a programme of transition through teachers' learning



Kathryn Corbett

Principal

For most pupils, the move from primary to post-primary is a momentous event in their young lives. Less than eight weeks separate their experience of one system from another, involving changes in educational location, regulations, demands, and expectations. This often coincides with the physical and emotional changes of adolescence, and social adjustment in new and existing friendships (Eccles et al., 1993; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). For many, it is a time of great excitement. For others, it is a life stage, filled with anxiety and uncertainty.

Research in the Irish context, although conducted over a decade ago, concluded that successful transition depended on the school's approach to 'student integration', subject choice, and method of ability grouping (ESRI, 2004, p.237). The study, entitled 'Moving Up: The experiences of first-year students in post-primary education', explored the social and academic factors that help young people settle into post-primary school in Ireland. It concluded that there were variations across schools in the type and range of supports offered to pupils for transition. Post-primary principals said they did not receive enough information on their incoming pupils, and the lowest level of satisfaction related to information on the coverage of the primary curriculum.

In recent years, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have taken significant steps to address the information gap. To ensure continuity of learning for pupils, and as part of the National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy, since 1 June 2012 all primary schools are required to send a copy of pupils' end-of-year report (including standardised test scores) upon enrolment to the post-primary school (Circular 0056/2011). Following on from this, the NCCA developed a suite of 'Education Passport' materials, which became mandatory for all schools to use in 2014/2015 (Circular 45/2014). These included:

- The standard *6th Class Report Card* template for completion by schools.
- The *My Profile* sheet for completion by pupils in primary schools before being shared with their parents or guardians.
- The *My Child's Profile* sheet for completion by parents or guardians.

While these steps illustrate the transfer of information between sectors for pupils and parents, the ESRI report also concluded that there was a need to develop more awareness among teachers about the different curricula, and a need for 'greater co-operation between

the primary and post-primary sectors in terms of curriculum development and transfer of good practice in relation to teaching methodologies' (ESRI, 2004, p.245).

TRANSITION PROGRAMME FOR 6TH CLASS PUPILS

Based on the research and Circular requirements outlined above, and combined with the practical experiences of pupils, parents, and teachers, our school aspired to develop a comprehensive transition programme to support our 6th class pupils, inform ourselves as teachers, and build a shared sense of responsibility with our local post-primary school. The process began in November 2016 and has become an important part of both pupil and teacher learning in our school calendar. This article outlines the steps involved in setting up and developing such a programme, and concludes with the benefits experienced by both school communities.

The first meeting involved both school principals and members of the in-school management team to discuss ideas, possible activities, and timelines. There was a sense of nervous excitement that both sectors could collaborate in a way that would benefit not only our pupils but also teachers' learning in both schools. None of the 6th class teachers had attended the local post-primary school as students. So the first obvious step was to organise a visit for them to see these classrooms in action across a range of subjects, to understand the changes our pupils would experience when they completed their primary education.

All primary schools are now required to send a copy of pupils' end-of-year report to the post-primary school, including standardized test scores.

It was on this visit that we looked at the post-primary school through the eyes of our pupils, and imagined how it must feel to experience the sheer size, the movement after each class, the management of lockers, lunch in the canteen, remembering where to sit and what was needed for each of the 19 subjects they would have in First Year. Our empathy for pupils with special educational needs deepened, strengthening our determination to develop the most comprehensive programme possible.

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS PUPILS

In a more recent report by the ESRI as part of the Growing Up in Ireland series, 'Off to a Good Start? Primary School Experiences and the Transition to Second-Level Education' (2016), research findings indicate that 'young people with special educational needs experienced the greatest transition difficulties and the largest decline in academic self-image between the ages of 9 and 13' (p.7). The study emphasised the crucial role of relationships with teachers in influencing pupils' attitudes to school and school subjects.

Sharing knowledge and experiences between both sectors therefore enables the development of empathic understanding, and subsequently policies and practices to meet the needs of pupils. As a priority, teachers with responsibility for coordinating SEN in both schools have established strong and consistent communication links as part of our transition programme. This involves meetings in term 3 to discuss support provided for pupils,

and strategies that have been effective in supporting their learning in the primary setting.

The next step in our programme was to open our 6th class classrooms to our post-primary colleagues. The focus of their observations included methodologies, assessment and differentiation strategies, seating arrangements, our code of behaviour, and transitions between subjects while remaining in the same room. Our 6th class teachers were initially a little apprehensive. It was a leap into the unknown, and there is vulnerability and courage in opening one's practice to others. Two lessons were observed, one numeracy and one other subject, and with the permission of the class teacher, the post-primary teacher was actively involved with small groups engaged in a task.

STARTING A PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION

To conclude, the teachers had a lunch meeting, which led to a hugely enriching professional conversation for all teachers who shared their assumptions and experiences. Noteworthy comments referred to the post-primary teachers' preconceptions of primary teaching, the independent learning and articulate pupil discussion they had observed, the movement and pacing of teachers, and how embedded assessment was in teaching and learning in our classrooms. They were simply blown away by the ability and competence of our 6th class pupils. 'Maybe we disempower them when they come to us, because we have such low expectations of what they are able to do' was one thoughtful comment from a post-primary colleague.

Teacher collaboration that focuses on pupil learning is a powerful agent of change.

There was also a tangible sense of pride and affirmation for the teachers in our school in the exchange of feedback and insights on their practice. The meeting concluded with a consensus that there were more similarities than differences between the sectors, and acknowledgement of the value in the opportunity to talk about and share knowledge and experience. This has now become an annual practice in our schools, with different teachers benefiting each time.

THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Various transition activities have grown from these first steps. As part of Active School Week, 6th class Sports Day takes place in our local post-primary school. Within walking distance, and taking advantage of an empty campus in June, our pupils and teachers can use its wide range of equipment and sports facilities. Our pupils also had the opportunity to attend an introductory science lesson, taught by post-primary teachers in their labs, designed and fully equipped with apparatus for which the primary sector has neither the space nor the funding. Both experiences have gently introduced our pupils to the surroundings of a post-primary school, and generated a sense of readiness to move to the next stage of their education. For teachers, these activities again enabled the sharing of knowledge and practice in PE and Science, which were mutually beneficial.

STUDENT COUNCILS INTRODUCED TO EACH OTHER

Both schools have active student councils. In our first year, members of the post-primary student council held a Q&A session with our 6th classes to complement the work of our pupils using a school-developed booklet on transition. Building on the success of this, the following year we introduced the councils to each other, to enable the pupils to discuss the impact of their role in the school and to share ideas and goals. It was a memorable moment when a 3rd class pupil articulately questioned the post-primary council about its biggest achievement as a council to date!

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO SECOND LEVEL

The benefit is evident in how quickly and confidently our pupils settle into the post-primary setting. We are excited about the programme and intend to build on its successes in the years to come. It is created from a sense of shared responsibility by both schools, combined with trust through building relationships using good communication structures. Regardless of sector, teaching is about good planning, assessment, and differentiation, combined with enthusiasm, creativity, patience, and perseverance.

Teacher collaboration that focuses on pupil learning is a powerful agent of change. Without a focus on this as part of a comprehensive transition programme, I have no doubt that pupil and teacher learning could have been lost in transition.

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PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN IRELAND

Let's get together to learn together



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Professional collaboration involves colleagues sharing their knowledge and expertise in order to benefit their own professional growth and hence their students' learning experience. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.4) state that professional collaboration is a descriptive term and that the term collaborative professionalism 'is normative – it is about creating stronger and better professional practice together'. 'Together' is a simple but powerful word, because working together means we all learn in one way or another.

Schools that give teachers opportunities to collaborate are more likely to attract, develop, and retain skilled, effective teachers (Ingersoll and Kralik, 2004, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018). According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.4), the *professional* aspect of collaboration refers to a teacher's ability to act professionally, exercise judgement, and retain an appropriate professional distance from colleagues and students, thus ensuring personal boundaries are not crossed; the *collaborative* aspect refers to teachers or other colleagues who work, talk, share, and reflect together.

COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONALISM

A teacher's colleagues and students are their 'most valuable resource', because they 'learn from them and with them' (Delaney, 2017, p.195). Collaborative professionalism allows a collective learning initiative to be created, where dialogue is valued and where students and teachers share ideas and learn from one another in a reflective, open, learning environment. In the words of Sir Ken Robinson, 'collaboration is the stuff of growth'.

PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING (P21)

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) is a leading advocate in the promotion of learning through collaboration by developing partnerships between education, business, community, and policy leaders 'so that that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a world where change is constant and learning never stops'. The P21 framework encourages creativity and innovation among teachers and students alike, driven by an effective school leader. Traditionally, teachers were autonomous in their professionalism, which is a barrier to collaboration. This type of approach can lead teachers to resist becoming part of a community of teachers and learners who share and reflect together (Little, 1990, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018; Moller et al., 2013, cited in Johnston and Tsai, 2018).

The Henry Ford Learning Institute believes innovation can take place in an environment where 'time for valuable collaboration is

identified and protected. Despite tightly scheduled days and an array of assignments that compete for attention, school leaders ensure sufficient and regularly scheduled time for educators and students to work together' (Parizek, 2018). This approach to collaboration can be adopted to ensure that learning takes place between teacher and teacher, teacher and student, and student and student, from preschool to third-level.

Schools that give teachers opportunities to collaborate are more likely to attract, develop and retain skilled, effective teachers.

Hargreaves (Education Northwest, 2018) states that while we know how professional collaboration works, there is little evidence to show what types of collaboration work best. Teachers often report a lack of time for collaboration in the school day (Dreyer, 2014). For example, the Rand Report (Johnston and Tsai, 2018) states that only 31% of teachers felt they had enough time to collaborate with other teachers. Research shows that when teachers are given opportunities to collaborate, the benefits are reaped for both teacher and student learning:

- Students achieve more. Teachers improve their expertise and become more motivated to teach effectively and to stay in teaching (Education Northwest, 2018).
- According to Veldsman (2011, cited in Dreyer, 2014), when collaborative approaches were used between mainstream and learning support teachers in an effort to improve literacy skills, teachers became more confident in their ability to collaborate effectively. Improvements were also seen in students' literacy skills and in classroom management.
- Cooperative teaching is a method through which mainstream and special education teachers teach collaboratively in the classroom. Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989, p.36) define cooperative teaching as:

An educational approach in which general and special educators work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings In cooperative teaching both general and special educators are simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibilities for specified education instruction that is to occur within that setting.

Examples of good practice of cooperative teaching have been produced by SESS and Cork Education Support Centre. They clearly demonstrate the benefits of teachers working together in the classroom to teach all children of different learning abilities.

- Through collaborative professionalism, teachers find themselves in a position where they can receive mentoring from more experienced and more effective teachers, thus improving their own teaching skills and methodologies (Johnston and Tsai, 2018). It allows for new ideas to grow, and for stagnation in creativity, motivation, and implementation of new teaching strategies to cease.

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.65) discuss the approach to cooperative learning and working in Norway, where one of the four pillars of the curriculum is to 'communicate, collaborate, and participate', while another is to 'inquire and create'. Cooperative learning in Norway embraces the outdoors and the environment, and gives opportunities to teachers to work together and develop professionally, and to students to learn and teach one another.

In summary, a collaborative school community is one where both the teacher voice and student voice influence teaching and learning.

HOW IS PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION BEING ADDRESSED IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

We have noted the traditional autonomous nature of the teaching profession in Ireland. In recent years, however, Ireland has adopted a much more collaborative approach to teaching and learning in primary schools. In this new direction, collaborative professionalism in schools is seen as a way for teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning, in order to enhance the learning experience and outcomes of the children in their classrooms. Many new initiatives and policies have been implemented to encourage teacher collaboration in primary schools in Ireland, such as School Self-Evaluation Process (2016a), The Digital Learning Framework for Primary Schools (2017), Cosán (2016), and Féilte, the Festival of Education. So how do these initiatives encourage collaborative professionalism?

A collaborative school community is one where both the teacher voice and student voice influence teaching and learning.

SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

The School Self-Evaluation Process or SSE (2016–2020) follows on from the SSE process that took place from 2012 to 2016 (DES, 2016a). It allows schools to focus on improving teaching and learning in their school community by using collaborative, reflective practices. According to the DES (2016a, p.10), 'School self-evaluation is a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review'. It involves gathering evidence, reflecting on this evidence, and putting an action plan into place to improve children's learning. Throughout the process, the teacher is also learning and improving their professional and collaborative skills.

According to the SSE Guidelines (DES, 2016a, p. 37):

Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning is a practical and powerful method of obtaining direct, first-hand information or evidence about teaching and learning in classrooms and in other learning settings. It gives direct access to what pupils and teachers are doing and can be used to gather information on a wide range of aspects of teaching and learning.

Once a school decides on the area of focus for the SSE, for example the Primary Language Curriculum (DES, 2016c), it must then devise ways to work collaboratively as professionals to gather information. These evaluation approaches ensure that the views of the whole school community are included in the process. Evaluation approaches of teaching and learning include:

- Teacher discussion and reflection
- Teacher self-reflection
- Team teaching and review
- Review of monthly progress reports (*cuntas míosúil*)
- Professional collaborative review of teaching and learning
- Individual and collective review of pupils' work. (DES, 2016a, p.35)

One school that used SSE to improve oral language skills among its pupils was the Harold Primary School in Dublin (Curran, 2014). The school's level of reading was quite high, but children were not bringing these skills into their oral language experiences with themselves and other people. The school devised a collaborative action plan to teach oral language skills in context in all classes, relating it to subjects such as history, art, and maths by including language that the children used in everyday life. The result was overall improvement in the children's ability to use oral language skills to develop their reading and writing skills.

DIGITAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The Digital Learning Framework for Primary Schools (DES, 2017) contributes to SSE by enhancing teaching and learning through digital technologies in primary schools. It encourages collaborative planning in areas such as literacy, numeracy, and STEM, as it requires a cross-curricular focus (DES, 2017, p.3). It is directly aligned with the domains and standards of the framework Looking at Our School 2016 (DES, 2016b), which complements SSE. The framework focuses on two dimensions of the work in schools: teaching and learning; and leadership and management (DES, 2016b, p.7). The theme of teaching and learning, and achieving these through collaborative professionalism, is common to all of these initiatives and policies.

“Teachers valued the sharing of new ideas, methodologies and resources, and the support they received from colleagues.”

COSÁN

Cosán is the national framework for teachers' learning in Ireland and the framework through which teachers' lifelong learning and development are recognised. It encourages their continuous professional development, which in turn helps to improve the learning and development of their students (Teaching Council, 2016). Based on feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, it outlines four dimensions of teachers' learning: formal and informal, personal and professional, collaborative and individual, and school-based and external.

Feedback on the collaborative and individual dimension was that 'teachers valued the sharing of new ideas, methodologies and resources, and the support they received from colleagues' (Teaching Council, 2016, p.12). The framework acknowledges that by working together as part of a structured planning process, teachers could identify their own professional learning needs. Cosán acknowledges the importance of teachers as autonomous professionals and learners, thus placing value on self-reflection to enhance both teacher and student learning. Collaborative, collective reflection is also an essential part of a teacher's professional growth. SSE and Cosán

place similar value and importance on the effectiveness of collaboration to improve teacher and student learning.

FÉILTE – THE FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

Féilte (2018) is the Teaching Council's Festival of Education. It celebrates excellence in teaching and allows teachers from all education sectors and from all over Ireland to come together to collaborate and share ideas. Féilte began in 2012 with an audience of 150 and is now one of the largest gatherings of teachers in Ireland.

Much progress has been made in the past quarter-century in developing professional collaboration, and Ireland is part of this progress. However, as Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p.138) write, 'it is now time for this to develop into collaborative professionalism, rooted in inquiry, responsive to feedback, and always up for a good argument'.

CONCLUSION

There are many opportunities for collaborative professionalism in a school community. Quality leadership in a school is one essential component: it sets the collaboration wheel rolling by allowing time in a busy schedule for teachers to talk, share ideas, and reflect on teaching and learning in the school. Quality leadership should encourage a school community to get together to learn together. Learning together in a whole school community, for both teacher and student, is at the core of true collaborative professionalism in the classroom.

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Educate Together celebrates 40th anniversary



Pictured at the Educate Together 40th anniversary event are: **Prof Áine Hyland**, one of the founding parents of the Dalkey School Project in Dublin, the first school in the Educate Together tradition. She is pictured here with **David Rankin** (10), **Dylan O'Broin** (11), **Emily Roarty** (5), **Sophie Roarty** (8), **Matt O'Broin** (7) and **Oliver Donohue** (9). Photo: Brendan Lyon/ImageBureau

SPECIALISING IN PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Primary teachers 'fit' to enhance well-being of children

Physical Education (PE) teachers at post-primary level are teaching PE as a recognised Leaving Certificate subject from 2018. This new focus on PE is particularly significant at a time when the Primary Curriculum in Ireland is being redeveloped, with considerable debate likely on policy and current practice for PE in primary schools.

Such interest in PE at both levels prompts us to examine where it all begins for our young people: What are the foundations of a child's PE experience? How can we prepare our teachers to provide quality experiences for children in our PE classes? Arguably, there are actions required to ensure that each child's primary PE journey makes a significant difference to their long-term well-being.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF WELL-BEING IN AND THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The challenge to provide a rich foundation in early years and primary PE which embraces the physical, affective, and cognitive development of the child is underpinned by growing concern about the number of children who have poor eating habits, who have reduced play and physical activity opportunities, and who consequently are failing to develop fundamental movement skills. For example, in an Irish context only 19% of 5th and 6th class primary school children met the Department of Health and Children's physical activity recommendations of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity (MVPA) (Woods et al., 2010).

PE is not the 'silver bullet' that can provide all the opportunities for adopting an active lifestyle, developing children's fundamental movement skills, or tackling childhood obesity. But PE is one of the key players in this complex societal space. It has a crucial role to play especially as *all* children undertake programmes of PE in primary schools. Harris (2018) argues that primary PE is increasingly recognised for the role it can play in setting a foundation for lifelong engagement in physical activity. In a UK context, she argues that PE should be a core subject, because:

it uniquely addresses the physical development aim of the curriculum and it also makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children. (p.2)

In an Irish context, PE as a core subject merits serious debate as we redevelop the curriculum, with its concern for well-being and the potential to enhance children's physical, affective, and cognitive development and well-being.



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PREPARING TO TEACH QUALITY PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

There is ongoing debate about *who* should teach primary PE worldwide (Coulter et al., 2009; Fletcher & Mandigo, 2012), including various views on the need for a ‘specialist’ teacher. In Ireland, the class teacher is responsible for planning and teaching PE programmes. In the Institute of Education, DCU, all PSTs undertake core PE modules that amount to 48 hours of contact time (see Table 1). They also plan PE lessons and teach PE in their school placements. Their study of PE is supported further through foundation disciplines, modules on other curriculum subjects such as SPHE, modules that focus on integration of subjects, and modules that prompt reflection on their professional practice. The core PE modules focus on content related to the strands of the PE Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) but also embrace key concepts such as skill acquisition, promotion of physical activity, exploration of cooperative learning in group work, and assessment in PE.

While we acknowledge that the time allocation for core PE modules is generous, in comparison to other ITE providers across Europe, the depth of exploration of PE content remains a challenge. In recognition of this, the Teaching Council (2013) has welcomed the specialist model and its potential to provide ‘distributed expertise in schools’ (p.10).

Since the inception of the reimagined four-year B.Ed. programme (Waldron et al., 2012) at the Institute of Education, DCU, it is now possible for PSTs to specialise in PE and hence become part of the distributed expertise in schools. This specialisation in PE gives PSTs additional time to focus on PE and deepen their knowledge and understanding. Specialist PSTs are prepared to develop their capacity as leaders and advocates for the subject without deskilling their colleagues who continue to teach PE. We describe below how these specialist PSTs are supported to become leaders.

Physical Education, IoE, DCU - Core and Specialism Modules

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3			Year 4	
Core	Core	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism	Specialism
Physical Education	Child Development, Health and Wellbeing through PE	Theory, Practice and Fundamental Skill Development	Teaching the PE Curriculum	Curriculum and Inclusion	Outdoor Learning in PE	Subject Leadership in PE
ED1015 2.5 ECTS *	ED 2019 2.5 ECTS *	AP 204 5 ECTS *	AP 205 5 ECTS *	AP 301 5 ECTS *	AP 302 5 ECTS *	AP 401 2.5 ECTS *
European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) are a standard means for comparing volume of learning across Europe						

* Core courses with 2.5 credits are generally allocated 24 hours contact time.

PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY TEACHERS WITH A SPECIALISM IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

PSTs who opt for the PE specialism spend an additional 120 hours doing specialist study as part of a group of around 25 students (group size is limited by capacity). The group examine their own socialisation related to PE, as recommended by Cosgrave and Murphy (2009). The PSTs engage further in practical activities exploring play, and teaching fundamental movement and sports-specific skills for athletics, gymnastics, and games, for example, thus deepening their content and subject knowledge. They build on their experience of outdoor and adventure activities in various locations indoors and outdoors, such as in local parks.

While aquatics will be taught to children by swimming teachers, the PE specialism prompts PSTs to explore their crucial role in supporting children as they develop proficiency and confidence in the water through play and with a focus on stroke development. Exploring particular curriculum models, such as Teaching Games for Understanding (Bunker and Thorpe, 1982), gives them frameworks for teaching. The principles of movement applied to tasks are further explored during their work in dance and gymnastics.

Use of digital technologies in PE is a valuable aspect of the specialism, as reported by Marron and Coulter (2018). Inclusion of children with special educational needs is another element of the specialist study, and links are made with settings that provide opportunities for children with special needs to experience PE as part of mainstream or special classes. The role of sports and activities that promote physical activity in the school day is explored with particular study of initiatives such as the Active School Flag¹ and the Be Active After School Activity Programme (ASAP).²

As part of their study, the PSTs are prompted to critique ongoing debates in PE and related issues at local, national, and international level. They are encouraged to research aspects of PE and to work collaboratively to present case studies illustrating best practice in: adapting content to local contexts; use of equipment; technology; and working in partnership with coaches and other external providers.

Assessment of the specialism modules encompasses continuous assessment of particular aspects of coursework, including a performance skills assessment where the emphasis is on teaching skills to children rather than on sports-related performance. PSTs reflect using an e-portfolio as a further assessment method. Their PE specialism work starts them on their professional journey to becoming subject leaders. This journey will be supported by the further learning opportunities embraced in the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (Teaching Council, 2016).

Throughout the specialism modules, significant time is allocated to giving PSTs opportunities to work with children in PE classes, supported by

Student teachers who opt for the PE specialism spend an additional 120 hours doing specialist study.

PE as a core subject merits serious debate as we redevelop the curriculum.

peer feedback and teacher educator mentoring. Research tracking the progress of this work is currently underway under the umbrella of Create 21,³ a university initiative to drive research into the continuum of teacher education.

As we now observe a third cohort of PSTs begin their teaching journey, we can be confident that they are well positioned to make significant contributions to leading primary PE as they progress on this journey. While they will continue to teach *all* subjects, their leadership role in PE broadens the reach of their impact as they support others to teach quality PE programmes.

THE PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION SPECIALIST AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD: SOME ACTIONS

Providing early opportunities for children to learn in and through PE must be a priority for primary schools. Provision of specialist opportunities for some PSTs, as described above, is a significant step to ensuring that classroom teachers in each primary school are supported by a colleague who can also advocate for PE in contexts where this is necessary. With the redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum, the likelihood of PE becoming embedded in a well-being space, the growing interest in the Active School Flag Award, and the links to well-being in the Aistear and Junior Cycle Frameworks, the time is ripe to highlight the potential contribution of these primary PE specialists.

The onus is on school management to recognise the potential contribution of the primary specialist to supporting PE. On appointment to a school staff, the specialist primary teacher can nurture the teaching of quality PE (McLennan & Thompson, 2015) and drive the provision of quality PE learning experiences. The contribution of PE to the well-being of the child can be significantly enhanced by the primary teacher with deep knowledge of the subject.

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FOOTNOTES

1. <http://activeschoolflag.ie/>
2. <http://www.beactiveasap.ie>
3. <https://www.dcu.ie/create21/About-create21.shtml>

Féilte 2018: Teaching Whole-Heartedly

FÉILTE 2018 took place at Mary Immaculate College Limerick, 5-6 October 2018. This annual Festival of Education, organised by The Teaching Council, celebrates the wonderful work that teachers do, and gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate and share this work with each other and with the wider public.



Pictured here are: **Aoife Hughes**, St. Vincent's Girls NS Dublin 1; **Máire Lineen**, Teaching Council Member; and **Seána Ó Rodaigh**, St Vincent's GNS Dublin 1.



DISCOVERING GEMS

Authentic listening to the 'voice' of experience in teaching pupils with autism

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Empirical research on evidence-based practice provision for people with autism values quantitative methods (Bond & Symes, 2014; Westerveld et al., 2015) over the qualitative methods that relay 'voice' through, for example, teacher interviews. Any attempt to justify educational practice must include the voice and views of *all* experts (Perry, 2009). This article challenges the notion that applying evidence-based scientific programmes for autism-specific intervention is the sole 'best-practice' approach in schools.

Presented as direct support is evidence on literacy teaching and learning, particularly from a 'voice' perspective, regarding the professional and ethical practice of a case study teacher as she 'discovers gems' when teaching pupils with autism. The article reports on findings from a programme of research that explored literacy practices involving pupils with autism (n=35), their parents (n=34) and teachers (n=14), and observations of teaching and learning (189 hours) in seven autism-specific classrooms in mainstream primary education in Ireland.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AUTISM CLASSROOMS: MORE TO LEARN?

Across the US and Europe, access to autism diagnostic profiling is now more accessible than ever, with a rise in confirmed diagnoses. The increased identification of children and young people with autism has led to an unprecedented increase in specialist autism classrooms attached to mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2018), through its section on teacher education, has invested significantly in special-education initiatives across colleges and universities for ongoing professional development in evidence-based practices.

Over 60% of the provision of special classes in Ireland are designated for pupils with autism (McCoy et al., 2014; Banks et al., 2016; Banks and McCoy, 2017). With such large specific educational provision, it is appropriate to query the efficacy of the teaching and learning experienced. While Daly et al. (2016) provided a comprehensive evaluation of educational provision, with a particular focus on a framework of indicators for good practice in four areas – teaching and learning, inclusive school culture, school management, and staff development – we argue that such an approach should be extended to encompass a more nuanced and personalised 'voice' perspective of the experiences and outcomes from those involved.

NOT EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE MEASURED COUNTS: NOT EVERYTHING THAT COUNTS CAN BE MEASURED?

There is general consensus among educators that many evidence-informed interventions can be used to enhance the educational experiences of children and young people with autism. When explored in a tightly designed review of the literature, however, Parsons et al. (2009) found that (1) the number of robustly designed and evaluated approaches available was rather low, and (2) these were quantitative. Parsons et al. concluded that well-known evidence-based interventions 'may not be as effective as initially thought and there is a need for more explicit research on the appropriateness of these interventions'.

In observing 'best autism practice', Guldberg (2010, p.168) suggests a particular focus on 'direct teaching of communication and language, social understanding and skills, as well as learning with and through peers'. Parsons and Kasari (2013, p.251) report 'growing awareness in the autism field that there remains a substantial gap between research and practice in real-world classrooms'. This supports the position of Lanter et al. (2012), who say there is a deficit of literature on literacy practices in these classrooms.

This presents us with our query: What are the most appropriate models of teaching and learning and inclusive educational practices for pupils with autism that would enable these learners to demonstrate their literacy practices? In seeking to answer this, we present a case study of a teacher who shows exceptional practice through respectful pedagogy.

Tasks set were respectful, authentic, and academically focused. Her planning was organic and she made written changes, as needed, during the lessons.

CASE STUDY: SUSAN

Susan has been teaching for more than 35 years, and for the past 10 years has been a teacher in an autism-specific classroom. She has engaged extensively in professional development across all autism-specific evidence-based programmes and practices. She is the main teacher to a group of six boys aged 6–9 years, all with a diagnosis of autism. Susan demonstrates a wealth of knowledge of the theories of autism and has established a fluid and flexible approach to teaching and learning.

Twenty-seven hours of observations from Susan's classroom showed significant differences from other classrooms in the study. Her classroom was very small and had limited space and facilities; as a result, she constantly changed and adapted the layout by moving furniture. There were no schedules or visual timetables on the walls or desks. She said, 'They are not needed.' She taught time to all the pupils by structuring a lesson on the school day, which was the basis of her maths lessons for the first month of the school year.

Susan constantly referred to the clock and the mental schedule she had established with the pupils, and they all transitioned seamlessly across the school day. There was no room for individual tables and work stations. Susan taught in small groups for the full day. She worked and planned from the mainstream curriculum with differentiation

and responsive teaching. Tasks set were respectful, authentic, and academically focused. Her planning was organic and she made written changes, as needed, during the lessons.

SUSAN IS AUTHENTIC AND CARING. SUSAN PLANS AND ADAPTS. BE LIKE SUSAN.

Susan, in contrast to her teaching peers in the study, presented an interpretation of literacy and being literate as ‘identity and connecting’. She described literacy as:

Stories, their stories ... their response to stories they hear, and if they record their responses in drawings, that’s their literacy as well.

Susan explained how literacy skills can emerge in the autistic learner’s ability to connect with a text, with the self, and with characters or others when she engages artistically by dramatising a story. She conceptualised literacy as ‘their own vocal responses’:

Since doing the Mr Men, one of my most challenging boys has decided he’s Mr Greedy, which means he robs my jellies at every available opportunity – the whole box! He then calls out, ‘Look, Susan, look what Mr Greedy is doing in the corner’, and I’m going ‘Oh!’ ... but that’s his drama ... That’s what literacy is. It’s communicating, it’s books they are surrounded with, it’s do they want to play with ideas they come in contact with.

Susan demonstrated her skills as an inclusive teacher: valuing learning diversity, supporting all learners while holding high expectations, working with others (SNAs), and having a professional attitude. For example, she reported ‘discovering’ a child’s ‘gem’ or motivation-enabled expression, language, and communication, and she said: ‘Sam made most of that display because he was motivated to do it’ (Sam used a diorama to recreate the narrative of *Rosie’s Walk*). Susan said, ‘You need to be flexible, because there’s no point in turning a literacy or writing lesson into total torture.’

Social communication was also observed where the pupils initiated conversations and took on a role of communicative leader. Susan and the SNAs provided jovial moments to engage the pupils in language experiences. Having moments of waiting or quiet also gave pupils open opportunities to begin conversations in a natural, safe manner. An observed pause in the day allowed one pupil to initiate a conversation, asking Susan if they could have a party day and make a cake from his new book, *Gruffalo Crumble and Other Recipes*, which he had brought to school. Literacy flowed:

P(a) (excitedly): ‘Make them Gruffalo cake, make them Gruffalo crumble.’

Susan: ‘How do we make them all brown?’

P(a): ‘Melt chocolate.’

Susan: 'How do we put purple prickles all over its back?'

P(a): 'What about icing?'

Susan (referring to the picture in the cookbook): 'How do we make them like this?'

P(a): 'We could use toothpicks.'

(The whole group begin talking together and at once, arguing about how to make this cake. There are too many dyads happening at once for me to record, so I sit and observe. The volume is high. There is a natural break in the conversation.)

P(e): 'We could put icing in it.'

Susan: 'Okay, we need icing sugar. How are we going to get chocolate all over it?'

P(a): 'Buy chocolate.'

Susan: 'Okay, we need cooking chocolate. What about purple prickles?'

SNA (referring to an earlier suggestion during the argument): 'We could use Smarties. Great idea.'

Susan: 'Okay, I need Smarties. How many packets will I need?'

SNA: 'And something to drink?'

Susan: 'Okay, we need to tell mummies and daddies that we are not going to do any work tomorrow, because it will be a Gruffalo party!'

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study indicate that we need to embrace a broader conceptualisation of literacy practices for children with autism. A fluid, flexible practice is evidenced that suggests caution is needed in the use of programmes that restrict a differentiated, informed pedagogical approach to literacy instruction. Greater inclusive opportunities are needed for children with autism, in order to build literacy practices through playfulness and social experiences. Quality is evidenced in the synthesis of knowledge of theories of autism with theories of effective teaching and learning and high expectations. (Two of Susan's six boys transitioned to mainstream the following year for all academic subjects.)

While Susan's classroom remains in a 'unit' setting, it did not restrict the teaching and learning experienced by the pupils but did restrict their learning with and from non-autistic peers. It is not the establishment of specialised classrooms or physical architecture that guarantees or

safeguards quality and effective participation and learning, but the quality of the pedagogue.

Based on these rich research findings and Susan's practice, we encourage teachers and researchers to continually explore qualitative and 'voice' approaches to understanding the teaching and learning experiences of pupils with autism. Many of us rely on our own readings and standard practices in this increasingly important area of education. O'Síoráin et al. (2018) remind us that leadership in inclusive education is never straightforward – it is always a dilemma of 'doing things right' or 'doing the right things'.

Such work requires continued personal and professional reflection by the educator. What Susan helps us to understand is that we can also have very real dialogue with these pupils, who can co-construct the learning environment. Confidence and competence can be developed – not only in the pupils, but also in the reflective practitioner.

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GOING BACK TO SCHOOL FOR 150 YEARS

A time for reflection



Sheila Nunan

General Secretary of the
Irish National Teachers'
Organisation

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). Anniversaries, like birthdays, retirements, and other milestones, are a prime time for reflection. There have been a lot of changes since 1868, when a couple of dozen men gathered in a Dublin room for what was 'decidedly the largest meeting of teachers ever in Ireland'.¹ From that humble start, INTO membership has grown to over 45,000 teachers across the island of Ireland today.

Since its foundation, INTO has played a central role in raising the status of teaching and influencing policy towards inclusive, child-centred teaching. To those first INTO members, who taught long before electricity became a ubiquitous commodity, the classrooms of today would seem like foreign places. Even visually, today's schools are very different from those of 1868. A teacher of 150 years ago would be amazed by the brightly printed posters and displays on our modern classroom walls. I'm sure they would be entranced at the sight of interactive whiteboards in action and in awe of the fabulous role-play areas that our teachers have created, from post offices to spaceships, in junior classes across the country.

We have moved on in many ways since 1868. We know more about how children learn, and we have adapted our teaching methodologies accordingly. In the mid-nineteenth century, only one in three teachers was trained, and teachers were poorly regarded. Today's primary teachers are a highly skilled, well-trained, and well-respected professional group.

But in some ways the INTO of 2018 echoes the organisation of 1868 much more than it should. That first INTO Congress was dominated by discussions of pay. Over the years, INTO has fought for pay equality. In the past, the equality sought was equalisation of the pay between men and women. It is concerning that, in 2018, equal pay is still a top priority for the organisation – this time based on date of entry to the teaching profession, rather than gender.

We have come a long way since 1868, but INTO remains as relevant now as it was then. There are many improvements to the teaching profession outstanding, not only in pay but also in the areas of class size, supports for school leadership, planning of teacher supply, and school funding.

PAY EQUALITY

At the time of writing, achieving pay equality remains the INTO's top priority. 2011 saw a 10% pay cut implemented for new entrants, which

meant that any teachers graduating from 2011 onwards were financially disadvantaged. Further measures cut the pay of entrants from early 2012.

Significant progress has been made in reversing these impositions, and the work continues. While the economic crisis is now over, it has had a huge impact on teachers' morale and led to difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. Pay equality is about attracting and retaining the best into the profession, a benefit for all.

CLASS SIZE

Ireland currently has some of the largest classes in Europe, averaging twenty-five pupils per class – five above the EU average. While class sizes may have varied over the years, our understanding of the factors that affect pupils' learning has increased. We know that children do better in smaller classes, especially children early in the school experience, children with special educational needs, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Smaller classes ensure that teachers can give more attention to each child. They notice early if a child is struggling and can make the necessary intervention.

We have come a long way since 1868, but INTO remains as relevant now as it was then. There are many improvements to the teaching profession outstanding...

We know that the primary school teacher is one of the most influential adults in the lives of many children – the person with whom they want to share their news, the person they turn to when they feel sad, the person they seek out when friends fall out. Smaller classes ensure that teachers provide not only better academic support but also social and emotional support, and guidance to the pupils in their care.

If we aspire to have the best education system in Europe, we must make the classroom environment conducive to excellence, starting by reducing the size of our classes. Our teachers are a hardworking, ambitious group of professionals: we must facilitate their best work.

While there were some improvements in the pupil-teacher ratio in Budget 2016 and Budget 2018, there is still a way to go. Worryingly, while small reductions were made in the pupil-teacher ratio in ordinary schools, there was no corresponding reduction in the ratio in our DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), which work with some of our most vulnerable children so they can have the opportunity they deserve to achieve their educational potential.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The role of principal has changed significantly over the years. Since the 1990s, it has an increased focus on leadership. This shift has brought a dramatic increase in the administrative tasks associated with the role, and the workload of the principal has increased. The principal has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school, management of staff, implementation of new initiatives and curriculum revisions, and the administrative work that keeps a school functioning, among many other things. Many of our principals do this while teaching a class full-time.

Our teaching principals are over-burdened and over-stretched. The policies that must be written for a small school are no shorter or fewer than those needed in a larger school. Curricular initiatives that must be implemented are the same whether a principal manages a school with 50 pupils or 500. An emergency that requires managerial attention is no less urgent in a school with a teaching principal than in a school with an administrative principal.

We need measures to ensure that our principals have the capacity to run our schools to the best of their ability. At the very least, teaching principals need to have at least one day a week to work on the administrative and non-teaching duties of a being a principal.

IN-SCHOOL MANAGEMENT POSTS

The supports needed for our principals include the need to establish proper in-school management teams, so that the leadership and management of our schools are a shared task. A moratorium on filling posts of responsibility in our schools was introduced in 2009; as a result, over 5,000 of these posts were lost. The cutting of these posts left schools without supports in a range of curricular and other areas, and abolished career progression opportunities for many teachers.

2017 saw the first structured restoration of posts of responsibility to schools since the moratorium was introduced. But a job started is not a job done. Our schools and teachers need full restoration of the posts that were lost. Our school leaders need the additional support, and our teachers need opportunities for career progression.

SCHOOL FUNDING

The introduction of free education in the 1960s opened a host of opportunities for many. But the price of 'free education' continues to climb, and families are increasingly being asked to carry the cost. Primary schools have, for too long, been the poor relation in the education family. For every €8 spent funding our primary schools, €11 is spent at second level and €15 at third level. We expect our schools to run on 92 cent per pupil per day.

**Parents and local communities
are subsidising our primary
schools to the tune of €46
million a year.**

It's simply not enough. We know that our primary principals and teachers are a creative and resourceful group, but they are not magicians. Schools cannot run on creativity and goodwill alone. As it stands, parents and local communities are subsidising our primary schools to the tune of €46 million a year. This money is not being spent on luxuries or sophisticated extras to enhance learning, but on basic necessities and day-to-day running costs to keep our schools open.

TEACHER SUPPLY

When INTO was founded, most national teachers were unqualified. Over the years, INTO has worked for the professionalism of the job and to ensure that our pupils are taught every day by qualified teachers. We know that our schools currently struggle to find qualified teachers to cover for absences. Without qualified substitute teachers to cover sick leave, for example, schools must resort to measures such as hiring unqualified personnel,

splitting classes, moving pupils into other classes (where they are supervised but are not engaged in learning), and deploying special education teachers to teach classes; children with special educational needs then have reduced access to SEN teachers.

Proper supply panels would ensure that schools have a secure supply of substitute teachers.

How do we solve this problem? By establishing proper supply panels. This would ensure that schools have a secure supply of substitute teachers available to cover brief absences, and the teachers on the panel would have security of employment. This year, INTO has been involved in establishing a 'cluster' model where a number of schools with teaching principals may employ one teacher to cover their release days. A similar model could be used to ensure that schools have

access to qualified teachers to cover other absences. With the technology most of us carry around in our pockets every day, such a model has never been more workable.

CONCLUSION

This year marks 150 years since the first meeting of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and we have travelled a long and interesting path since then. In the words of historian Niamh Purséil, in her book *Kindling the Flame*, to mark the 150 years of INTO, 'the INTO's greatest success was its survival, and one of its greatest achievement was fostering a sense of solidarity, unity and professionalism among men and women whom the authorities, whether secular or clerical, so keenly wished to keep divided'.

Our values and choices today will affect the teachers who come after us, just as the decisions of those teachers who organised 150 years ago affect our teaching profession today. Let us choose wisely, therefore, and value primary education.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Freeman's Journal*, 6 June 1905.



Top table at the 150th INTO Congress held in Killarney, Co Kerry, in April 2018. Seated from left to right: **Noel Ward**, INTO Deputy General Secretary/General Treasurer, **Joe McKeown**, INTO CEC Representative; **Richard Bruton**, Minister for Education; **Sheila Nunan**, INTO General Secretary and **Joe Killeen**, INTO President 2018/19.

JOHN CURRAN RIP

A Generous Soul, A Visionary



It is with a profound sense of shock, sadness and disbelief that we acknowledge the sudden passing of John Curran, highly esteemed colleague and friend to all in Irish education, in South Africa on 7th November. John is and was a highly esteemed colleague and friend to all in the Irish Primary Principals' Network - IPPN.

The outpouring of condolences, shock and sadness at John's passing indicates the calibre of person he was. Indeed, hundreds of our members shared their feelings on our online Book of Condolences and

many more attended his memorial service in Trinity College, Dublin on 23rd November. The words of John's fellow founding member, and former CEO of IPPN, Seán Cottrell reflect the feelings of us all - 'A good friend, a generous soul, a visionary - gone too soon. May your generous spirit be with us always.' It is impossible to quantify how many people were inspired and impacted by John over the course of his life, but we believe it was many thousands, both in Ireland and in Africa. What an incredible legacy!

A founding member of IPPN, John served on the IPPN Executive Committee (now the Board of Directors) from 2000 to 2007 and was PRO from 2005 to 2009. During his sixteen years as Principal of Good Shepherd NS, Churchtown, Dublin 14 until his early retirement in June 2005, John advocated positively and consistently in relation to principals' workload, boards of management and school funding, as well as supporting his fellow school leaders directly and in the development of services through his role on the Executive Committee. We are all indebted to him for all his work over many years, all completely voluntary. On a personal level, we will greatly miss his wonderful sense of humour, his infectious laugh and his ability to lighten the most serious topic. As our president David Ruddy commented "He was very much loved and very dynamic. He always wanted to give back."

John was so passionate about his recent work in South Africa, as Director of Education for Mellon Educate*, a role he began in October 2016. He was tireless in empowering teachers and principals, as evidenced in his own words last January when he described his role:

“Exciting times helping mentor and support principals and schools in some of the most disadvantaged communities I have seen. Very rewarding to help empower teachers and communities to improve teaching and learning in their schools and overcome significant obstacles. Learning lots and broadening my horizons.”

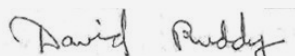
He brought a delegation from South Africa to IPPN Conference last January, as he was keen to showcase Irish school leadership practice to the Minister for Education and the Secretary General for the Ministry for Education in the Western Cape, as well as a number of their colleagues. He was instrumental in bringing Irish teachers and principals to Africa as part of the Teachers’ Blitz projects in 2017 and 2018, to build schools, improve existing school infrastructure, and support school leaders’ professional development.

Nelson Mandela once said “Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world“. John lived and breathed those words. John lived and breathed those words. He has had a profound impact on numerous children in Ireland and in Africa, and on school leaders, colleagues, friends, and above all on his family. May he rest peacefully.

Is briseadh croí do Líonraí Príomhoidí Éireann bás tubaisteach John Curran. Iar-phríomhoide agus iar-chomhghleacaí ag IPPN é John. Fear seimh, uasal a bhí ina chara ag príomhoidí agus ag múinteoirí in Éirinn agus thar lear. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal dilis.



Páirc Clerkin
CEO



David Ruddy
President

PINE FOREST ART CENTRE

Set in the Dublin Mountains amidst beautiful scenery, for 40 years now Pine Forest Art Centre has been providing camps and courses for children and young people which combine creativity with fun.

Summer Courses for 4-16 year olds, Easter Courses,
Schools Activity Days from March to June, Portfolio Preparation Courses,
Halloween Workshops, Birthday Parties,
Christmas Workshops, Parent/Adult and Child Art Activity mornings.



Summer Camps

The Centre runs two-week summer camps during July and August for children aged 5 -12 years and teenagers aged 13-16 years. Activities are many and varied - participants paint, sculpt, sketch, make pottery and clay items, weave, do batik and paper crafts.

Portfolio Preparation

There is also a Portfolio Preparation course during the summer for young people aged 16-19 years. This course is provided with a view to helping young people organise and expand portfolios with Art College and /or Leaving Cert in mind.

Courses during the year

The Centre runs courses during the Halloween, Christmas and Easter Holidays. Birthday Parties and Team building events.

School Groups Activity Days

School Art and Craft activity days are available from March to June.

Parent and Child Art & Craft Days

Held on the last Sunday of each month.

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