

The Wellbeing of Irish Primary School Leaders: A Shared Responsibility

As the professional body for Irish primary school leaders, and as an officially recognised Education Partner, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) advocates for and supports effective school leadership. It is well established that effective school leadership leads to effective schools, and in turn to improved outcomes for children.

In the context of wellbeing as a stated priority in Irish education, the IPPN published its position paper *Wellbeing of School Leaders* in June 2024. Developed by the Advocacy and Communications Committee of the IPPN's National Council, which comprised administrative, teaching, and deputy principals in schools in every kind of context, the paper articulates the collective wisdom of primary school leaders throughout Ireland.

Since publication of the Department of Education's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* in 2019, school leaders have been tasked with developing and implementing structures to enhance the wellbeing of everyone in the school community.

Drawing on data from independent research carried out by Deakin University as part of the IPPN's Sustainable Leadership project, *Wellbeing of School Leaders* explores why and how wellbeing pertains to effective school leadership. Frighteningly, the data show that more than half of primary school leaders are now in the severe or high categories of burnout, due to workload and lack of time and space to lead.

The question may reasonably be asked: How can school leaders effectively promote the wellbeing of all other members of the school community if their own wellbeing is so significantly compromised?

School leaders recognise that there are things they can do to improve the sustainability of their roles. Legislation demands that employers fulfil their duty of care to



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Effective school leadership leads to effective schools and in turn to improved outcomes for children. Such leadership depends on the wellbeing of school leaders. Towards that end, the IPPN, drawing on independent research, published its position paper *Wellbeing of School Leaders* in June 2024. This article reflects on the paper's findings and recommendations, and makes the case that creating conditions conducive to effective school leadership is a shared responsibility.

employees by implementing interventions that prevent, manage, and minimise the risk of unabated stress caused by workload and work environments. The IPPN acknowledges that this can be enormously challenging for boards of management, as they have little control over school leaders' workloads. In this regard, the Department of Education (DE) shares responsibility for the impact that an ever-increasing workload and role expansion has on school leaders' wellbeing. The DE-funded Employee Assistance Service is the only support available to all school leaders as a matter of right.

Having examined the supports provided to school leaders in other jurisdictions, the IPPN outlines its advocacy for greater role clarity, time, and space to lead and for a review of the current school governance structure. In advocating for school leaders, the IPPN has always sought to put forward solutions and recognises that creating conditions conducive to effective school leadership is a shared responsibility.

Wellbeing of School Leaders makes proposals and recommendations for school leaders, boards of management, the IPPN, and the DE. In doing so, the IPPN's aim is to encourage school leaders to take actions to enhance their own wellbeing and to provide a basis for future engagement between stakeholders and school leaders.

REFERENCES

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