



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

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Northern Secretary:
Gerry Murphy

GM/CMcD

7th September 2020

Ms Sara Long
Chair, TNC Management Side
TEACHERS' SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF
SERVICE COMMITTEE (SCHOOLS) MANAGEMENT SIDE
C/O Ballee Centre
Ballee Road West
BALLYMENA
BT42 2HS

Dear Ms Long

I am writing concerning the increasing pressure that INTO principal members are being subjected to in particular following another weekend of communication chaos.

It is becoming increasingly clear as the initial re-opening phase for schools concludes that significant gaps are emerging in the guidance and support available. Principals are dealing with the here and now, responding to the immediate concerns of each day. This may be cases of COVID-19, chasing procurement, sourcing staff, planning for SEN support, reintroduction of EA support services, creating learning areas to name just a few which cannot be avoided. INTO has been dealing with significant numbers of queries concerning issues of interpretation and implementation of DE guidance. The health and wellbeing of principals is critical if schools are to maintain and deliver learning in as low risk an environment as they can achieve given the circumstances of their particular schools. Strictly speaking these are management matters and consequently not the business of a trade union to advise on. INTO is however providing advice and we are doing so from the perspective that every decision a principal is taking must be guided by the prevailing medical advice and predicated on maintaining the lowest risk to the health of the teachers and support colleagues and the broader school community.

It would be most helpful and is becoming critical that immediate changes/support are implemented to provide much needed reassurance to our principal members. We suggest that the following measures are necessary:

- A commitment that circulars/directives/communications with principals are delivered during “working hours”. Emails at the weekend or at end of business on Friday are heightening anxieties and in a number of anecdotal reports pushing principals to reconsider whether they can continue. The example of DHSC communications again this weekend sent in error is simply not acceptable. Communications with principals should always be accurate and if related to actions to be taken, implementable. INTO is concerned at the harmful impact of in error messages, late changes and what has become an expectation on the part of DE and others of “always being at work” is having on wellbeing, is being dismissed.
- Make available to principals explicit direction as to what they need to prioritise beyond the safety and well-being of their colleagues and the young people in their care. This will INTO believes reduce some of the stress that they are experiencing. EA has already helpfully circulated to the trade unions a list of the supports they are making available to schools in an easily accessible format what we are seeking now is in addition to that.
- Support with HR. Principals have been supporting and managing the individual needs and anxieties of their staff, pupils, and parents/carers, this will continue to present challenges as positive COVID-19 numbers continue to rise. Staffing is proving to be a significant stressor; it is not just the teaching but also non-teaching staff that are needing covered. A positive step would be to start up NISTR equivalent for class-room assistants – this could be achieved with a quick turnaround.
- Outstanding repairs on schools being completed urgently to enable principals to use all their resources.
- Continuation of development, by an outside body or agency, of resources for online learning to support the inevitable blended learning and possible school closures.
- Planning at system level for potential changes going forward [Plan B, C and D if necessary] – pre-empting the challenges and providing alternative plans as we adapt teaching/learning to the COVID-19 world. This should be done in conjunction with INTO and others.

INTO is of the view that the business-critical message must be re-stated by the employers. By this we mean that school development plans, curriculum audits, and the myriad of other administrative layers that make no difference to a school’s safe functioning, be set aside for the present. It is the case that some principals continue to try to meet the demands of business as usual and the others worry to greater and lesser degrees that not doing it will come back to haunt them at a later date. A simple directive from the employing authorities making it clear what their priorities should be and confirming that no school or principal will suffer from prioritising the safety of staff and pupils would go a long way to lifting the considerable burden principals are labouring under.

Our principal members are committed to their schools. Many of them have gone without a break since the schools were partially closed in March. They have adapted their schools to deliver blended learning, support children of key workers, support vulnerable children, organise pastoral support, deliver the FSM programme, monitor safeguarding and more. They deserve a clearer message of practical support from their employers.

INTO remains available to discuss this with your organisation in greater detail if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely



GERRY MURPHY
Northern Secretary

cc Mr Gerry Campbell, CCMS
Mr Mark Bailey, DE